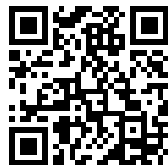

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REMARKS
ON THE
ETERNAL SONSHIP OF CHRIST;
AND
THE USE OF REASON
IN
MATTERS OF REVELATION:

SUGGESTED BY

SEVERAL PASSAGES

In Dr. Adam Clarke's Commentary on the New Testament.

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IN A LETTER TO A FRIEND.

\_\_\_\_\_  
By RICHARD WATSON.  
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“ I gratefully receive, and rejoice in the light of revelation, which sets me at rest in many things, the manner whereof my poor reason can by no means make out to me.”  
LOCKE.

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# REMARKS,

&c.

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DEAR SIR,

YOU request my opinion on those passages of Dr. Clarke's Commentary in which he has denied a doctrine received in all ages, and by every church, reputed orthodox,—the eternal filiation of the second person of the Holy Trinity; and on those principles which he has laid down in support of his views;—views not new; but which have been of late almost peculiar to those who entirely reject the essential divinity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

I should have been very unwilling to be the first to excite a controversy on these subjects. Had the notes in question passed off, as certain peculiarities of opinion in Dr. Clarke's Commentary have done, noticed only for the moment, and now almost forgotten, I would not have recalled to them the attention of his readers, better employed, I hope, on the many excellent things which his work contains. But they have been, as may indeed be supposed from their notorious opposition to the sentiments most commonly received among Christians, and in that religious body to which Dr. Clarke belongs, the subject of much and serious discussion: they have made some converts; and have mooted subjects which have never been put into discussion in any church, without considerable mischief. This was the case before any reply was made to them. Since then a written controversy has commenced, and my reasons for engaging in it may be briefly stated. I consider it a very serious one.—I think a clearly revealed truth has been

given up by Dr. Clarke;—and that he has defended his opinions on the subject by arguments, and on principles, which however innocently held by himself, as to their practical influence on his own thinkings on religious subjects, are very capable of being turned against doctrines which he reveres, in common with all orthodox Christians.

I would however premise,

1. That I approach the subject merely as a matter of theological inquiry. The notes objected to are before the world, and proposed, as all other writings are, to the judgment of men, and lie open to remark and criticism.

2. That I have no feeling, but that of respect, towards Dr. Clarke. My personal acquaintance with him is but slight, and what I know of him by his writings has impressed me with a high sense of his talents and virtues.

3. That I have not taken up the subject under the idea that the learned annotator does not most firmly believe in the essential divinity of Christ; of this doctrine, his notes afford ample proof, and contain masterly and irrefragable arguments; and I am further persuaded, that at the time he wrote those passages, in which he restricts the application of the term Son of God, as it occurs in the New Testament as an appellation of Christ, to his human nature, he conscientiously believed that he was removing an objection to the doctrine of our Lord's divinity: and

4. That, though I shall have occasion to remark that he has, in some instances, adopted the Arian and Socinian rules of interpreting Scripture; and, as I conceive, very dangerously, I strongly protest against this being construed into an insinuation that I associate Dr. Clarke with theologians of that class; at the same time, honesty obliges me to confess, that though the Doctor's great qualities may keep him secure, even upon those premises which upon some subjects he has assumed, yet that they have produced contradiction and inconsistency in his comments; and that, as to many of his readers, it is seriously to be apprehended, that they will be greatly be-

wildered by them, in their religious opinions, and that their *direct* tendency is to lead to errors, which Dr. Clarke himself would be the first to condemn.

These particulars being premised, I hope that it will appear to you, and to others, that I enter upon the discussion with the respect for Dr. Clarke, which his learning and talents demand; and that it is quite consistent with this respect, to feel that we owe, more than to any man, a deference to truth,—the one is feeling and propriety, the other is imperative duty.

The present inquiry respects, first, the Eternal Sonship of Christ, which Dr. Clarke denies; second, the principles by which he has corroborated his negation of that doctrine.

As to the first, the inquiry is precisely this; are the appellations, "SON," "SON OF GOD," and others of similar import, in the New Testament, to be considered, *in every instance*, designations of our Lord's human nature, and imposed with reference to his miraculous conception; or are they used also as appellations of his Divine nature, with reference to his personal existence in the Trinity, and expressive of one of his peculiar and eternal relations, in that personality, to God the Father? This is the question; and if it can be proved, that the doctrines of the eternal filiation of Christ, and the essential personal paternity of God the Father, are contained in Scripture, the matter, as to most of Dr. Clarke's readers, will, I hope, be considered sufficiently determined.

"The doctrine of the eternal sonship of Christ," says Dr. Clarke, "is, in my opinion antisciptural.—I have not been able to find any *express* declaration in the Scriptures concerning it."(1) Here then we are at issue; but, before the evidence from Scripture is adduced, I must remark upon his "not been able to find any *express* declaration in the Scriptures" in favour of the doctrine, that if he means, that there is no passage which states *in so many words*,

(1) Commentary, Luke i. 35.

that Jesus Christ, according to his divine nature, is the eternal Son of God; it is an objection to the doctrine, which he overlooks in other cases. There is no passage, which, in this sense, that is, in the same terms, expressly asserts, that the three divine persons are one God; except it be that in 1 John, so often disputed, and the genuineness of which Dr. Clarke has given up. No passage which, *in so many words*, states the union of two natures in one person in Christ; and no one which *expressly* enjoins the administration of baptism to infants. Yet Dr. Clarke admits these doctrines, and practises this rite. I do not know what idea he may attach to the *express statement* of a doctrine; but I am warranted to conclude, from his admission of the doctrines just named, and from his administering baptism to infants, that he does not in other cases hesitate to form his judgment on the necessary sense of scripture, even where he does not find the explicatory phraseology adopted in the theology of subsequent ages in the sacred text. To me it appears, and I think also it appears to Dr. Clarke, where the point in debate is not in question, that there is an "*express*" enunciation of a doctrine in Scripture, when it is found in the literal sense of any of its passages; when there is nothing in any other part of the revelation to oblige us to depart from that literal sense; when the meaning of other passages restrains us to this literal signification; and when no consistent sense can be made out, if the doctrine be not admitted. If this be allowed, then I hope to make it appear, that the doctrine of the eternal sonship of Christ is expressly announced in the revelation which God has given of his Son. If words have meaning, and the holy text is not to be turned from its obvious sense, by subjecting it to some unauthorized standard of fitness and reason, I do not anticipate any difficulty in the demonstration; and though it be allowed, that it is not uncommon for the sacred writers, because of the personal union of the two natures of Christ, to ascribe actions and relations to our Lord, under the appellations of the "Son of God," and "the Son of Man,"

which interchangeably apply to either nature; if it be clearly made out, that the term "SON OF GOD," and others of the same import, are used when the divine nature of Christ is either contemplated *separately*, or in direct contradistinction to his human nature, the argument, I conceive, is fairly established; though many passages should be considered as entirely neutral. Nor would the argument, from the use of the term, where the divinity of Christ is contemplated in opposition to his humanity, be at all weakened, were we to admit, (which I am not prepared to do, not even in the instance of Luke i. 35, for reasons which shall be afterwards given,) that the term Son of God is sometimes applied to the human nature of Christ, considered in like manner separately, and in contradistinction to his divinity. For, even then, it would remain to be proved, that it is used in this sense *only*.

I proceed, therefore, to establish this argument, by adducing a few passages from the New Testament in which "Son of God," and other cognate terms are applied solely and exclusively to the divine nature of Christ; which cannot, by fair interpretation, be otherwise understood; and which are, therefore, to me, decisive proofs of the doctrine in question.

The epithet "*only begotten*" occurs, in the New Testament, only five times, as applied to Christ; and in two of the passages it is used with great emphasis. They both occur in the first Chapter of St. John's Gospel: "*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,*" ver. 14. "*No man hath seen God at any time, THE ONLY BEGOTTEN SON, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him,*" ver. 18.

On the latter passage I remark, that if the term "*only begotten Son,*" be used, as Dr. Clarke's scheme supposes, with reference to the human nature of Christ, the text contains a contradiction. "*No man, (οὐδεις, nullus, nemo,) hath seen,*" that is, in Scripture language, hath *known*, the



Father; "the only begotten Son," he *hath seen*, and known him, and hath, therefore, declared him: but if this "*only begotten Son*," were the man Jesus, separately and distinctly considered as a man; then at least one man, one human being, composed of flesh and blood, had seen God, and declared him, which the former part of the verse denies. Between the term "*only begotten*," and the nature of *man* there is an obvious opposition.

The 14th verse is still stronger. The glory which the disciples saw, which they *exclusively* saw, "*a glory as of the only begotten of the Father*," or such as became the only begotten of the Father, could not be human glory. Christ had not, like Moses, any splendour of personal appearance; no rays of light played upon his countenance, to mark him out as a divine messenger; and if this glory be referred to his miraculous works, as these works were wrought, not by his human, but his divine power, this view would fix the term "*only begotten*," as a note of supreme and absolute Divinity, demonstrating itself by miraculous operations. There is, however, another and more striking view of the passage. There appears, as most critics have observed, an allusion in it to the tabernacle of Moses, the sacred tent of the Divine Shekinah. "*The Word made flesh, and (σκηνοωσεν) pitched his tabernacle among us.*" Agreeably to this, the fleshly body of Christ, is represented by the Evangelist as having an indwelling glory; the glory of a divine inhabitant; "*the only begotten Son.*" This was not seen by the Jewish people; for though "*he came to his own, his own received him not;*" they did not admit his claims. But his disciples received him: they saw in their habitual converse with him; in the wisdom with which he spake; the super-human virtues he manifested; the miraculous works he wrought; the evidences, the occasional beamings forth of the divinity which dwelt within him; and this glory is denominated "*a glory as of the only begotten of the Father.*" This I conceive to be the sense of this noble passage; but, whatever may be thought of the reference to

the tabernacle of Moses, the argument is not affected by it. Unless Dr. Clarke will acknowledge the glory seen by the Apostles to have been merely the glory of his human nature; of which he had none, as far as I can discover, from the circumstance of having been supernaturally conceived; the glory must have been that of a higher nature, *which nature* is called, "expressly" called, "the only begotten of the Father," and indeed as the context shews, was the glory of the *Word* made flesh.

There is a singular confusion in Dr. Clarke's note on this passage, which could only arise from the difficulty of making out a consistent sense upon the scheme, that the appellation "*the only begotten of the Father,*" is given to Christ, because of his miraculous conception. He first adopts the allusion to the Divine Shekinah; and says, "the human nature which he took of the Virgin, was as the *shrine*, house, or temple, in which his immaculate Deity condescended to dwell." The natural inference from this is, that, as this shrine, house, or temple, had no glory, being in the "likeness of sinful flesh," the glory which the disciples saw, was the glory of that "immaculate Deity," which condescended to dwell in it. No, we are told, it was that glory which "John saw, in company with Peter and James," at the transfiguration. This is perfectly gratuitous; nothing is afforded in proof; and it is directly contradicted in the very next page, where he observes very truly, "While God dwelt in the tabernacle among the Jews, the priests saw his glory; and while Jesus dwelt among men, *his glory was manifested in his gracious words and miraculous acts.*" What glory then was that which was manifested by miracles, but his divine glory, the glory of a nature superior to his body, the mere shrine in which it dwelt, and to which higher nature the Evangelist gives the title "*only begotten Son.*" Dr. Clarke himself has thus given up the point in the same note in which he wrestles with it!

But the argument from the use of this term does not terminate here. If it be used to express the production of

the body of our Lord, by the immediate power of God, it is a false term; the Son of Mary was not in this sense the "only begotten of the Father;" for Adam was also immediately formed by God, without human interposition; and, for that reason, is called by St. Luke, "*the Son of God.*" It is, therefore, in exclusive reference to his divine nature, that Christ can be truly entitled, "*the only begotten of the Father.*"

In the other passages where this term occurs, it has scarcely less emphasis; though the two natures of Christ are not, as in the former, put in opposition. John iii 16, may be an instance for the rest, "*God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son,*" &c. Let us allow that the whole compound nature of Christ is here spoken of, under the term Son; and let the argument just adduced from the use of the term "*only begotten,*" be put out of sight; yet the force of this important text, as an expression of God's love to the world, depends upon the use of that term, as the designation of the divine nature of Christ. The circumstance in the text, which most strongly and affectingly marks the love of God to us, is not merely that he gave to the world a Saviour; but that he gave his "*only begotten Son,*" as that Saviour. It is this which, to use Dr. Clarke's own words, "has put an eternity of meaning into the particle *ουτω*, *so*, and left a subject for everlasting contemplation, wonder, and praise, to angels and men." But if "*the only begotten Son*" be used as the designation of the human nature, where is the emphatic tenderness of the passage? Was that so eminently dear to God, that the giving of a human being involved, so to speak, such a sacrifice of paternal feeling? I at least cannot discover it; and, I think, I may appeal to every heart, which beats in unison with this passage, whether the effect of such an interpretation be not to weaken its power upon the feelings; whether by ceasing to consider Christ as a *divine* Son, and the object of the boundless love of a divine and everlasting Father, the love of God to our fallen world does not lose much of its unutterable tender-

ness, and affecting expression. The love of Christ remains precisely the same; but the love of the Father! is the emphasis of that in the least heightened by the gift of an "only begotten Son," if that Son, as *Son*, were merely human? It is by the existence of the tender relations of Father and Son, in the first and second persons of the Trinity, that the love which redeemed the guilty is heightened as much beyond our conception, as the love of the Father to the Son is beyond it; it is this which renders the sacrifice of Isaac, a proper, though a faint type of the love of the everlasting Father; and it is this that crowds an infinity of meaning into the particle "*οὐτως, σο.*"— "*God so loved the world.*" "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." Upon the comparatively cold interpretation of this text, which must consistently follow from Dr. Clarke's theory, our perception of the love of God the Father, I think, would be unspeakably weakened; and our attention chiefly, perhaps exclusively, concentrated on the love of the Son himself; which would be most contrary to every natural impression, which the words of this text are adapted to convey. It would be nothing in reply to urge, that the divine nature of Christ could not suffer pain, and therefore his being "given" as a *divine* Son, implies no violation of the tenderness of a Father. *If* it suffered no pain, it suffered something; of this there are mysterious, and, from the nature of the thing, only mysterious indications in Scripture; but brief as are these notices, they are strong and emphatic. "*He emptied himself,*" "*made himself of no reputation;*" and though "*equal with God,*" became "*obedient,*" and, therefore truly "*a servant.*" This then is the manifestation of the love of God the Father, that he "*so loved the world,*" as, for its redemption, to humble, and abase this *Son*, his "*only begotten.*" "*He spared not his own Son.*"

I find another scriptural argument in favour of the doctrine in the application of the term Father to the first person in the adorable Trinity. When Divinity is spoken of without any reference to the peculiar and mysterious

mode of his existence in three persons; Father is one of those common terms of emphatic and encouraging meaning by which God has condescended to represent himself to man. But it is worthy of notice, that when the awful veil, which shrouds the Incomprehensible, is in part withdrawn by the Spirit of revelation, and we are permitted, at least a glance of the ineffable manner in which he subsists; when the three divine hypostases are exhibited, in mysterious distinction and unity, and names are solemnly given to each; "THE FATHER," is the high and expressive distinction of the *first*. Thus, in the authorized form of baptism, into the new and finished evangelical dispensation, communicated by Christ to his Apostles, and entered in their commission; a form, in which the name of God is written by himself, where he has "passed before us and proclaimed it;" where he has perfected the revelation of a Trinity of persons, in the one name and essence of one God; and where terms, not only of the most expressive import, but of the utmost precision, were to be expected, as they were to present the true God, in the exact views he was to form of him, to every convert from the worship of false gods; excluding all figurative and accommodating language, for that reason; the three persons are thus distinctly and emphatically designated. "*Baptizing them in the name of the FATHER, and of the SON, and of the HOLY GHOST.*" The inquiry then is, why the first person in the Godhead is thus called the Father with relation to a Son, in a case where there is a *distinct consideration* of the three: the first person, *as the first person*, is called the Father; and for this no reason can, I think, be given, except that he is the "Father" of the divine nature "of our Lord Jesus Christ." The terms Father and Son here are exact correlatives, the first person is the Father, the second is the *Son* of that first person; but of the *human nature* of Jesus, the first person is not the Father; for the sacred temple of our Lord's body was produced by the Holy Ghost, the third person. Yet is the *first person*, though in that person not the creator of the humanity of our

Lord, still the Father, the Father of the Son Christ; and if a father, the reason of the appellation is only to be found in the doctrine which Dr. Clarke would disprove. It follows, therefore, that to deny the eternal filiation of the second person in the Trinity, is to deny the essential paternity of the first; and by the denial, to take away all meaning from the first of those correlative terms, which are to be pronounced as "*the name*" of God, and as his name, are descriptive of his nature, to every new convert to the Christian faith.

Nor is the term "SON OF GOD," applied to Christ, merely with reference to his miraculous production; or used in those passages in which it can have no such reference, only in consequence of a common interchange of the appellations of each nature. Such an interchange of names and titles I readily allow; but there are passages to which this rule of interpretation will not apply; passages which, by no fair criticism, can be made to have a consistent meaning upon this scheme; passages, in which the superior and inferior natures are contemplated either in opposition or in distinction; and in which the term "SON OF GOD" is the denomination which the Spirit of Inspiration has given to the superior nature, and which, for that reason, I think, disprove Dr. Clarke's position, that there is no "*express*" enunciation of the doctrine of the divine Sonship in the Holy Scriptures. And here you will observe, that we have at least this advantage over the learned commentator,—to make his assertion good, he ought, in fairness, to examine every passage, in which the appellation Son of God occurs, and *prove*, that in no one of them is it given to the divine nature of Christ, considered in contradistinction to his humanity; whilst, if those who take the other side of the question, can prove, that in only one passage, Christ is called "*the Son of God*," with express and distinguishing reference to his Divine nature, the point is gained. As Dr. Clarke will himself allow, that there is no passage which denies the doctrine of the eternal Filiation; in how many other senses the term may be taken,

they are not contradictory to that one text, if one only could be found in the sacred record, in which the divinity of the Son of God, as a Son, is asserted; whilst on the other hand, whatever texts he may find, in which the use of the term is restricted to the human nature, they cannot shield that general conclusion which he has hastily drawn from them, from being opposed and swept away by evidence directly contradictory. If we cannot establish the eternal sonship of Christ, as the express doctrine of Scripture; no man can bring evidence from Scripture to contradict it: after all, it would be left as a matter of inference; whilst, if the express doctrine be established, the notion Dr. Clarke has attempted to introduce among us, is disproved and destroyed.

I have, however, more than one text to offer to your attention, which are as decisive as those I have already adduced. A passage, in which the appellation "Son of God" most clearly appears to me to be used *expressly* to characterize the Divine nature of Christ, and, therefore, as *expressly* to prove the disputed doctrine, occurs in Romans i. 3, 4, "*Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David, according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.*" A very few remarks will be sufficient to point out the force of this passage. The apostle, it is to be observed, is not speaking of what Christ is officially; but of what he is personally and essentially; for the truth of all his official claims depends upon the truth of his personal ones. If he be a divine person, he is every thing else he assumes to be. He is, therefore, considered by the Apostle distinctly in his two natures. As a man he was flesh, of the seed of David, and a son of David; in a superior nature he was divine, and the Son of God. That he was of the seed of David, no proof was necessary, but the Jewish genealogies; that he was divine, or, as the Apostle chooses to express it, "THE SON OF GOD," a proof of a higher kind was necessary; and it was given in his resurrection from the

dead. That “declared him to be the Son of God with power;” or powerfully determined and marked him out to be the Son of God; a divine person. That an opposition is expressed between what Christ was according to the flesh, and what he was according to a higher nature, must be allowed, or there is no force in the Apostle’s observation; and equally clear it must be, that the nature put in *opposition* to the fleshly nature, can be no other than the divine nature of Christ, the apostolic designation of which is the “SON OF GOD.” According to Dr. Clarke’s view of the meaning of this term, this opposition would be lost, and the argument of the Apostle destroyed. It would make him say, that Christ was of the seed of David according to the flesh, and the Son of God according to the flesh; but the manifest opposition is between the flesh, and some higher nature; between what he was as a man, and what he was as more than man; a decisive indication of the Divinity of our Lord, which the theory of Dr. Clarke utterly sinks and annihilates. Here then, I think, whatever may be the sense of the phrase, according to “the Spirit of Holiness,” which follows, and which, whether it refer to the Divine nature of our Lord, or to the agency of the Holy Spirit in raising him from the dead, does not at all weaken the argument, because it does not affect the contrast in the text, is a passage in which the two natures of Christ are placed in distinction, and even in *opposition*, and of the higher or Divine nature, it is expressly affirmed, that it is the “*Son of God.*”(2)

(2) Though I have not, in the above remarks, attempted to confirm the argument by the phrase, “*according to the Spirit of Holiness;*” because of the disagreeing views of commentators; I have myself, no doubt, but that it is equivalent to, “*according to his Divine nature.*” Because of the opposition stated by the Apostle between what Christ was, *κατα*, according to, in respect of the flesh; and his being declared the Son of God with power, “*κατα*, according to, in respect of the Spirit of Holiness;” Macknight, following Locke and many others, interprets the “Spirit of Holiness,” to mean the divine nature of Christ, as the flesh signifies his whole human nature. To this Schleusner adds his authority, sub voce *αγιου πνευματος*; “*Summa Dei majestas et perfectio. Rom. i. 4. κατα πνευματος αγιου πνευματος quoad vim suam*



The way, in which Dr. Clarke, in his note on this place, avoids the force of the argument drawn from the evident contrast in the text, between that nature of Christ, which was of "the seed of David according to the flesh," and that which bears the designation "Son of God," is entirely to overlook the manner in which the Apostle places the one in opposition to the other; and in a loose paraphrase informs us, that to be "*declared the Son of God,*" means

et majestatem divinam. Similiter in vers. Alex. non solum Hebr. דוד Psalm cxlv. 4, 5. sed etiam *רו שר* respondet, Psalm xcvi. 12. In this view the passage is even more strong in favour of the sense given above. Against this Doddridge, though a believer in the eternal sonship of Christ, observes, "It seems to me so little agreeable to the style of Scripture in general, to call the Divine nature of Christ, the Spirit of Holiness, or the Holy Spirit, that, highly as I esteem the many learned and accurate commentators who have given it this turn, I rather refer it to the operation of the Spirit of God, in the production of Christ's body, by which means the opposition between *κατα σαρκ* and *κατα πνευμα* will be preserved; the one referring to the materials acted upon, the other to the Divine and miraculous Agent." The contrast is, however, by no means preserved by this interpretation; and to give any force to the Apostle's argument, on the view taken of the passage by Doddridge, it ought to be shewn that the resurrection of Christ from the dead, proved that his human nature was formed by the agency of the Holy Spirit, more eminently than it proved any other of his high claims. Another objection to this interpretation is, that it narrows the proofs of the resurrection, to the demonstration that the human nature of Christ was supernaturally formed in the womb of the Virgin, which might have occurred to a person not divine; whereas it was evidently intended to be a proof of his Divinity and equality with the Father. "*For as the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself.*" "*I lay down my life, and I have power to take it again.*" No creature could assume this; but it was assumed by Christ, and justified by the resurrection. If the resurrection of Christ proved him divine, it proved every thing else respecting him: if it principally proved only that his body was formed by the Holy Spirit, it did not necessarily prove his divinity. The sense of the Apostle appears to me, therefore, to be this; though Christ was of the seed of David according to the flesh; yet his resurrection declared him to be more than a human descendant from David, even a divine person, *κατα*, according to another nature; that is, the "*holy and glorious Spirit,*" which was united to the human body and soul. There is not much force in the objection, that the phrase, "the Spirit of Holiness," in this sense, is an unusual one. St. Paul is not unfrequently unusual in his expressions; but here he had, at least, the authority of the LXX, who use *αγιωσπον*, as Schleusner has observed, as the rendering for דוד Psalm cxlv. 5, a word which signifies *glory, majesty, honour.*

that Christ was declared to be the Messiah; and, as this is the usual manner in which, not only those who with Dr. Clarke oppose the doctrine of the Eternal Sonship of Christ, but those also who deny his Divinity, endeavour to dispose of the phrase "*Son of God,*" denying that it implies any idea of Deity, and asserting that it is merely an official, or a human personal designation, it shall have a brief consideration. It is necessary to this discussion, to examine, whether the term Son of God, was considered a synonyme of the appellation Messiah, among the first disciples of Jesus, and among the Jews, with their priests and rulers.

The calling of Nathanael, will afford a striking instance of the sense in which the term was used by the disciples. The history is given in John i. 44, ad finem. Nathanael's acknowledgement of Jesus is given in these words, "*Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel.*" Here Dr. Clarke, and others, consider the titles Son of God, and King of Israel, as terms of the same import,—and both as designating the Messiahship. But why do they not also consider the term "*Rabbi,*" as synonymous with the other two, and as an appropriate appellation of Messiah? If a distinct idea be attached to the term "*Rabbi,*" Master, Teacher, or however it may be rendered, what reason can be given, that the terms "*Son of God, and King of Israel,*" should involve precisely one idea, differently expressed? It appears much more consistent with the rapid brevity of these expressions of overflowing feeling, to consider them all as conveying very distinct ideas. This, I grant, if it stood alone, would be rather opinion than argument; but it has strong confirmation in the circumstances of the history. If it be maintained, that the appellation Son of God is used as synonymous with Messiah, and that the proof that Christ, as to his human nature, was miraculously produced by God, was the proof of his Messiahship; then, before the title Son of God could have been applied to him by Nathanael, he must have known that "he was conceived of the Holv

Ghost, and born of the Virgin Mary." But nothing of this appears in the history. He appears to have been an utter stranger to Jesus, and the circumstances of his life, before Philip met with him and declared, that he and others had found the Messias. Nay, the very terms in which Philtp announced him were such as entirely to put out of sight his miraculous conception, with which Philip himself was, at that time, apparently unacquainted. "*We have found him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write ; Jesus of Nazareth, the SON OF JOSEPH.*" So little share had the miraculous conception in convincing Philip that Jesus was the Messias, that he announces him to Nathanael as "*the Son of Joseph ;*" which he could scarcely have done, had he even known that Joseph was his reputed father only, if the miraculous conception had been previously urged upon him in proof of the claims of him whose call "follow me" he had obeyed. To Nathanael, however, this proof, was wholly unknown ; and yet without any acquaintance with it, even in opposition to the contrary information, that Jesus was "*the Son of Joseph,*" did he pronounce him to be the "*Son of God.*" What then led to Nathanael's conversion? Not any information of the manner in which the human body of Christ was formed ; it was not with reference to this, that he saluted him as the Son of God ; but, as the context shews, with reference to his having exercised a Divine attribute. "*Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig-tree, I saw thee.*" Christ saw Nathanael, when he was sure no human being saw him ; he knew his secret acts, when he had shut himself out from all the world ; and this proof of divine knowledge at once convinced Nathanael, that he was more than man ; that he was truly divine ; and, under this idea, the most prominent one certainly in his mind at the time, after the common salutation of courtesy to superior persons, bearing a sacred character, *Rabbi!* he confesses that divinity of which he was convinced, under the appellation "*Son of God ;*" and then immediately hastens to acknow-

ledge what he, for this reason, was convinced must be true, because professed by a divine person who could not deceive mankind, that he was *Messias*, "*the King of Israel*."

I find what appears to me another proof, that the title *Son of God*, is not of identical meaning with "*Messias*," in Peter's celebrated confession of Christ, *Matt. xvi. 16*, "*Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God*." Let any one ask, what the purpose was of that interrogation being put which produced a reply for which a special benediction was pronounced upon Peter. It could scarcely be to draw forth a confession from the disciples, that Jesus was the *Messias*; for that they had confessed from the time they had left all to follow him; that they confessed at the very moment by remaining with him. The very reason they were his followers was their belief of his *Messiahship*. But their belief in this did not necessarily involve, *in the first stages of their discipleship*, the belief of his divinity. That the Jews did not generally, in the time of Christ, expect their *Messias* to be a divine person, I shall presently adduce some evidence to establish; and they who had so grossly misunderstood all that was spiritual in the predictions of the Old Testament; who had lost all understanding of the *Mosaic types*; of the doctrine of atonement, and pardon through faith in a universal propitiation; may well be supposed to have been generally blind to the meaning of those scriptures which array *Messiah* in the awful attributes of absolute divinity. In this grossness of conception we know, by many instances, the disciples themselves were involved. With his divinity they were most probably, at their first call, little, if at all acquainted. None of them, upon their first vocation, had so clear a manifestation of it as *Nathanael*; and none of them probably had at the time so high a moral preparation to receive it as he who was declared "*an Israelite indeed*," by the sentence of him who saw him "*under the fig-tree*," and could therefore read his heart. But at the time the question, "*Whom say ye that I am*," was put, they had for a considerable time followed him. They had seen many

acts of his divine power and majesty; and now, therefore, he requires from them a higher confession than that of his simple Messiahship; a confession of his Godhead. The question is put to them in a remarkable form, and one which certainly was rather calculated to repress, than to entice the answer. "*Whom say men that I the SON OF MAN am;*" I, who appear before you, obviously a human being like yourselves? And Peter, after the disciples had given the opinions of others, said, "*Thou art Christ, the SON OF THE LIVING GOD.*" Here there is a like opposition between the terms "Son of Man," and "Son of God," as in the passage quoted from the Romans, which expresses what Christ was according to the flesh, and what he was in a higher nature, and in both places he is designated "*The Son of God.*" Upon this confession Jesus rejoins, "*Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee, but my FATHER which is in heaven.*" That is, as I understand it, this opinion respecting me has not been obtained, from the sentiments which are generally received among the Jews; but by the influence of God upon thy mind, giving thee a right understanding, and a docile disposition, to yield to the demonstrations of this high doctrine. But what were these demonstrations? This is a very important question in the discussion. If the confession that Christ was "*the Son of the living God,*" be taken in Dr. Clarke's view; if the reason for the use of the term Son of God, were his miraculous conception, it would follow that Peter believed him to be the Messiah, because he knew him to be thus miraculously conceived of the Holy Ghost. But if this were so prominent and emphatic a proof of the Messiahship of Jesus, that, according to Dr. Clarke's note on Romans i. 3, 4, it was the great object of the resurrection of Christ to demonstrate it, and in this sense to "*declare him the Son of God with power.*" Can the Doctor account for it; can any man account for it; that in no part of the evangelic history, nor in any of the discourses of Jesus with his disciples is this circumstance ever urged

upon them in proof of our Lord's claims? No: though Mary, the virgin mother, was with them, and might easily have been referred to; though they doubted not the truth of their Master's words, but in this respect would have received such a declaration from him with humble submission; I cannot call to recollection a single case in which, by this evidence, he attempted to reach their judgment. On the contrary, the class of proofs to which he referred them was entirely distinct. He referred to his *works*, and upon these he rested his claims to call God his Father, and himself the Son of the living God. Take for instance these explicit words, addressed to Philip, John xiv. 11, "*Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me, or else believe me,* (not because I was miraculously conceived, this is not so much as hinted at in justification of this assumption of filiation,) but FOR THE VERY WORKS' SAKE." I think then, that I am fully warranted in concluding, that the title Son of God, as applied to Christ by himself and by his disciples, is one which involves the idea of his divinity, from the very species of proof to which he resorts for their conviction; it is a kind of proof, the proof of miracles, which brings the term Son of God into constant collocation with ideas of supreme divinity, and whose object could only be to demonstrate him to be a divine person under that appellation. Of the steady and uniform use of this appellation in the sense of true and absolute divinity by the disciples, an interesting example is also afforded in Matt. xiv. 33. Jesus had walked on the sea to the ship in which were his disciples. Peter by his permission goes to meet him, he begins to be afraid of the boisterous waves, and to sink; he is upheld by the hand of his Lord; and the astonishing miracle is exhibited to those in the ship, of the Master and his favoured disciple, both treading the yielding wavering element, as on solid ground. And they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, "*Of a truth thou art the SON OF GOD.*" What idea, in such solemn and impressive circumstances, could they attach to the term? Is it probable that there should

have been the most transient reference in their minds to the manner in which our Lord's human nature was produced; or if there were, could this term have suggested itself to them as at all a proper one to express their deep and ample conviction of his superhuman power, had they not been accustomed to use it as the designation of supreme divinity?

Another instance of the firm association of the term "SON OF GOD," with the notion of Deity, in a disciple, is given in John ix. in the case of the man born blind, whom Jesus healed. After Christ had directed him to wash in the pool of Siloam; he appears not to have met with him again till after his examination before the Pharisees. In that examination he was asked, "*what sayest thou of him?*"—"He said, he is a prophet." He does not say, the Messiah; and his boldness before his haughty examiners, leaves no doubt, but that if he had heard that Jesus had professed to be the Messiah, he would have professed his faith in him in that character. Jesus was evidently a stranger to him; but from the miracle, he believed him to be a prophet, and a good man; for, as he argued, "*God heareth not sinners.*" There is sufficient reason, therefore, to conclude that the man was ignorant both of his miraculous conception, and of his professing to be the Messiah. Certainly his acknowledgment that Jesus was "*a prophet,*" did not imply a confession that he was Messiah, as Dr. Clarke has acknowledged in his note on the passage. But when Christ afterwards met him, he proposes to him the naked question, "*Dost thou believe on the SON OF GOD?*" He does not say, Messiah the Son of God, he gives him no information as to his miraculous conception; and even if we were to allow, that the term Son of God was understood by the man to comprehend the claim of the Messiahship, of which no proof is in the history; yet he could not consider him Messiah, Son of God, because he was born of a virgin. On the contrary, the man clearly understood the title Son of God, in the sense of his being a divine person; for it is added, "*he*

*worshipped him.*" He worshipped him, *as the Son of God*, a divine person, not as having been conceived out of the ordinary way, or as arguing his divinity from that of which as he knew nothing; but being convinced of it from his having wrought a miracle. And here again, I am happy, as in the text in 1 John, to be able to plead the authority of Dr. Clarke against himself; for on this act of grateful adoration he observes, "Never having seen Jesus before, but simply knowing that a person of that name had opened his eyes, he had only considered him as a holy man, and a prophet; but now that he sees and hears him, *he is convinced of his divinity*, and glorifies him as his Saviour." Yet, be it observed, that this ample view of his divinity was conveyed to him by the single question, "*Dost thou believe on THE SON OF GOD;*" which Dr. Clarke contends is the appellation of the human nature, the man only!

I hope then, that I have made it tolerably clear, that the disciples of Christ did not use the terms Son of God, and Messiah, as titles of the same import; of this, however, the evidence is full, that they used the former term, so as to involve the idea of absolute divinity, a circumstance in which I shall find a sufficient argument presently. In the mean time, let us consult the Evangelists for evidence, to show that the terms Messiah and Son of God were understood to be of very different import by the Jews in general; a circumstance which will go still further to prove that Dr. Clarke is not warranted in considering them as conveying the same meaning, in the popular language of the Jews. The question whether the Jews expected a human or a divine Messiah has been much agitated by learned men, and very great names are arranged on each side. But though, to use the words of BASNAGE, who has carefully examined the opinions of the Jews on this subject, "it is our interest to be of their opinion who believe that the Jews in our Lord's time, expected the second person of the Trinity, as the Messiah, because it strongly concludes against the antitrinitarians, there appears no conclusive evidence in its favour." That the Messiah of the law and the prophets is a divine person



stands on unshaken proofs; but this doctrine appears to have been lost to the body of a people, whose chief sects, the Pharisees and Sadducees, were notoriously, not merely bad interpreters, but gross perverters of the oracles they acknowledged to be divine. Among the spiritual persons who remained, better views, though perhaps considerably obscured, would be found; but they were few, and too unknown to exert any influence, and give any direction to the public sentiment. The great mistake of those divines who have attributed to the Jews at large opinions as to the Messiah so correct appears to have been first, attributing too much weight of evidence to the Platonic revellings of imagination in Philo, who, though he uses the term Son of God, is said, on what I take to be competent authority, no where to apply it to the Jewish Messiah; and in none of the numerous passages in his writings I have read, have I found it so applied; and, secondly, in taking the use of the term Son of God among the disciples of Christ, who certainly applied it in the sense of divinity, as indicative of the common opinion of the Jews as to the Messiah they expected. They, however, forgot that these were the views of *instructed* and *illuminated* persons; that a moral change had been wrought in their habits; that their minds were enlightened by special influence; “*that flesh and blood had not revealed it unto them; but the Father which is in heaven;*” and the views under which the disciples considered Messiah, can no more be used in proof of what were the commonly received opinions, than the application of them to Jesus, would prove that the body of the Jewish nation admitted his claims to that character. Here then we may lay down the following positions—that the disciples of Christ allowed him to be Messiah, and Son of God; that the Jews doubted whether he were the Messiah, and frequently resorted to him to obtain evidence of it; that occasionally, in great numbers, they professed to be convinced, though waveringly, of his claim to that character; (on one occasion, they would have proclaimed him king;) but that, *at all times*, they steadily resisted his claim

to be the "THE SON OF GOD;" his claim that God was his "proper Father;" accused him of blasphemy for this assumption; took up stones to stone him; and at last brought him to trial and condemned him on this charge. The conclusions I would draw from these positions are, that the assumption of Messiahship and Sonship were, in the view of the Jews of our Lord's time, entirely distinct; the latter being considered by them to involve a claim of divinity; and that these terms were considered as of distinct import by the disciples, though in their faith they applied, as was due, both of them to him, and confessed him to be "*the Messiah*," and "*the Son of the living God*,"—a divine person. In illustration and confirmation of these positions, I shall make some quotations from an able discussion of the subject in a modern work; but for the argument, in its most extended form, I refer to the work itself.(3)

"Christ was arraigned, it appears, before the two different tribunals of the Jewish Sanhedrim, and the Roman governor. In the latter he was accused of sedition, and acquitted:(4) in the former he was accused of blasphemy, and condemned:(5) and though the judicial power of the Jewish court was at that time much abridged, the Roman governor was prevailed on, by the importunity of the Jews, to ratify and execute the sentence of the Sanhedrim. The conduct of the Jews on this occasion appears to have been determined by the different claims, which Jesus had advanced. He had sometimes simply declared himself Christ or Messiah, viz. the King of Israel, foretold by their prophets; and sometimes, Christ, the Son of God. The assumption of the first of these titles, combined with another circumstance, that of being sometimes followed by

(3) An Illustration of the Method of Explaining the New Testament, by the Early Opinions of Jews and Christians concerning Christ. By W. Wilson, B. D.

(4) John xviii. 38, and xix. 4.

(5) Matthew xxvi. 65, 66. See also the corresponding accounts of Mark and Luke.

great multitudes of people, might seem treason against the sovereignty of the Romans; and of this combination of alleged guilt he was accused before Pilate. "We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar, saying, that he himself is Christ a King."—"He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee to this place."(6) But, to discover what they conceived to be his real offence, we must refer to the proceedings of their own tribunal. There, we are informed, after the court had in vain attempted to prove him guilty of blasphemy, by the rules of evidence laid down in the Mosaic law, that a confession of his supposed guilt was drawn from him by the High Priest's examination. With respect to the examination of witnesses, St. Matthew has related, that "the council sought false witness against Jesus to put him to death: yet found they none, though many false witnesses came."(7) According to St. Mark, "the council sought for witnesses against Jesus to put him to death; but found none: for many bare false witness against him: but their witness agreed not together."(8) The obscurity of the first Evangelist is well explained by the second. The Sanhedrim, it appears, sought for witnesses to convict Jesus of a capital crime: on examination, they proved to be false witnesses, either by the inconsistency or the weakness of their evidence; and, therefore, by the law of Moses, could have no weight with the court. By the Mosaic law, the concurrent testimony of two or three witnesses was necessary to convict any one of a capital crime; (9) and at last came "two witnesses," to testify that Jesus had threatened to destroy the temple, and build it again in three days: but, either a slight disagreement in their testimony annulled the force of their evidence; or, what is more probable, the fact substantiated was not thought to amount to a capital offence. Testimony

(6) Luke xxiii. 2, 5.

(7) Matt. xxvi. 59, 60.

(8) Mark xiv. 55, 56. *Ἰσχυὶ ἀνεπαρκεῖσιν αὐτῶν*. Perhaps the true translation is, "their testimonies were insufficient. See Grotius on the term *ισχυὶ*."

(9) Numb. xxxv. 30. Deut. xvii. 6.

sufficient to convict a culprit might be said to be true, insufficient testimony false in the eye of the law. In this language St. John remarks, "It is written in your law, the testimony of two men is true:" and it must be according to the same sort of phraseology that these witnesses are called "false witnesses;" for the only fact mentioned, to which they deposed, appears to have been strictly true, but not sufficient to prove the crime of blasphemy. Having failed in establishing this charge, the High Priest asks, however, for a reply, expecting, perhaps, to meet with some objectionable matter in a long defence. Having failed in this also, he proceeds to examine Jesus, in order to draw from him an acknowledgement of his supposed guilt: and this he effected. According to St. Luke, our Saviour was asked two questions: in Matthew and Mark these are expressed in one, probably for the sake of brevity: and from these two Evangelists it cannot be certainly known, whether he was condemned for declaring himself the Christ, or the Son of God, or for asserting that he should afterwards appear with glory at the right hand of God. The doubt, however, is removed in the narrative of Luke. "As soon as it was day, the elders of the people, and the chief priests and the scribes came together, and led him into their council, saying, Art thou the Christ? Tell us. And he said unto them, If I tell you, you will not believe; and if I also ask you, you will not answer me, nor let me go. Hereafter, shall the Son of Man sit on the right hand of the power of God. Then said they *all*; Art thou then the Son of God? And he saith unto them, Ye say that I am. And they said, What need we any further (1) witness? for we ourselves have heard of his own mouth." (2) "The High Priest rent his clothes, saying, he hath spoken blasphemy: what further need have

(1) From this expression it appears, consistently with the whole account of the trial, that till then further evidence was thought necessary. This may also be collected from the silence of St. Luke, no less than by his testimony: he has not even mentioned the examination of the witnesses.

(2) Luke xxii. 66-71.

we of witnesses? Behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy: what think ye? They answered and said, he is guilty of death.”(3) The real ground of his condemnation also appears from a circumstance mentioned by St. John in his account of the second trial. The Jews exclaimed to Pilate, “ We have a law, and by *our law* he ought to die, *because he made himself the Son of God.*”(4) It appears then, by very full and decisive evidence, that Jesus was accused by the Jews before the *Roman* governor for assuming the title of the Christ, or Messiah, a King; and that, in a *Jewish* court, he was adjudged guilty of the capital crime of blasphemy by the Mosaic law, for *simply declaring himself the Son of God*. His claim to this title was not set aside by any additional evidence: but the simple assumption of the title, not only invalidated his pretensions to the character of the Messiah, but was in itself the crime for which he suffered.

“To prove that Jesus Christ was tried and condemned by the Mosaic law, it is sufficient to observe, that his trial was before a Jewish court. Their proceedings, however, as described by the three first Evangelists, and a declaration of some of their people, as recorded by St. John, would place the matter beyond all question, were there any preceding doubt. They evidently proceeded by the rule of evidence laid down in Numb. xxxv. 30, and Deut. xvii. 6. Afterwards, indeed, before Pilate, his prosecutors did not bring forward at first, the crime of which they really believed him guilty; because it was not likely to influence a Roman governor, who might have no respect for Jewish laws. They accused him, at first, of sedition for declaring himself Messiah, a King: but the governor perceived this to be an invidious charge: he knew that “for envy” they had accused him of this crime: and they were at length compelled to advert to the real grounds of their prosecution. “*We have a law, and by our law* he ought to die, *because he made himself the Son of God.*” Happily

(3) Matt. xxvi. 65.

(4) John xix. 7.

for the cause of religion and truth, their law has come down to our times : and it is hardly necessary to observe, that it is not a capital crime by any statute in the whole Mosaic code to assume the title and character of the Messiah. The oral law, in the time of Christ, may be said to have had nearly the same relation to the Pentateuch, in the opinion of the Jews, that our common law bears to our statutes : they supposed both to have the same origin and equal authority : and some parts of the one were, unquestionably, useful as an explanation and supplement to the other. The traditionary maxims, which constituted the second law, were digested and published by a learned and zealous Jew, about one hundred and eighty years after the trial of Christ ; (5) at a time when Christianity had diffused itself into every part of the vast extent of the Roman empire ; when the Jews had practised every art to defame the new religion, and to apologize for their own conduct towards Christ and Christians : no precept or rule, therefore, in the oral law, however inconsiderable, that might in any way tend to justify their conduct, would be left out of this collection : it is not, however, a capital crime, or any crime, by any rule found in the Mishna, to assume the title and character of the Messiah : and, as the Sanhedrim condemned Jesus by their law, and the Jewish people approved the sentence, because he professed to be the Son of God, they must have conceived him to have laid claim, in these words, to some other title and character, against which their law was really directed. But, if the Pentateuch and Mishna be examined with the utmost care, no statute or maxim will be found in either, which the Jews could mistake so far, as to conceive it capable of application to this case, unless they supposed Jesus, in declaring himself the Son of God, to claim divinity : none of their

(5) The Mishna was published by R. Juda about the year two hundred and twenty : but the Jews had employed themselves in collecting the traditions and customs, which form the body of this second law, from the time of their second destruction under Adrian. See Allix Judgment of the Jewish Church, c. xxiii. p. 395.

laws appear to have any relation to this case, on any other supposition. If, indeed, our Lord was understood to have advanced this claim; having then generally lost all notion of a trinity of persons in the divine unity, and having never entertained the idea of the Son of God invested with human flesh, they would probably believe him guilty of a breach of the first commandment; and his case would be supposed to fall under the operation of some of the penal laws in the Pentateuch, enacted to enforce its observance.

“ To express the whole argument in a few words: Jesus Christ was condemned to death by the Jewish law for acknowledging himself the Son of God: the phrase “ Son God” admits, and merely admits of several different acceptations: the declaration must have been thought innocent, in the eye of the law, in any of these significations except one: in that, it was liable to be accounted a capital crime; it might be thought a breach of the first commandment: in that sense it must therefore have been understood by the Jews.

“ The question before us, it must be remembered, is this: Whether Jesus, under the external disadvantages of an humble birth and appearance, was condemned by the Jewish Sanhedrim for professing to be their Messiah; or, for claiming a higher nature than they attributed to the great personage, whom they expected under that title? Whether he was condemned for indirectly declaring himself the Christ, the Son of David and King of Israel; or for asserting his divinity? And, in the discussion of this question, it seems reasonable to judge of the motives of the Sanhedrim by those of the Jewish people; to explain the conduct of one body of Jews by the conduct of others, and to form our opinions on a connected and comparative view of the whole. If the magistrate and the subject, the learned and the ignorant, the inhabitant of the city and of the country, at different times, and in various situations, appear to have been incensed against our Saviour for asserting his divinity, without shewing equal displeasure, when they conceived him to speak of his divine mission

only as Messiah ; we are then furnished with a forcible reason, in addition to those already stated, for believing that this was, at least the principal, if not the only ground of his condemnation. And, it may be added, that such a perfect uniformity in the interpretation of his words by several different bodies of men of his own time and country, who all spoke the same language, were conversant about the same objects, to whom his figures of speech and modes of instruction would be familiar, such uniformity in the interpretation of his words by so many different bodies of contemporaries affords a decisive proof, that his meaning was not misunderstood.

“ In order to judge whether the Sanhedrim would condemn Jesus, appearing as he did appear, for teaching the doctrine of his divinity, or for simply declaring himself the Messiah ; we may first appeal to the conduct of a body of Jews of Jerusalem, described in the fifth chapter of St. John. It is there related that he spoke of his divine mission as Messiah ; “ Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness of the truth : but I have greater witness than that of John ; for the works that I do, bear witness of me that the Father hath *sent* me.” And no mention is made of any disapprobation expressed on this occasion. But, a short time before this, when he had appeared to the same people to call God his father in a more strict and proper sense than was consistent with the notion of his simple humanity, the sacred historian has recorded that they sought to put him to death. “ Therefore, the Jews sought the more to kill him, not only because he had broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was his *proper* father ; Πάτερα ἰδίον εἶπε τοῦ Θεοῦ ; making himself equal with God.” (6)

“ Some inhabitants of Jerusalem, according to this account, sought to kill him, because he called God his father in such a sense as to make himself equal with God : and, he was afterwards condemned to death by the magistrates

(6) John v. 18.



of Jerusalem, because he made himself the "Son of God." We may judge of the interpretation of the latter phrase by that of the former, one being equivalent to the other; and conclude, with considerable probability, that he was on both occasions understood to call God his father in such a sense as to claim divinity; that, on this account, they at one time sought to kill him; and afterwards, on the same account, and not because he called himself the Messiah, condemned him to the cross.

"In order to explain the conduct of the Sanhedrim by that of the Jewish people, our second appeal may be to a body of Jews collected in one of the courts of the temple of Jerusalem. (7) In the conference of Christ with the Jews on this occasion, after having openly spoken of his divine mission; and having alluded to his divine nature without being understood by his hearers; (8) he at length addresses them in these remarkable words. "Verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was I am." This sentence seems to contain no allusion to the office of the Messiah: but he directly claims in it eternity of existence, an attribute of God alone: and, that the Jewish interpretation was the same with our's appears not by any obscure and ambiguous words let fall on the occasion, but by a speaking action too expressive to be misunderstood. "Then took they up stones to cast at him." Our Saviour asserts his

(7) John viii.

(8) In this conference with the Jews he declares himself a teacher, "the light of the world;" and appeals to his miracles to confirm this and his other claims; he speaks of his Father that sent him, bearing witness of him, and addresses the Jews in these words, "Ye neither know me, nor my Father: if ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also." Here, it will perhaps be said, is a plain allusion to his divine origin; and yet no violence was offered to him by the Jews. The Evangelist has observed it, as if it were a remarkable circumstance, "While Jesus spake these words, no man laid hands on him," viii. 20. and, he soon after even adds, "As he spake these words, many believed on him," v. 30. But he has solved the difficulty, v. 27, "They understood not that he spake to them of the Father," i. e. of God being his Father. They believed him to speak of one, who was strictly and properly his father; but had no conception, on this occasion, that he intimated his Father to be God.

pre-existence, and certain Jews immediately attempt to destroy him. Consistently with this claim, he afterwards on his trial professes to be, not merely the Messiah, according to the Jewish notions of their Messiah, the Son of David, but the Son of God: and the Jewish Sanhedrim, in perfect consistency with the preceding conduct of the people, unanimously pronounce him worthy of death.

“To account for the conduct of the Sanhedrim by comparing it with that of the people, we may appeal, in the third place, to another body of Jews collected in the temple.(9) “And Jesus walked in the temple, in Solomon’s porch: then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him; “If thou be the Messiah, tell us plainly.” Jesus answered them; *I told you*, and ye believed not: the works, that I do in my Father’s name, they bear witness of me: but ye believe not; for ye are not of my sheep. My sheep hear my voice, I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand: my Father, which gave them me, is greater than all, and none is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand. I and my Father are one.”

“Then the Jews again took up stones to stone him. Jesus answered them, Many good works have I shewn you from my Father: for which of these works do ye stone me? The Jews answered him, For a good work we stone thee not, but for blasphemy, and because thou, being a man, makest thyself God.’

“In this narrative, two circumstances claim our notice. When Jesus remarks that he has already declared himself the Messiah, the observation appears to have made no uncommon impression on his hearers; so far from being reckoned blasphemous, it seems to have been heard without exciting more emotion than a common remark: and it is not till he declares himself one with his Father, that they take up stones to stone him. Their words, in this case,

(9) John x. 22

are not less significant than their actions. They do not say, " We stone thee, because thou, being a humble Galilean, makest thyself the Messiah ;" but " we stone thee for blasphemy, and because thou, being a man, makest thyself God." The motive of the Jews on this occasion, is avowed in direct and explicit terms. They attempt to stone him, because, in asserting his own divinity, he was guilty of blasphemy, and in their observations and his answer, we distinctly see the two claims, the combination of which they conceived to form his guilt. The first and principal, according to our Saviour's account, was, that he called himself the Son of God: " Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified and sent into the world, ' thou blasphemest ;' because I said, I am the Son of God ?" The second, and that which fixed the meaning of the other, was, that he professed to be one with God, whom he had called his Father. Both were combined in the affirmation, " I and my Father are one." The people, on this occasion, attempt to stone him for blasphemy ; and he was afterwards condemned by the Sanhedrim for the same crime. The people attempt to stone him, because he, as they alleged, being a man, made himself God, by calling himself the Son of God, and professing to be one with his Father : and the Sanhedrim also condemned him to death, because he declared himself the Son of God. This narrative of the proceedings of the people contains a just exposition of the motives, which afterwards influenced their magistrates, and forms a valuable comment on the history of our Saviour's trial.

" The subsequent conduct of this same body of people is also not unworthy of attention. Our Saviour reproves them for considering him as a blasphemer in declaring himself the Son of God ; when in their own writings princes and rulers are sometimes, on account of their office, called gods : and, applying the argument *a fortiori*, he intimates that the appellation would be given with a more strict propriety to him, who was *sanctified and sent* by the Father. So far in this expostulation, his language was doubtful.

When he intimated, that the appellation would be applied with more propriety to him than to others, he might be supposed either to allude to his divine nature, or to assert only his divine mission; and so far he was suffered by the Jews to proceed without interruption. But, when he adds, "If I do not the works of *my Father*, believe me not: but if I do, then though ye believe not me, yet believe the works, that ye may know and believe, that *the Father is in me, and I in him.*" The Evangelist then relates, that "again they went about to take him?" The strain of this expostulation appeared to them the same with that from which they had just concluded, that he being a man made himself God: and though he knew, that this was their interpretation, he neither on this, nor any other similar occasion, complained of any mistake.

"In order to judge whether the Sanhedrim would probably condemn Jesus to death, for declaring himself the Messiah, or for asserting his divinity, we may make our fourth appeal to the conduct and language of a body of Jews in Galilee, described in the sixth chapter of St. John. Five thousand men, who had witnessed his miracles, actually acknowledged him as "that prophet that should come into the world," and were preparing to invest him with the kingly office; consistently with their notions of the Messiah. The next day, the same persons murmured disapprobation, when he intimated in metaphorical language that he was more than human nature. "The Jews then murmured at him, because he said, I am the bread which came down from heaven." That they understood him on this occasion to allude to his divinity, and pre-existence, appears further from their own observation: "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How then saith he, I came down from heaven?" i. e. We know his father and mother: we know that he was born of human parents: how then can he be of heavenly origin, as he affirms?

"If this case be viewed in connection with the history of our Saviour's trial, we may ask, whether it is probable

that he would be condemned to death by Jews for advancing that claim, which five thousand Jews had admitted; or that, at which they had expressed their displeasure by murmurs? After he had been judged guilty by the Sanhedrim for professing to be the Son of God: had the question been proposed to these five thousand people; had they been asked, what they conceived were the grounds of his condemnation; would they have declared it their opinion, that Jesus was condemned for professing to be that prophet, who should come into the world, or for the higher, and, as they thought, the more extravagant claim of divinity? Their language and conduct have obviated the question: they have virtually given their suffrages; and their opinion must have great weight in deciding ours.

“ It is on one occasion related by St. John, (1) that when Christ was speaking of his Father, the people, who heard him, understood not that he spoke of God: and it may be reasonably supposed, that when he indirectly or obscurely advanced the claim of divinity, his meaning would be sooner discovered by men of learning than by the common people. Let the conduct of the Sanhedrim then be compared with that of a body of scribes and pharisees assembled from every town of Galilee, and Judæa, and Jerusalem itself. (2) Before this assembly of men of education, as well as a great multitude of the common people, he assumed and exercised the power of forgiving sins. Then, certain of the scribes said within themselves, “ Who is this that speaketh blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God only?” When he asserted the power of forgiving sins, on this occasion, it was at least suspected by some of the scribes, that his words amounted to blasphemy, the crime for which he was afterwards condemned by the great national tribunal; which was probably for the most part composed of priests and scribes. The power of forgiving sins, far from being allowed to their expected

(1) Chap. viii. 27.

(2) Luke v. 17.

Messiah, was considered by the scribes as appropriated to God alone: and he was afterwards condemned by the Sanhedrim for claiming a higher nature than they admitted in the Messiah, in declaring himself the Son of God."

Proved then, as I think it is irrefragably, that the personal term "Son of God," was understood in the common language of the Jews, as one of infinitely higher import than the official term Messiah, it only remains to apply this circumstance to the question of the eternal sonship. If the term "*Son of God*," were used with reference to the miraculous conception; then, as it has been shown, that it was understood by the Jews and by the disciples to imply divinity; Dr. Clarke and others on that side must show, in order to explain and justify its use in their sense, that the miraculous conception also implied the divinity of him thus supernaturally produced. This would be absurd. It could scarcely be an evidence of Messiahship as a fulfilment of prophecy; but could not prove what was false, in fact, that that which was born of Mary was divine, or, in other words, that the man was God. Nor was this appellation admitted by Christ when before his accusers with any reference to the production of his human nature. He acknowledges himself to be the Son of God, in the *very sense* applied to the term by the High Priest and others, who challenged his confession. "*Then said they all, Art thou then the Son of God, and he saith unto them, confessing the fact, in their sense, with frankness, "Ye say THAT I am:."*" i. e. I am that ye say. In no conversation with the Jews, when they were offended at this title, as implying divinity, did he ever refer to his miraculous conception, as explicatory of it; not even upon his trial was this urged as any evidence of his right to use it. In both cases the reference in proof was to his divine works; and in both cases, therefore, must he have assumed this title in the sense of strict and proper divinity, and in reference to it. The conclusion of the whole, as applicable to the text in Romans, is, that the term Son of God applied to Christ by his followers, and denied to him by the Jews, being a designation of his

divine nature, when the Apostle affirms, that he was "*declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead;*" he spoke language unintelligible both to Christians, and to the unbelieving Jews, for whose use it is plain the epistle to the Romans was also written, if by placing that term in opposition to what Christ was "*according to the flesh,*" he did not intend to state that he was a divine person, and *as such* "the Son of God."

But though I think it very clear, that neither the disciples of Christ, nor the Jews of their time, considered the title Messiah as necessarily including divinity; and that both used the term Son of God to express a higher conception; yet it makes little difference in the argument as to the eternal sonship when the question lies with those who admit the Messiah to be a divine person, whether the terms be considered as perfectly synonymous, or of different import. The argument in that case only takes another form. We ask, why was Messiah, if he were acknowledged both by the disciples of Jesus, and by the Jews, to be a divine person, called the "Son of God?" Is this epithet a term expressive of humanity or of divinity? To prove that it was given to Messiah, with reference to his miraculous conception, it ought to be proved that the Jews understood that their Messiah was to be born of a virgin. Now that this was at all a prominent opinion, and much less an opinion so prominent and decisive, as the common use of the term "*Son of God*" among them must suppose, if used in the sense of Dr. Clarke, there is not the least evidence; but much contrary to it. For from what source were they to derive the information? They had, it is true, a prophecy, "*A virgin shall conceive and bring forth a Son,*" &c. But though this be clear to us, who live *after* the accomplishment, and who have seen the sense of the prediction fixed by the Spirit of inspiration; it could not be a clear prophecy to the Jews. It would indeed be to them a much more obscure prediction than almost any other so entirely and exclusively relating to Messiah in their scriptures. There is nothing in the con-

text to refer it to him; it is unaccompanied with any of those common notices of him which usually occur in the prophets where he is spoken of; and even to us, had the passage not been quoted in the New Testament, it would not with certainty appear to have an application to any person or event beyond the times of Ahaz. From such a prediction, the exact explication of which, with its context, even Christian divines have found a matter of some difficulty, the Jews living before the fact of Christ's miraculous conception cannot be supposed to have deduced the doctrine, that Messiah would be the Son of David as to the mother, and the Son of God as to the father of his human nature. And as they had no sufficient means of becoming acquainted with the doctrine of the miraculous conception of their Messiah; they give no indications in the evangelic history of its being at all received among them. Jesus, says St. Luke, in giving the genealogy of our Lord, "*was the supposed,*" the reputed son of Joseph. *As such* he was entered in the Jewish genealogies, and was so "*supposed,*" reputed, among the people. "*Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Joseph,*" was his common compellation among his countrymen. Now, if the Jews used Messiah and Son of God, as synonymous terms, and the latter with respect to an expected supernatural conception of the human nature of their Messiah, how is it to be accounted for, that they never argued against the claim of Jesus to be the Messiah, that he wanted this proof of Messiahship, being the Son of Joseph, and not in this sense, the Son of God? Such an objection would have produced the proper answer, a statement of the fact; but the objection was never made, and the correcting information was never given. It would even perhaps be difficult to prove that the disciples themselves knew the fact before the giving of the Spirit, who was to take of the things of Jesus and reveal them. It is probable, and that for some obvious reasons, besides the absence of all allusion to it in the discourses of Jesus, that it was among the things which "*Mary kept in her heart.*" But whatever was the case as to the dis-



ciples, it is plain that the Jews knew it not; and the term **Son of God** as used by them, if even synonymous with **Messiah**, was a designation of divinity exclusively. Thus the argument is gained both ways. If the terms **Messiah** and **Son of God** be of different meaning, it was for the assumption of the latter in the sense of divinity that Jesus was convicted of blasphemy, and it had no reference to his miraculous conception, or to that of **Messiah**, whom the Jews still expected. If the terms are of the same import, and the **Messiah** is allowed to have been in the view of the Jews a divine person; then their unacquaintance with the doctrine of the miraculous conception proves that, with reference to *that*, they could not use the term **Son of God**. **Son of David** indeed appears to have been their common appellation for **Messiah**. So when our Lord asked the scribes, "*What think ye of Messiah, whose Son is he?*" They replied, "*He is the Son of David.*"

From the note on the passage in Romans, Dr. Clarke refers us to his comment on Acts xiii. 33, a passage cited by St. Paul in his sermon in the synagogue at Antioch, from the second Psalm, "*Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee;*" and informs us that the question of the eternal sonship of Christ is there considered at large. All the consideration I find given to it, is the assertion that the term *Son* must express the production of Christ's human nature by the Holy Ghost, "for as to his divine nature, which is allowed to be God, it could neither be created nor *begotten*," with a repetition of the arguments in the note on Luke i. 35. This is an instance of the applications of the Doctor's own canon of interpretation, that what is contrary to reason is contrary to Scripture; and of that prompt method of despatching a doctrine, when it appears to the reader that it *cannot* be true, to which it of course leads. However, as I have not adopted the canon, I demur to the decision; and am far from thinking that the deposition of the second Psalm in favour of the divine sonship, has been silenced by the note upon Acts xiii. 33. I do not indeed contend that the term "*begotten*" there,

(for observe it is not "*the only begotten*,") refers to the eternal filiation of the Christ of God. The evidence of Scripture is too strong in favour of the doctrine, to render it at all necessary to go in search of any but clear interpretations. But notwithstanding this concession, the same conclusion may be reached by another route. If the term "*begotten*" here is not to be applied to the divine nature of Christ, neither is it to be understood of the incarnation, to which Dr. Clarke inclines, though with hesitation. The sense of the passage is fixed, firmly fixed, by the inspired Apostle who cites it,—it is a prediction of the resurrection of Christ. The consideration of the whole passage is all that is necessary to ascertain this, its *authorized sense*. "*And we declare unto you good tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again, as it is also written in the second Psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.*" Here the action predicted is represented as fulfilled by the raising of Christ from the dead; and no reference at all is made to the "*incarnation*;" nor does the argument imply any. The sense of the passage is therefore obvious, "*Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee,*" raised thee up from the dead, in attestation of thy sonship; and it is a passage of exactly similar import to that in the epistle to the Romans, which has been already discussed;—"*And declared to be the Son of God with power, by the resurrection from the dead.*" In both, Christ is declared to be God's Son; the proof in both cases is rested upon that great event, his resurrection from the dead; and if it has been established, that St. Paul, when writing to the Romans, contemplated the supreme divinity of his Lord under the title Son of God; we can be at no loss to determine how he understood it in his quotation from the second Psalm, when he gives the same proof of the claim implied in it in both cases, and when it is evident that the same current of thought was passing through his mind. There is no

authority at all for considering the great object of the resurrection to be to prove the miraculous conception, as the view which Dr. Clarke has adopted necessarily supposes. If it be said, that its object was to prove, by a *further consequence*, that Jesus was the Messiah, the proof of the miraculous conception was but an imperfect proof of it. In this view it proved one circumstance relative to the Messiahship, mentioned in what to a Jew must have been but an equivocal prophecy, and *but one*,—that he was born of a virgin; but it left all the other proofs of that claim untouched. I appeal, however, to every attentive reader of the New Testament, whether the resurrection of Christ is not constantly referred to by the first teachers of Christianity, as the *principal, the all comprehending proof* of Christ's mission and of his claims. In the narrow view which the theory of Dr. Clarke compels him to take of this miracle, it is not that all comprehending proof; and it can be that kind of proof *only* as it declares Christ to be the Son of God in the sense of proper divinity, for then all his other claims follow of course; the proofs of his miraculous birth, his divine mission, his kingly authority, his eternal priesthood, are all comprehended in this great proof of his *divine* sonship. Christ confesses himself to be the Son of God before the Jewish counsel, they find him guilty of blasphemy, and obtain his crucifixion; but the disciples, immediately after the resurrection, take up the disputed title, assert it before the same people, use it in the popular and received sense; and appeal, constantly appeal, to his resurrection, as the ample, the glorious, the eternal evidence, that "*he witnessed a good confession before Pilate,*" and before the elders.

Of this collocation of the term Son, with ideas of full and supreme divinity, the second Psalm, from which the text in question is taken, affords also splendid instances; a circumstance of association not to be accounted for if the principal reason of its imposition were the formation of an inferior nature. To this Son the heathen are given for his

inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession. He destroys his enemies, the associated kings and judges of the earth, with all their accumulated powers, with the ease with which a vessel of earth is broken by a rod of iron; and they are exhorted to give him the kiss of homage, lest they "perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little." Similar associations of sonship and divinity, I find in innumerable passages in the Old and New Testament, for which I cannot account to my own mind, except as the one is constantly understood by the inspired writers to involve the other. "Is God the fountain of life? to the *Son* is given to have life in himself, even as the Father hath life in himself." Is the name of God solemnly presented in the baptismal form? the second divine hypostasis has the name of *Son*; is the Father to receive supreme honours? we are to honour the *Son* as we honour the Father; is the Holy Ghost sent forth? he is sent as the Spirit of the *Son*, and by the *Son*: are all things created? they are created "by the *Son* and for him." The *Son* is appointed "heir of all things." This *Son* is the brightness, (*ακτυρασμα*) the effulgence, the emitted splendour of the Father's glory, certainly not as a human being; and the express, or exact image, (*χαρακτηρ*), of his person, (*της υποστασεως αυτης*), of his substance; another expression not in the least applicable to his human body, which had no visible glory, nor to his human spirit, which however heightened by its union with the Deity, could not be the exact image of his person; for of his eternity, self-existence, omniscience, and omnipresence, it could not be even the faint image. His nature is proved by the Apostle to be superangelic, by the very title *Son* itself; "For to which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my SON," "and I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a SON." But if that title were given him solely because of his having been conceived by the Holy Ghost, it would, as Dr. Macknight observes, instead of proving him superior to angels, fail to prove him superior to Adam; "To the SON, by way of emphasis and distinction, he saith, in most solemn and emphatic

association of a divine idea with the term, "Thy throne, O GOD, is for ever and ever." These and many similar passages, to be found scattered through almost every page of the New Testament, I leave to your own particular examination, and ask, whether, on the supposition that the term Son of God were understood by the Apostles in the low and narrow sense given to it by Dr. Clarke; and whether if they felt as he feels, that the application of it to the divine nature, must necessarily impugn his divinity, and lead to the conclusion, that if he were begotten he could not be eternal, and therefore could not be God: in other words, that they were throwing a serious obstacle in the way of faith in his Deity, they would have expressed themselves in such terms, and have presented the Son to us, emphatically and distinctly *as the Son*, invested with all the high attributes, and achieving all the works of supreme divinity? A slight examination of only another passage, though several might be adduced, shall close the argument from Scripture. It occurs Hebrews v. 8, "*Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered.*" The Apostle, in the preceding verse, speaks of the sufferings of Christ in terms which carry us to the solemn scene of the agony in the garden, "*where he offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears;*" and then subjoins, "*Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things he suffered.*" Now not to argue, that the Apostle uses the term *Son* in consequence of his having previously quoted the second Psalm, ver. 5, "*Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee,*" and cannot be supposed to assign to it a lower sense than it there bears, and which has been shown to be one which comprehends the attributes and prerogatives of divinity; the very stress of the Apostle's argument compels us to conclude that in the use of this term in this passage, he must refer *distinctly* and *exclusively* to the divine nature of Christ. Was it a subject to be introduced with so great an emphasis of holy wonder, that the *Son*, if his human nature alone were contemplated, should become

obedient unto suffering? Christ, considered as a man, was under a natural law to God; and if the will of God demanded that he should submit to death, that will was as imperative upon him, as upon the Apostles who were called to "lay down their lives for the brethren," in attestation of the truth, and in the service of the church. Nor are the sufferings of Christ, considering him as a man, more the subject of admiration than those of his Apostles, who laid down their lives in the same cause, and with as great disinterestedness. The circumstance of the miraculous conception of Christ makes no difference, for, however produced, he was still a man, and as a man, was still under a law to God. The force of the Apostle's remark then consists in this, that being more than a man, being a divine person, and therefore under no natural law or obligation to do or to suffer, he became voluntarily obedient; put himself under law, came to do the will of his God and Father, who had assigned him the work of suffering and death. "*A body hast thou prepared me,*" a body in which to suffer and to die, "*Lo I come to do thy will, O God, thy law is within my heart.*" This is the only consideration which gives us a perfect view of the love of Christ. "Though he were a SON," a divine person, and under no obligations, yet even he, identified with a suffering nature, "learned obedience by the things he suffered." This is the contrast which only can convey any impression of supererogatory charity: the contrast between natural insubordinate dignity, and conventional and covenant obedience; between the right of exemption from suffering, and the benevolence of voluntary submission to it; between what he was as "*Son of God,*" and what he chose to endure as the "*Son of God*" made man. Take the passage in the sense of Dr. Clarke, "Though he were in his 'human nature,' produced by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of his virgin mother, "yet learned he obedience by the things he suffered;" and contrast this exposition, poor, spiritless, without point, or emphasis, with another passage in the writings of St. Paul, and you will not hesitate which

view of it to prefer. "*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.*" The passages are exactly parallel, the phraseology not greatly different; and the sense precisely the same. "Though he were a Son," "in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God," "yet he learned obedience by the things which he suffered," "he became obedient to death, even the death of the cross." The Son, in the passage in the epistle to the Hebrews, is he who, in the epistle to the Philippians, is said to be "in the form of God," and without robbery "equal to God;" in other words, the Son stands there as a designation to be taken in the exclusive sense of positive divinity. (3)

Though it would not in the least alter the argument from Scripture in favour of the divine sonship, to adduce passages in which a human sonship is expressed, because both may be true; yet I observed in the former part of this discussion, that I was not prepared to allow that even Christ is called the Son of God, in Luke i. 35, with sole reference to the human nature, or its miraculous conception. There is certainly there no contemplation of the human nature of Christ in *contradistinction* to the divine; but as in connection with it from the moment of its creation. This union of the two natures, from the instant of the creation of the inferior nature, seems to have constituted the holiness, the peculiar and emphatic sanctity of the "holy thing," who was to be born of the virgin. The only question is, whether the overshadowing of the Holy Ghost, producing a supernatural conception, was the reason why the "holy person" to be born was to be called the Son of God, considered simply as the means of bringing

(3) Consult also Hebrews vii. 28, where the antithesis is equally strong, and the passage utterly inexplicable on Dr. Clarke's principle.

into the world a faultless man, or considered as the means and the essential process of the incarnation of God, in a human body. If the latter be the reason; if the operation of the Holy Ghost creating a human body *in order to effect an incarnation of Deity*, was that which led the angel to say, "Therefore also, that holy thing which shall be born of thee, shall be called the Son of God;" there is in the whole passage so direct a contemplation of divinity as well as humanity, and of both as united in one "holy thing or person," that the passage is by no means so positive a testimony that Christ is called the Son of God with mere reference to the conception of his human nature as Dr. Clarke supposes. There is nothing in this text to show that the term Son of God is given with exclusive reference to the human nature. The holy thing born of Mary, was, as the angel predicted, called the "*Son of God*:" but we have seen he was so called when his miraculous conception is not in the least referred to, and when it was not even known. I have examined with some care, I think, all the passages in the New Testament, where the term Son of God occurs, as applied to Christ, and I find no one in which it is used as the designation of the human nature exclusively, and when the divine nature of Christ is not also implied; no one in which the humanity is considered in *contradistinction* to the higher nature; except it may be the solitary text, Mark xiii. 32; the difficulty of which Dr. Clarke confesses, and the genuineness of the clause "neither the Son," he appears disposed to give up. He therefore will not bring that into the argument. On the contrary, there are passages too numerous to be quoted, where that term is so used, that the mind is at once carried to the immediate contemplation of the acts and attributes of pure and essential Godhead; and utterly loses sight of every thing human.

Such is the evidence of Scripture on this doctrine, not indeed by any means the whole which might be adduced; but it is, I think, sufficient to convince any person who is willing to settle his opinions upon the plain unfrustrated



sense of the sacred word alone, that in how many senses soever it may be pretended the term Son of God is used by the inspired writers; they use it also when applied to Christ in a sense which marks him out as the Son of God as to his higher and divine nature; and if that has been proved, the doctrine of the *eternal sonship of Christ* is established by the authority of inspiration itself. Against this we have Dr. Clarke's principle, that it *cannot* be true, and is not the sense of Scripture; because it is contrary to reason. If Christ be the Son of God as to his super-human nature, he *cannot* be eternal, and therefore not divine; if on the contrary he is God, he *cannot* be the Son of God, except as to his human nature. Now if I thought more of this argument than I really do; if to my mind, as to Dr. Clarke's, the eternal sonship of a divine person, involved a contradiction to my reason; I dare not plead that circumstance against what appears to me so plainly the sense of Scripture. How do I know that my reason in this particular is right reason? that the communication of one single idea, which I may acquire in this life, when my knowledge is more improved, and my faculties better exercised, or which I may not acquire till I enter the life to come, may not correct my present views, alter the whole scope of my present reasoning on these high subjects, and furnish me with some medium of proof, which shall demonstrate what now is to me, not only incomprehensible, but even contradictory? If the question were concerning what I could see, handle, weigh, and measure; if it related to a being, with whose mode of existence, and whose essential and accidental attributes I were fully acquainted in all those particulars of which any thing is affirmed, the case would be considerably altered; but it concerns a Being confessedly the greatest, because the first and the last, the author and end of all things; whose nature is by necessity infinite; of whose perfections ages of contemplation in the nearest and most delightful vision of him will leave an infinite of mystery to be unfolded; and who must, to finite minds, however exalted by station, or matured by duration,

because finite, be still, in respect to their comprehension, THE UNKNOWN. Is it possible then, that as to his nature and modes of being, I can have views so certain, so just, so agreeable to "eternal reason," that I shall be authorized to affirm, that the reason of the case to me, is indeed the reason of the case itself. Where is the man who has not, in many instances, changed his opinions as to things infinitely lower, and within the reach of man? Yet his former opinions appeared to him to possess satisfactory evidence of truth; and the same reason which now impugns and rejects them, formerly regarded them as very undeniable conclusions. Better information, or more patient inquiry, has put him in possession of new or corrected premises; and he reasons better, though he reasons differently, perhaps oppositely. A very laudable kind of self scepticism, grows up often with our years, and corrects the confidence of youth. What is this but a proof of the fallibility of our reason; because it is a proof of the limitedness and incorrectness of our knowledge. We can argue only from what we know; and if we err in knowledge, we must err in reason. Is our reason then the standard by which to try the word of God? I certainly do not mean that we ought not to make use of our reason, that is, our understanding, in interpreting the sense of the divine volume: that would be ridiculous, it is what no one says; but is there not a manifest difference between enquiring for the sense of Scripture by considering the established meaning of its terms, the connection of a proposition with the argument of which it is a part, and the elucidation which doubtful passages may receive from other more obvious parts of the sacred record; and approaching to this word with previous notions assumed as infallible, to whatever subject applied, because to us they are reasonable; to the standard of which we summon the declarations of Scripture, by that to fix their meaning without appeal? What is said by the God of truth must be true; what appears reasonable to me, may or may not be true; and the

position which best becomes our humility, as fallible creatures, is not that Scripture cannot be true if it be contrary to my reason; but that my reason cannot be true if it contradict Scripture. This must be held conclusive, at least by all who believe in the divine authority of the Bible. The only question among such ought surely to be, not what ought to be the sense of Scripture; but what that sense really is; not what we must make it, to make it reasonable; but what it appears when read solely by its own light: and if Dr. Clarke had made the doctrine of the eternal sonship of Christ exclusively the subject of scriptural inquiry, he would not have offended against the only principle which can preserve man in his proper place, an humble learner at the feet of the great teacher Christ: "for if any man receive not the kingdom of heaven as a little child, he shall in no wise enter therein," he will not receive its truths.

But as Dr. Clarke has, in the conclusion of his commentary, contended for a right to make use of human reason in matters of revelation, which to me appears highly dangerous and unwarranted, I shall give his remarks on the subject a larger consideration. The passages to which I refer are the following; and I quote them, that it may appear that I attribute to him, nothing more than he has himself expressed as his deliberate views, in the summing up of his opinions at the end of his learned, and, generally speaking, very useful commentary on the New Testament. *"The doctrine which cannot stand the test of rational investigation, cannot be true. We have gone too far when we have said, such and such doctrines should not be subjected to rational investigation, being doctrines of pure revelation. I know of no such doctrine in the Bible. The doctrines of this book are doctrines of eternal reason, and they are revealed because they are such. Human reason could not have found them out; but when revealed, reason can both apprehend and comprehend them."* "No man either can or should believe a doctrine that contradicts reason; but he may safely credit (in any thing that concerns the nature of

God) *what is above his reason.*" Here are, as you cannot fail to perceive, some very singular positions, and some very obvious contradictions.

To most of these positions I object, generally, because they implicate the pernicious principle, that the meaning of scripture is to be determined by our own views of what is reasonable; that human reason is to be made not only the *instrument* of investigating the meaning of the revelation, but the *judge* of the doctrine; a principle, which makes it a canon of interpretation, that where the letter of scripture indicates a doctrine which appears unreasonable to us, it must be taken in a sense which does appear reasonable. This, I conceive, would authorize the most unnatural interpretations of even Socinian writers; and make the sense of revelation to be what every man may take it to be; thereby destroying the unity of truth, and leaving us without any standard of opinion, except the ever varying one of human reason. (4). The application of such a canon of interpretation is objectionable in almost every case, but more especially in all those parts of the sacred revelation which relate to the manner of the divine existence. This must, from its nature, be a subject of pure revelation; "*for no man hath seen God at any time;*" and though there is in many cases a great difference between what transcends, and what contradicts the reason of man, it is not possible to say, in speculations concerning the Deity, either that the reason which may be contradicted is right, or always when reason is contradicted or when only transcended; for, to one person, there may be

(4) "If we come to examine the rules by which mankind give their assent to many propositions, differing from and contradictory to each other, we cannot think this procedure of the mind to be a very easy, or sure performance. The bounds of truth and falsehood have never yet been settled; one is assured of what another is diffident; evidence in Egypt is but probability at Athens; and, by all experience and history, we find there has been so little exactness or certainty in the conclusions of mankind, that they seem to be the result of inattention, passion, or interest; rather than proceeding on any sound principles, or in any rational method of argumentation for the discovery of truth." *Ellis's Knowledge of Divine Things.*

an evident contradiction, while, to another, only a transcendency. Even Dr. Priestly has observed, "There is manifold reason to conclude, that the divine nature, or essence, besides being simply unknown to us, has properties most essentially different from any thing else. God is, and must ever remain, the incomprehensible." A just position, which, had it been kept in mind by Socinians in their inquiries, would have prevented them from so positively concluding, that there *cannot* be three co-eternal and co-equal personal subsistencies in the unity of one divine essence; and would equally have prevented all who have denied the eternal sonship of our Lord from concluding as positively, that one of those subsistencies cannot bear the name and relation of an eternal son without a contradiction. In both cases, it were surely the highest reason humbly to receive what God hath testified of himself, without attempting to coerce its meaning by the rule and rod of our assumed first and infallible principles. It is true, Dr. Clarke denies, in his note on Luke i. 35, the eternal sonship of Christ, to be the doctrine of revelation; but goes immediately to prove that it is not so, by alleging its absurdity, its contradiction to all just notions of the deity of Christ. If he meant to rest the proof on Scripture, why did he resort to the *argumentum ex absurdo*? If he did not mean to make our reason the judge of the case, why did he not merely adduce passages of holy writ, used in support of the commonly received opinion, and show that the doctrine is not contained in them? His practice, in this instance, shews that I have not mistaken his views in the application of reason to matters of revelation.

Let us, however, attend to Dr. Clarke's argument on this subject. The doctrines of scripture are doctrines of "eternal reason." This is his position; and his inference is, that they are therefore proper subjects of rational investigation; and that human reason is an adequate judge of them, when once revealed. With him we acknowledge that the doctrines of scripture are doctrines of eternal reason. Eternal reason, is truth, and the word of God must in all

its parts be true ; but it is remarkable that Dr. Clarke did not detect himself in a fallacy which vitiates his whole argument. With him human reason and eternal reason, are assumed to be the same ; in other words, that human reason is divine reason ; and therefore infallible. Now it may be the reverse of eternal reason ; or it may be a very faint radiation of eternal reason ; (5) but in no case can it be full and perfect eternal reason, for then would the reason of man be equalled to the reason of God. These principles are of easy application. A revelation from God cannot contain all the truths apprehended by eternal reason. This would be profusion, a hopeless attempt at instruction ; for the mind of man can only receive a very small part of the truths known to the divine mind ; or what is the same thing, of the truths established on the eternal reason of things. All beyond what can be made known in any mode to the mind, is not capable of revelation ; all that is revealed as truth, but of which the reasons, the processes of proof are not given, is apprehended but not comprehended by the mind ; and is no revelation to reason *as such* ; but rather to faith : the human faculty of comparing and determining, not being furnished with so clear a view of the nature and relations of the subjects in question, as to conclude or judge any thing concerning them *by the light of their own evidence*. Certainly, then, it is possible that there may be truths, the evidence of which can only be known to the eternal reason of the divine nature ; and which cannot possibly be the subjects of the reasoning of any inferior mind, and therefore not of human reasoning. I will go farther and say, that there must of necessity be such truths in a revelation ;

(5) "The ratiocinations of men are vastly imperfect. Do we not every day see wise men falling into dangerous errors and mistakes ; and when their arguments come to be examined, are found to proceed on loose and uncertain principles, to use fallacious incoherent ideas, or draw weak and false conclusions. If this be not so, whence comes so much controversy, opposition, and litigation, among the learned of the world, in all parts of knowledge ? So that care must be taken not to admit every thing for reasoning that pretends to be so ; but rather to suspect what is subject to so much abuse, especially when we find it striving against God." *Elli.*

if it be a revelation of God, his mode of existence, and his counsels, which, from their nature, can only be fully known to God himself. The only question which arises out of these premises is, whether the *conclusions* of eternal reason may not be subjects of revelation, whilst the process of their proof remains unknown, either because it transcends our faculties, or that it is purposely hidden, in cases where it might be understood; because it is necessary to put us under a state of discipline, and teach us implicit submission to the *dīcta* of the unerring God.

This, surely, is conceivable, for what is similar occurs among men themselves. The conclusions of Sir Isaac Newton's philosophy have been understood and admitted by thousands, whose minds were utterly incapable of pursuing the processes of calculation and reasoning by which they were reached, and who have never, in fact, become acquainted with them. They have been received upon the authority of a superior mind; and, if he were right, his followers are right, though their reason, properly speaking, has had no share in illuminating them. In like manner, there are truths in the revelation of God, the evidence of which is withheld, but may be received under his authority: and, as the eternal reason of God is absolutely perfect, the doctrines we thus receive are true, though neither in this nor in another world should we be able, for want of evidence, to make them subjects of rational investigation, and ourselves work out the proof. Dr. Clarke cannot mean to assert, that all the truths comprehended by eternal reason, with their evidence, and all the processes of the operation of the divine mind upon such truths, are contained in the Bible, and lie level to our reason, and are within its reach; in other words, that eternal reason and human reason are the same, for then it would follow, that we have no more to learn; "that we are as gods, knowing good and evil." If, then, we must acknowledge that there are truths in the divine revelation, which are but the *conclusions* and *results* of eternal reason; while the rational evidence of them is inscrutable to us, then are there truths which cannot be made the subjects of

human rational investigation in any mode; truths which are to be admitted upon authority; something to be received on the evidence that it is a part of a revelation from God, and not on its own evidence; something, in a word, to be believed, as well as something to be admitted because it is agreeable to reason.

Dr. Clarke, however, says, that if a doctrine will not bear the test of rational investigation, it cannot be true; but there is a previous inquiry, whether we can subject every doctrine to such a test; nor is it an inquiry to be hastily despatched, for the most serious consequences are involved in it.

All the doctrines which churches of every age, and of every description, have crowded into their "creeds," or sung in their "hymns," are to be put in question; the whole is to be brought, not, as one might have expected to hear from such a divine as is Dr. Clarke, to the test of Scripture alone, but *reason* also, the great "commentator" on Scripture itself; or, in his former words, subjected to the "test of rational investigation;" and if any doctrine, whether found in creeds or sung in hymns, will not bear this test, it must be instantly and fearlessly rejected; "*Fiat justitia, ruat cælum.*" Of what kind, then, is the test of rational investigation, by which the doctrines of the universal church are to be determined? I can attach no other meaning to the phrase, than that it is a process by which we inquire the truth and falsehood of any thing by comparing it with what we already know, and what we have already determined to be true. We are led by reason, as *Cicero* has observed, "from things apprehended and understood, to things not apprehended." Now, to the reason and fitness of how many of the doctrines of revelation shall we be conducted by this process? To how many of the truths concerning the divine nature which the sacred record has exhibited to us can any *previous* knowledge we have be thus applied? for previous knowledge it must be, or the investigation is not *rational*. If it be conducted on principles which we have received on the authority



of Scripture, then it is scriptural investigation; we cease then to walk by our own torch, and walk in the light of the Lord. All the doctrines in human creeds are to be put in question; and, as the Scriptures are by this principle excluded, or this boasted process of "rational investigation" means nothing; formularies, which, whatever mistakes or additions they may be charged with, do contain all the great doctrines of revelation, are to be tried by principles previously obtained by the exercise of our reason, or, in other words, subjected to rational investigation. Now, I will not say how much of our previous knowledge may be used as sure *data* in the conducting of this inquiry; whether there is not much in the Bible relative to morals, and duties merely human, of the excellency of which we might not obtain some very satisfactory demonstration in this way; though I think these subjects are but very few, and that the very *data* themselves are furnished by some previous traditional declaration of the will of God; but as to subjects which relate to the divine nature, I cannot conceive of any information existing among men previously to a revelation, or previously to its being admitted, which can furnish a rule of judgment at all certain, much less infallible. For this inquiry to be strictly and severely rational, all the knowledge of God which has been obtained by tradition or previous revelation must be put out of the case, and the whole of what is affirmed of God must be tested solely by some previous known and established truths. But where, then, is the inquirer to begin? To what will he liken God, or to whom compare him? What is the task we thus assign him? To apply finite measures to an infinite being; corporeal ideas to a spiritual essence, or mixed notions of corporeity and spirituality to a being pure and unmixed; a knowledge arising from acquaintance with perishable objects to absolute immortality; and the calculations of time to positive eternity. If an apostle, with all the aids of a plenary inspiration, could not approach that abyss without exclaiming, *O the depth!* If deeply as the radiance of divine light had penetrated it, the profound darkness below was still

sufficient to awe his spirit, and repress the fearful gaze in which he for a moment indulged, I can scarcely think the plummet, the rod, and the measure, which unassisted reason furnishes, an apparatus sufficient to mete out this immeasurable ocean: and it is not indeed further necessary to prove, how utterly false and delusive all rational investigation must be as to the divine nature, when an authority to which Dr. Clarke, with every other Christian, must bow, has declared, that as "No man knoweth the things of a man save the spirit of a man that is in him, so no man knows the things of God but the Spirit of God." If without a revelation by words or signs, no man can penetrate the secrets of even a human mind, to him who would approach the depths of God by his own intelligence, we may justly say, "*Canst thou by searching find out God?*"

Though I have here taken Dr. Clarke's principle of subjecting divine doctrines to rational investigation, according to the strict meaning of that phrase in our common language, yet I shall probably be met by another of his observations, in which the principle before stated has the air of being modified. Though reason, he admits, could not have discovered the doctrines of revelation, yet when they are revealed, reason is able not only "to apprehend but to comprehend them." Postponing any consideration of the *comprehending* power here ascribed to reason, and which indeed is given up in the same page; I may ask what the principle of subjecting doctrines of revelation to "rational investigation" gains by this apparent modification, if indeed it were intended as one? So little, that the sentiments are fatal to each other. For if reason is to proceed only by the light of revelation, then any investigation so conducted is not, as I have already observed, a rational, but a scriptural investigation; and Dr. Clarke has in vain attempted to correct the notions of those who exclude reason as the judge of the doctrines of an acknowledged revelation. If the investigation is to be conducted by an appeal to principles which reason did not furnish, but which have been communicated to the mind by revelation,

Dr. Clarke agrees with his opponents while he strongly condemns them, for then are the obvious *data* of that revelation made the test of those parts of it which are more recondite, and human reason is no judge in the case at all. So contradictory is Dr. Clarke to himself.

But there is still another view of this modification. Dr. Clarke may be understood to mean, that reason when aided by a revelation, is raised into so perfect a condition, that what appears incongruous to it, must of necessity be concluded to be contrary to the revelation itself. This however proceeds either upon that very false assumption, which I have already pointed out, that a revelation from God to man, must not only declare a doctrine, but also discover its congruity with the reason and truth of things; or that reason, when put in possession of the doctrine, is able to complete the process, and to mount up to the discovery of its full evidence. To this notion, however, the evidence of Scripture is in direct opposition. "*No man knoweth the Son, but the Father;*" but a revelation has been made by the Father of the Son; and yet the reason of those who have received that revelation, so far from completing the discovery to the full evolution of the evidence from the truth and nature of things of all that is affirmed in the revelation of the Son, is still so uninstructed, that to this hour it holds good, that "*No man knoweth the Son but the Father.*"(6) Again, if it be true, that as to many high mysteries we "*see as through a glass darkly,*" and not "*face to face,*" with clear and distinct knowledge; something which we now know obscurely shall be hereafter made plain; and this clear discovery is not of the mere subject itself, which is seen, though obscurely, but of its modes and relations, and consequently its absolute correspondence with the truth of things; in other words, the discovery will be that of its rational evidence. If reason had the faculty of improving upon the truth of God,

(6) "The full comprehension of the Godhead, and the mystery of the Trinity, belongs to God alone." Dr. CLARKE *in loc.*

making clear what is doubtful, and rendering luminous what is obscure, the veil which was thrown upon the mysteries of Christianity, at its first revelation, would since have been gradually withdrawn, in consequence of the investigations of learned and pious men ; and we had now been, as to the " deep things of God," much nearer a demonstration than formerly. This, however, is not agreeable to fact. I know of no one doctrine which was formerly allowed to transcend human reason, of which we have received any stronger demonstration in consequence of the application of the most profound reasonings. Divines who have confined themselves to demonstrate doctrines by bringing the collective evidence of the divine word to bear upon them, are those to whom our faith is most indebted ; and we ought to acknowledge our obligations, and those of the Christian world to those theologians also, who have met the objections to Christianity, urged by infidels and others, with so much triumph. But I appeal to every person who has made theology his study, whether the great service such divines have rendered to truth, may not be chiefly comprehended under the following heads. Presenting the question at issue in its true form, and thus detecting the sophistry of objectors—proving their arguments false, on principles held by themselves, and acknowledged by mankind—demonstrating, that in a choice of difficulties the greater number, and those of the most formidable kind, lie against themselves—exhibiting the evidences of the revelation, which on all sides are acknowledged to be proper subjects of rational investigation—and in showing in how perfect a manner Christianity meets the wants and miseries of the human race. On the high and solemn mysteries of our religion the rational evidence of which has been withheld in the revelation, what light has been shed by the most powerful ratiocinations ? Do they, like philosophical truths, gain ground by reasonings abstract or analogic ? What evidence, for instance, has in this way been brought to the doctrine of the Trinity in Unity ? And does it not to this moment remain a doctrine of pure revelation, stand-

ing, I allow, upon the authority of the rational proof, that the record which contains it is authentic, but upon no rational evidence of the doctrine itself? No man of whom I have heard was ever convinced of this, or any of the acknowledged mysteries of Christianity, by an appeal to his reason, even when put under the tuition of the most highly cultivated and powerful reason of others; whilst thousands have been brought to believe them upon that which is indeed their proper and exclusive demonstration, the testimony of God; well judging, with a learned divine, "that no foundation is so immoveable as the word of God; no demonstration so clear as divine authority; no truth so evident as what God affirms; nor is it natural reason or philosophical notions, but faith, which will make us acceptable to him."

But this notion of the ability of human reason to acquire the rational evidence of doctrines which are but nakedly and authoritatively stated in the divine record; (and this is all I can understand by the qualification which Dr. Clarke supposes reason to derive from Scripture to be a judge of divine things,) proceeds in utter disregard of the difference between the office and potentiality of reason in divine and in human things. This is well stated by a writer I have before quoted. (7) "The great difference between the objects of human knowledge and divine is, that in the former there is a spacious field for new acquisitions and improvements; but in divine invisible objects it is far otherwise. The boundary is *fixed*; our inquiries limited to what is revealed; and all further search vain and unlawful. These things are above the discovery of reason; it had no principles from which it could regularly deduce them, by any natural use of its faculties; and without supernatural instruction, could never have attained the least knowledge or probability concerning them. It was not possible for any idea, notice, or apprehension of them to enter the mind, but by the mediation of some external agency: so that all

(7) Ellis's Knowledge of Divine Things.

we do, or can hope to know of them in this world is from revelation." The substance of which just remarks is, that where revelation stops we must stop; and that where there is a revelation of a subject, but none, or an imperfect one, of its modes and relations, though the reason of man is in this way enlightened with a new fact, that circumstance does not in the least empower it to discover, what revelation is still silent upon, its accordance with eternal reason; and what is affirmed of it cannot therefore be the subject of rational investigation.

The allusion made above to *faith*, leads me also to observe that, on Dr. Clarke's principles, it is scarcely conceivable how faith can exist in the mind of any man who has the revelation of God in his hand, in the full Christian sense of that term. We can scarcely be said to believe the existence of sensible objects, we know them; nor in a mathematical demonstration; which is also the object of certain knowledge. Believing has been defined by a great master, (8) "To be the admitting or receiving any proposition to be true, upon arguments or proofs that persuade us to receive it as true, without certain knowledge, that is knowledge derived from the thing itself, that it is so." It is true that the moral evidence of the truth of testimony, is a proper subject of rational investigation; and therefore the foundation of faith." As in the revelation of the Bible, which purports to be from God, "God has made us competent judges," observes a prelate of the English Church, "inasmuch as natural reason informs us what are the proper evidences of a divine revelation. When, upon an impartial examination, we find the evidences to be full and sufficient, our reason pronounces that the revelation ought to be received; and, as a necessary consequence thereof, directs us to give up ourselves to the guidance of it: but here reason stops, not thinking itself at liberty to call in question the wisdom and experience of any part, after it is satisfied that the whole comes from

(8) Locke.

God." But there is a faith of a higher nature, that faith which the apostle Paul calls "the evidence of things not seen;" by which must be meant also, that so far from having the evidence of our reason for these "unseen things," we have no other evidence than faith in the divine testimony concerning them. This may be further illustrated by our Lord's words to Thomas: "*Because thou hast seen me thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.*" From this it follows, that there may be faith on a lower evidence than was vouchsafed to the incredulous disciple for his conviction; and it as clearly follows, that this evidence may be reduced still lower on many subjects, and that without any injury to faith, till the only evidence left is the bare testimony of God, the fact that God hath spoken. This is faith in its highest sense; and it is evident that it rests not in the least on the rational investigation of the doctrine itself, for no rational evidence is afforded concerning it. What then becomes of Dr. Clarke's principle, that "the doctrine which cannot stand the test of rational investigation, cannot be true." There are doctrines to which this process cannot be applied, because no rational evidence of them is given. This is not less true after the revelation of them is made than before; for they are authoritatively, not rationally, stated there. They are objects of faith, not of inquiry, and therefore not of reason; and he who, led by the authority of Dr. Clarke, subjects them to this test, will very probably either soon give up the principle, or the doctrine. On the dark ocean of these mysteries he will either wreck his bark, or must put the helm into a superior hand. On this subject the following remarks of Mr. Locke, in his reply to the Bishop of Worcester, an authority of great weight with the advocates of reason, are worthy attention. On the question which gave rise to the controversy I say nothing.

"Your accusation of my lessening the credibility of these articles of faith, as founded on this, that the article of the immateriality of the soul abates of its credibility, if

it be allowed, that its immateriality (which is the supposed proof from reason and philosophy of its immortality) cannot be demonstrated from natural reason ; which argument of your Lordship bottoms, as I humbly conceive, on this, that divine revelation abates of its credibility in all those articles it proposes, proportionably as human reason fails to support the testimony of God. And all that your Lordship in those passages has said, when examined, will, I suppose, be found to import thus much, viz. ‘ does God propose any thing to mankind to be believed? It is very fit and credible to be believed, if reason can demonstrate it to be true : but if human reason comes short in the case, and cannot make it out, its credibility is thereby lessened ;’ which is in effect to say, *that the veracity of God is not a sure and firm foundation of faith to rely upon, without the concurrent testimony of reason, i. e. with reverence be it spoken, God is not to be believed on his own word, unless what he reveals be in itself credible, and might be believed without him.* Your Lordship says, you do not question whether God can give immortality to a material substance ; but you say it takes off very much from the evidence of immortality, if it depends wholly upon God’s giving that which of its own nature it is not capable of. To which I reply ; any one’s not being able to demonstrate the soul to be immaterial, takes off not very much, nor at all from the evidence of its immortality, if God has revealed that it shall be immortal, because the veracity of God is a demonstration of the truth of what he has revealed, and the want of another demonstration of a proposition that is demonstratively true, takes not off from the evidence of it. For where there is a clear demonstration, there is as much evidence as any truth can have, that is not self-evident. Can any one who admits of divine revelation, think this proposition less credible, the bodies of men after the resurrection shall live for ever, than this, the souls of men shall, after the resurrection, live for ever? For that he must do, if he think either of them is less credible than the other. *If*



*this be so, reason is to be consulted how far God is to be believed, and the credit of the divine testimony must receive its force from the evidence of reason, which is evidently to take away the credibility of divine revelation in all supernatural truths wherein the evidence of reason fails."*

Yet though these are principles which I suppose Dr. Clarke must acknowledge, where other doctrines which he believes are in question, for what rational evidence, except that they are doctrines of a revelation from God, is there of the Trinity, or of the union of two natures in one person in our Lord; both of which he will admit to be agreeable to eternal reason, he nevertheless lays it down, as a general principle too, that when a revelation is made, the reason of man is not only able "to apprehend but to comprehend" its doctrine. This principle, as far as I recollect, was never stated so broadly, in any Socinian writer, not even by Dr. Priestly or Mr. Belsham; though it has been very broadly acted upon both by them and by their followers. Henceforward then we are no more to speak of the incomprehensible God; or the great mystery of godliness; or of any other mystery. We have reached the old Socinian dilemma, what is revealed is not a mystery; what is a mystery is not revealed; and there are, therefore, no mysteries or no revelation. (9) It is not worth while, however, to spend a word in refutation of a principle which must carry every one who seriously admits it into the total disbelief of one half of the Bible because Dr. Clarke, in the same page, has with very happy disregard of consistency, himself given it up. In the divine nature he admits there is something "above reason;" then it follows that reason cannot comprehend it, even when illuminated by revelation; for what is above and beyond our reason, cannot be comprehended by it: and this is acknowledged;—"I cannot comprehend the divine nature, therefore I adore it; if I could comprehend,

(9) See an excellent chapter on mysteries in Dr. O. Gregory's Letters on the Evidences of Revelation.

I could not adore." That passages so contradictory should appear on the same page, shows either great confusion in the views of Dr. Clarke on the proper office of human reason, or great unguardedness in replying to those opponents he had in view when he wrote the observations with which his commentary concludes. It can scarcely be supposed that one of these conflicting paragraphs was intended as a modification of the other, for what obviously contradicts, cannot modify; and the Dr's readers will therefore be left to choose for themselves between the two. How many will choose the worst, I fear we are able from our knowledge of human nature to conclude with too much certainty not to be deeply grieved, that a momentary countenance should be given by Dr. Clarke to principles so dangerous in their operation, so utterly destructive to faith in all that is peculiar and special in the gospel of Jesus Christ. This countenance has been given unguardedly, I doubt not; but it has been given.

Leaving then the proposition, that when the doctrines of eternal reason are revealed, human reason is able both to apprehend and comprehend them, in hope that the wound inflicted upon it by the author himself may appear to some of his readers at least, a fatal one, I proceed to give some consideration to another, which is not peculiar to Dr. Clarke; but which, stated loosely and generally as it is, is not less dangerous. "No man," we are told, "either can, or should believe a doctrine which *contradicts* reason;" and it is of course supposed that there is no doctrine in the Bible, which does in fact contradict reason.

If Dr. Clarke means that there is nothing in revelation, even as it respects the nature of God, which contradicts eternal reason or truth, then this is a mere truism; but if he means, as I suppose, that there are no attributes or modes of existence ascribed to the divine nature in his word, which contradict *human* reason; then I greatly fear, that he will be understood, for it is indeed a natural, and in my view a necessary inference, that whatever doctrine of Scrip-

ture contradicts the reason of *him who reads it*, is not true, and must be rejected. This is applied by different men differently. The Theist holds this principle, and finding in the Bible doctrines which contradict *his* reason, he rejects the volume altogether. The old Socinians espoused the principle, and finding doctrines in the plain and fair construction of Scripture contradictory to their reason, adopted fanciful and gratuitous methods of interpretation, by which to resolve the *sense* of Scripture into some agreement with their own tenets, which of course they concluded to be according to *eternal reason*, because they were dictated by their *own reason*. They preferred to adopt a mode of interpreting Scripture, which took away all certainty from its meaning, and all meaning from its words, to the giving up the principle assumed by Dr. Clarke, that there can be nothing in a revelation from God concerning himself which contradicts the reason of man. The modern Socinians, ashamed of the absurdities of the allegorizing comments of their elder brethren, which were used to get rid of the plain sense of inspiration, have preferred a partial imitation of the example of the Theists. When a passage in the New Testament stubbornly contradicts their reason, which they are sufficiently ready to assume is eternal reason, they expel the chapter or verse from the sacred record; and often, on very insufficient evidence of its want of genuineness. They are not however wholly independent of the forced and figurative methods of the old Socinians, for sufficient remains in their authenticated text contradictory to their reason to render this process necessary. They are still obliged not only to excisions, but to figures and allegories, and in the true Procrustean method, what is too short they stretch, what is too long they lop away.

The error of Dr. Clarke before mentioned,—the assumption that human reason is eternal reason, thus placing a fallible for an infallible standard, has also crept into this proposition. Nor does it at all relieve the case to say that in the argument he supposes human reason to be en-

lightened by divine revelation. Many who reject doctrines, which Dr. Clarke considers essential to the Christian system, profess as well as himself, on these very subjects to have read and studied the sacred record; and with equal diligence, and equal means of coming to the knowledge of its truth; and who is to deny it? Yet to their reason so enlightened, doctrines which to Dr. Clarke's reason involve no *contradiction*, present to their reason gross contradictions. The same remark we may make as to the article in question, the eternal sonship of Christ: Dr. Clarke will not surely pretend that he has brought more learning, more honesty, more pious desire to know the mind of God in his word, great as are his faculties in all these respects, than many of those eminent divines who have investigated this doctrine, and given to the world the results of their inquiries; and yet, O! the fallacy of the standard of this boasted reason even when enlightened, Dr. Clarke is confident that the notion of the eternal sonship contradicts the Deity of Christ; whilst to the reason of these divines, however the doctrine might transcend their capacity, it has presented no such contradiction.

In pursuance of the argument, it may also be a subject of inquiry, whether, though Dr. Clarke supposes the reason which is to judge to be enlightened by the revelation, in point of fact, reason is in all cases so enlightened, as to be qualified for such an arbitration.

Now as to many doctrines, and doctrines too which Dr. Clarke admits, this is not the case. I have before stated that a revelation may contain the *conclusions* of eternal reason; whilst the *media* of proof are utterly hidden. That it may contain facts respecting the nature of God, without any other evidence of their truth than the authority of the revealer; facts respecting his administration of the affairs of the world, the reasons of which lie in the depths of his own bosom, "matters of which he gives no account," and that it does contain them. Now in none of these cases does the revelation enlighten reason, farther than by the naked statement of the doctrine, and the simple annunciations

ation of the fact. It is the highest reason to believe them; but they are believed on authority, not on their *own evidence*, and the authority of their reasonableness. It is stated, for instance, "That the Judge of all the earth will do right," and our reason is enlightened by this important axiom of the divine government; but surely we are not enlightened to discover the rectitude of every act of God in the administration of the world; and what then should we say of the man, who taking up the principle, that to reason, enlightened by Scripture, there can be nothing contrary in its doctrines, should deny the divine commission of Moses, because he commanded the Israelites to slay the children of the Canaanites with their parents; inasmuch as it is contrary to his notions of rectitude to punish the innocent with the guilty. Dr. Clarke, with most divines I suppose, would say that we are not adequate judges in this affair, because the bearing, relations, and results of the divine government have not yet been fully unfolded; which, in other words, is only to admit that our reason is not fully enlightened by revelation, even in all those matters of which that revelation treats; that there are subjects which are not to be tested by our views of what is reasonable; and that, as in this case, where all our notions of justice are violated, human reason may be even contradicted by revelation, and yet, that the doctrine which thus contradicts our reason, may be nevertheless a doctrine of revelation, and agreeable to eternal reason. I have no hesitation in saying, that the doctrines of the Trinity in Unity; of the union of two natures in one personal Christ; of the resurrection of the same body, not only transcend, but contradict human reason, though all are admitted by Dr. Clarke. For what is the meaning of this formidable term, brandished with so much defiance by the enemies of revelation, and under which so many Christian divines have cowered; and to escape whose apprehended edge they have too often come to disgraceful and compromising terms with the enemy? The only meaning it can have, is contrariety to our previous knowledge, to those inferences with which we

have been furnished by the use of our rational faculties, and which we conclude to be true; a conclusion which however involves the following uncertainties in a great number of cases,—whether our conclusions are in fact true,—whether they are universally true,—whether they are at all applicable to the case,—or in how many respects they are applicable. But if this previous knowledge of ours be assumed as true, I question not but it will meet with frequent and full contradiction in the sacred record; for that is contradictory to our reason, which when proposed to us we pronounce false and impossible. Let then the doctrines of the Trinity; the compound nature of Christ; and the resurrection of the same body, be formed into abstract propositions, and proposed to us, not under authority and as doctrines of revelation; let it be asked; can three persons exist in one undivided essence, and one person in two natures of a different essence; and the reason of probably every human mind, not excepting the reason of Dr. Clarke, would meet them with an instant negation. But what does revealed truth suffer from this: plainly nothing more than true philosophy suffers from it. Let the *Copernican* doctrine of the mobility of the earth, and the fixedness of the sun, be also thrown into abstract propositions. Let a man unacquainted with philosophy be asked, whether a body which he daily sees ascend from one side of the earth, make a circuit in the air, and sink down on the other side, remains stationary the whole time; and it contradicts his reason, and he instantly denies it. Let him again be asked, whether there can be so great a contradiction between his reason and his senses, that his reason will ever affirm to the conviction of his mind, what the experience of his sight has daily for many years determined him to deny; and he would not be persuaded that his Maker had so constructed him, that his reason should in any case contradict the daily evidence of his senses. And yet let this man have the Copernican scheme unfolded to him on its most easy and popular evidences, and he will probably become a convert, and acknowledge that what before con-

tradicted his eyes and his reason too, must be unquestionably true. The truth is, that what transcends our reason may be also contradictory of it, that is, contrary to all that previous knowledge by which its operations are conducted, and in many cases is so. But this certainly proves nothing against the truth of things; it proves only that our reason is not always sufficiently enlightened to come to certain determinations, that its *data* are defective, and that if in such cases men will come to a judgment, they may contradict the truth, and be contradicted by it; yet the truth must remain the same; and no exceptions can be fairly taken against the Trinity; the union of two natures in Christ; the mysteries of Providence; the resurrection of the same body; nor even of the eternal sonship of Christ, if that also should involve a contradiction to reason, a question to be hereafter examined. If human reason were eternal reason, they could not contradict it; but who shall prove that?

I am aware that it may be said in reply, that the instances I have given do themselves prove that reason may be so improved by instruction, as that the doctrines which appear contradictory at one time, shall cease to be so at another, when it is better instructed. Let this be granted, my position holds good, that human reason may be contradicted by truth, and therefore the simple circumstance of a doctrine being agreeable to or contradictory of reason, is no test of its truth. And if it be meant that human reason is to be schooled, and instructed, and elevated to some given standard of attainment before it can be qualified to become a judge in matters of revelation, we gain nothing as to the certainty of its decisions, unless Dr. Clarke or some other advocate of the same system, will tell us how long it is to be thus schooled and kept under tuition, before its judging faculty can be matured; unless we are informed how much human knowledge must be attained, before a man shall be allowed to act on the authority of his own reason, in interpreting Scripture, and deem it infallible. Here the world is left in the dark, and as no

such regulations are agreed upon, one of two consequences will follow—the modest will spend life at school, and never presume to judge; the bold will break away from it before their education is completed, and dogmatize in premature luxuriance. But what are the unlettered and ignorant to do? Either it must be allowed that every man's reason, however unschooled, is a standard of revealed doctrine; or we must come to the shortest and safest way, both for the learned and unlearned—to search only for the sense of the sacred volume as determined by itself, in utter disregard of a standard which can never be adjusted. Dr. Clarke's allusion to transubstantiation, will however lead me to some remarks, which will further show, that though a doctrine may contradict the reason of man, it is not on that account *alone* to be reputed unworthy of belief.

The Doctor thinks that he has put those who differ from his views of the office of human reason in deciding on Scripture doctrine between the horns of a dilemma by asserting, that unless we are allowed to subject the doctrines of Scripture to rational investigation, and to reject what is contradictory to our reason, we must admit the absurdities of transubstantiation. It will be necessary, therefore, for the full understanding of the case, to give to the term reason still greater precision of meaning. It does not mean, as used by the Dr. the faculty or the operation of judging and arguing. When it is said that any proposition contradicts our reason, it can only be meant therefore, either that it contradicts that previous and supposed certain information respecting the subject of it, which the operation of reasoning has furnished us with; or that it contradicts truths we have obtained by the exercise of reason respecting other subjects, and of which we have such evidence, that they and the proposition questioned cannot both be true; that there is not only a contradiction to our reason involved in it, but a contradiction to the truth of things themselves. All reasoning is founded upon a comparison of two or more things together, so as to ascertain an agreement or a disagreement, and to affirm or deny something

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respecting them. It may be compact or extended, as what is predicated of each is at once understood, or requires the introduction of intermediate ideas; but in all cases it is essential to good reasoning, that we should have determinate ideas of the things themselves which are compared, in the respects in which a comparison is instituted, or we can never ascertain their relation to each other, or to any intermediate idea which may have a common relation to both. Between what I know and what I know not there can be no comparison; between what I know and what I imperfectly know there can be no certain or complete comparison, and no determinate judgment.

Let me then suppose it affirmed of a person whom I have never seen, that he has lost the faculty of sight. This, if credibly stated, and with no apparent intention to deceive me, I at once assent to, for I know so much of the human eye as to be certain that it is liable to accidents and diseases fatal to its faculty of seeing. The comparison here is between subjects of which I have an adequate knowledge. But let me suppose it afterwards reported, that the same person, after having lost the use of his eyes, had acquired so delicate a sense of touch, as, by that sense, to distinguish colours with great accuracy. (1) There are few persons, I believe, who would not treat such a report with ridicule, and pronounce it impossible, and contrary to reason; that is, contrary to all those facts and deductions which have been generally admitted among men. Had I never heard of such an occurrence, attended with evidence sufficient to convince very incredulous men, who had attempted to ascertain the fact, I should probably join in the same issue. And yet, imperfectly as I am acquainted with the nature of sensation, it would be somewhat bold in me peremptorily to deny, that the touch may not become in any circumstances so exquisite, as to distinguish that different arrangement of the particles composing the surfaces of bodies, which pro-

(1) There are apparently well established facts of this nature on record. The most recent is the case of a young lady in Liverpool, lately published by a physician of that town.

places those various reflections of the rays of light on which colours depend; and what would be contradictory to my reason might not be contradictory to fact, or to the truth of things. My error may lie in considering certain truths to be universal which are not so, or in considering them as certain tests of a subject to which they do not, or, but partially, apply. If I fearlessly, therefore, apply my rule of judging to a subject of which I have only an imperfect acquaintance, my reason may prove a very erring guide. The point I would press is, that in judging of things which are but imperfectly known; in comparing what we know little of, with what we know, so as to affirm or deny any thing concerning them, our reason, or what is the same thing, our present knowledge, may be contradicted, and yet there may be no contradiction of the truth of things itself. Such are all the comparisons between what we know from the deductions of human reason and the observation of mankind, and the nature and attributes of the ever-blessed and infinite God. The comparison is between what is known, and what is, except in very partial and dim revelation, unknown; between the creature and the Creator; between man and God. Is it possible that such a process can be attended with any certainty? Is it not even certain that it must induce infinite mistakes; and who, that gives these very evident truths the least consideration, can admit the proposition laid down by Dr. Clarke—"No man either can or should believe a doctrine which contradicts reason;" no, not, as the sense of the paragraph fixes it, when that doctrine relates to the nature of God himself. I shall confirm the contrary view I have taken by a quotation from another eminent author. "In other sciences, such as geometry, &c. their foundation, or knowledge of what relation things bear to each other, is by their agreement with some third being or proposition, to which their relation is mutual and equal; but here there is no medium whereunto we can compare the divine nature; and to imagine reason could wade through the vast abyss to unknown regions, and proceed with certainty to the apprehension of it,

is no more than enthusiasm and chimera: a power which God and nature have denied to it. There are limits given to every created being, and bounds set that it cannot pass, beyond which all things are dark and impenetrable. This is the condition of man. He has faculties to receive what God vouchsafes to reveal of himself: this is the limit of human understanding, *it can add nothing thereto*. To receive larger emanations is the privilege of the blessed; to know all of himself the incommunicable prerogative of God."

But in cases of comparing things where both are known, so far known that all men in all ages, and under all circumstances, are agreed respecting their nature and qualities, from constant and universal experience and observation; it would destroy the certainty of all human knowledge to apply the same observations. The question of transubstantiation is therefore wholly distinct from doctrines relative to the divine nature. It concerns not the divine nature of Christ, but his human body, which was truly a body like our own; and we have surely sufficient means of judging, from experience, whether it be a quality of the human body to be in two places at the same time, and that also invisibly, under the forms of bread and wine; whether it can be divided into innumerable pieces, and yet be whole. "The question," says Mr. Fletcher, in his answer to Dr. Priestly, "between the popes and us, with respect to transubstantiation, is quite within our reach, since it is only whether bread be flesh and bones; whether wine be human blood; whether the same identical body can be wholly in heaven, and in a million of places on earth at the same time; and whether a thin round wafer, an inch in diameter, is the real person of a man six feet high: here we only decide about things known to us from the cradle; and, concerning which, our experience and our five senses help us to form a right judgment, agreeable to the tenor of the Scriptures: therefore, considering that the two cases are diametrically contrary, and differ as much as the depths of the divine nature differ from a piece of bread, as

much as the most incomprehensible thing in heaven, differs from the things we know best upon earth, we are bold to say, when the learned Doctor involves the Protestant worshippers of the Trinity, and the Popish worshippers of a bit of bread, in the same charge of absurd idolatry, he betrays as great a degree of unphilosophical prejudice, and illogical reasoning, as ever a learned and wise man was driven to, in the height of a disputation for a favourite error." (2)

It is not however to be concluded, that, though the doctrine of transubstantiation contradicts our reason, and that of all mankind, that we are left to resort at all to this argument to prove that it is not a doctrine of Scripture. If the question of the eternal sonship of Christ, the Trinity, or any other respecting the divine nature, presented to our inquiries subjects which we had equal means of knowing, as whether a human body can be in heaven and earth at the same time; and if, on the other hand, transubstantiation were affirmed of a subject as little known to us as the divine nature, and as plainly expressed, or as necessarily implied, in many passages of Scripture as the doctrines just mentioned, the cases would be parallel, and we should equally disclaim the judgment of reason in both cases; but if even we were to admit the necessity of an appeal to reason in the case of transubstantiation, as it in reality stands, we should neither give up the principles I have been endeavouring to establish, nor in the least sanction that which Dr. Clarke has assumed and attempted to defend; for the question would not be, are passages of Scripture containing declarations respecting a being who is incomprehensible to us, to be turned out of their plain and obvious meaning, because my reason determines against the doctrines they teach: but, whether in a case where the question lies, if we admit a question at all, chiefly in the literal or figurative meaning of terms; the knowledge which God himself has put within our reach as to the essential properties of things

(2) Fletcher's Works, vol. ix. p. 44.

of his creation, and which even a miracle cannot change without destroying the substance of which they are the essential properties, is to be applied to fix their meaning. Such an application of our reason to such a subject, and in a mere question of figurative or literal interpretation, is perfectly within the scope of my own views; but even that is not at all necessary. The case does not need it. Even the papists cannot carry their literal meaning throughout, and are obliged to give up this mode of interpretation, by considering the cup as a metonymy for the wine; and the whole doctrine is swept away, by the declarations that Christ was about to leave his disciples; that his coming to judgment is his coming again the "second time," and, that "the heavens are to receive him until the time of the restitution of all things." When we have decisions so clear in Scripture on this subject, there is not the least necessity for an appeal to reason; were that necessary, the case would not be parallel to those which respect any doctrine of the divine nature.

I have before remarked, that the great error from which the rest of the false principles laid down in that part of Dr. C.'s Commentary on which I have animadverted are derived, is the assuming that human reason and eternal reason are the same. This has been sufficiently exposed; but it may be allowed, that the notion is not altogether without foundation; and this, indeed, constitutes its danger. It requires great art, to present a proposition of unmingled error in the garb of truth. The most mischievous positions in theology, are those which have some great and acknowledged truth for their basis; but which carry it to an unwarranted extent, or give it wholly a wrong direction. Too many persons receive the whole argument, for the sake of the truth it contains, not staying to consider with how much error it may be mixed, or what false conclusions are hung upon it. To apply these observations to the case before us, it cannot be doubted, incautiously and erroneously as the principle has been applied, that human reason, when illuminated by revelation, is raised into a

very interesting correspondence with eternal reason: the mind of God is imparted to man, and the mind of man is to a certain extent elevated in its thinkings to the wisdom of God. I am not an advocate for urging the extremes of the case only, and placing the reason of man unnecessarily in opposition to the decisions of his Maker. Truth, in the revelation of Scripture, is not always stated on mere authority; there is often a condescension to us as rational creatures; and we are permitted to rise a few steps towards that state, where the reason of things will be more largely unfolded to our enquiring faculties. The tree of knowledge is not wholly forbidden to us; for, though its topmost branches are under interdict, there are boughs which bend to our reach beneath the weight of wholesome and exhilarating fruit. The great Author of revelation has accompanied some of the doctrines of his word with rational evidence; and has appealed to our reason, not, indeed, to give us the option of choosing or rejecting them; he has, in *no instance*, made reason a judge with the right of laying down the law of the case; but the appeal is made for our deeper conviction, and to render us the more inexcusable, if we reject the doctrines thus laid down on the joint authority of their Author and their own evidence. He declares his power and majesty, and refers to the magnificence of universal nature; he directs us for the proof of several of his moral perfections to his works of providence and judgment; various duties are enjoined upon us, in terms which indicate, that principles we have acknowledged bind us to their observance. "If I be a master, where is my fear? if I be a father, where is mine honour?" "If ye who are earthly know how to give good things unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give good things to them that ask him." Some rational evidence is afforded of the atonement, though not by any means all the reasons on which that most stupendous of all the acts of God's government reposes. It was a scheme of admirable wisdom, to reconcile opposite attributes rights and claims in mercy to the penitent guilty; it at once declared the love and

justice of the Sovereign Lord of man : and the scheme is commended by two most important considerations, which lie level to every man's understanding, that it is at once the strongest expression of the love of God, and affords the firmest hope to guilty man : all these ideas we find in the New Testament. Other doctrines might be adduced, in which some rays of rational evidence beam forth from the depths of those mysteries in which they are still embosomed ; and I will grant, that it is one of our most delightful employments to collect these rays, and, with them, at once to illuminate, adorn, and defend our systems ; for this "*glory is a defence,*" though not their only or chief one. It may be granted, too, that the pleasure arising from this discovery of the rational evidence of the truths of our holy religion, is a powerful motive to such investigations. There is more virtue in faith ; but more pleasure in knowledge. There is, in this, a rising from the child to the man ; an approximation to the illuminations of a future state ; and, probably, the minds of the pious are thus previously disciplined for the more vigorous efforts of the intellect in the full vision of God. All this I most readily allow ; to deny it, would be to surround our religion with an exclusive aspect of stern command and authority, and deprive it of its traits of affecting condescension.

But from all these admissions, the principles laid down by Dr. Clarke derive not the slightest support. It is very probable that the satisfaction enquiring men have felt, when these discoveries have been made ; the clearness and conviction brought to their reason by them ; may have led to the erroneous idea, that reason itself is an adequate judge of such doctrines ; and from having decided so much to their own edification on these points, and with so much consistency with the truth of God, they have had confidence enough in their reason to approach unexplained mysteries with it, in hope of similar success ; but they have utterly overlooked the great facts of the case,—it was not their reason that made the discovery of the rational evidence of any of the lower doctrines we have mentioned ; but God who was

pleased to accompany them with some discovery of their reasonableness: human reason was but the receptive, not the diacursive faculty; and the principles of our former knowledge appealed to by the word of God, principles which before were without any authoritative application to such subjects, became from that moment fixed in an appropriate application to them by the authority of God himself. I may very aptly adduce for an illustration the words of Christ I have already cited, "*If ye who are earthly know how to give good gifts,*" &c. No process of human reasoning could have inferred from the tenderness of earthly parents, the superior compassions of our heavenly Father towards us. At every stage of such a process we should have been met by the chilling considerations of the immense difference in these relations; and the majesty of the sovereign, and the guilt of rebels, would have presented themselves in company with the relations of father and children. The comparison is now one on which we may erect our hope with confidence; because it is authorized, and the reason of the case is determined by the revelation of God: and this applies equally to every instance in which our understandings are not only enriched with doctrines, but our judgment instructed by the reasons with which God has been pleased to accompany them. So far then are these interesting condescensions to the reason of man in the revelation of God, from supporting the principle that every doctrine which will not bear the test of rational examination ought to be rejected, that nothing lies more strongly against it. So far from this circumstance giving any qualification to reason to judge of doctrines of which no rational evidence is afforded in revelation; that even as to those doctrines which have some degree of accompanying rational evidence, human reason cannot add to the evidence. It may place it in different views, present it in various arrangements; but it owes all its light to the revelation, and cannot go beyond it. With even the clue in its hand it extricates itself no farther from the labyrinth, than it is led by the hand of inspiration. Take for



instance the doctrine of atonement. Some illustrations, as I have observed, of this great display of the wisdom of God are found in the sacred record; but all that has been written on the subject in the way of rational defence, from the commencement of Christianity until now, (and it has employed the most able pens,) has been no more than an amplification of the doctrine briefly but fully stated in Scripture, that it is an efficient scheme for uniting the rights and character of the moral Governor of the world with a merciful regard to his guilty creatures and subjects, with some other collateral representations. What more than this has been said, has been felt, both by its author and his readers, as conjecture and theory, which has had no authority, because it has had no demonstration. If this then be the fact as to doctrines whose reasons are partly revealed, how can reason be the judge of those which are stated on naked authority—all here is darkness, which if the sun has not dispersed, the light of the glow-worm shall approach it in vain. Where eternal reason has not beamed, human reason cannot be enlightened.

The conclusion of these observations on the office of reason in religion may be thus summed up,—the office of reason is to judge of the evidences of the record professing to be a revelation from God; when we are satisfied of the divine authority of Scripture, our understanding is to be employed humbly, and with dependance upon God, in ascertaining its sense; and whatever doctrine is there stated, or necessarily implied by the harmony of its different parts, is to be admitted, believed, and held fast, whether it corroborate or contradict the notions which our previous or collateral reasonings have led us to adopt.

I know that there is nothing here so dazzling as in the principles on which I have animadverted; it is more flattering to the human mind to be accounted a judge, than to be reduced to the rank of a scholar; to be placed in a condition to summon divine wisdom to its bar, and oblige it to give account of the reasons of its decisions, than to receive them upon authority; but this is the safe, because

the humble path; and I greatly mistake if it be not also the true way to high illumination in the things of God. "*The meek he will teach in his way.*" It is to the patient prayerful study of divine truth, by its own light, that its harmonies, and connections, and beauties most freely reveal themselves, as the bud discloses to the solar light the graces it refuses to the hand of violence.

I am not unaware that the learned commentator on whom I have so freely remarked will, at least partially, demur to the view I have given of the principles he has laid down in the conclusion of his valuable work; I have drawn them out to a length to which he probably did not mean them to extend. This I am anxious to believe; but my business is with what he has said, and not with what he might intend; for it is by what he has said that his opinions will influence and direct others in their religious inquiries. The principles have been taken in their true logical sense, and in the meaning of the terms in which they are expressed, as those terms are and must be understood in the conventional language of mankind. There are great errors, in my view, in the principles themselves after every explanation which can accord with the meaning of language has been given; but there are still greater arising out of the loose and even contradictory manner in which they are expressed. If followed out as they stand in the commentary, they would inevitably lead to the greatest errors; and if by some subtlety Dr. Clarke can himself accommodate them to correct views on religious subjects, he ought certainly to have remembered, that his readers have not generally that adroitness. If he can poise himself in walking the bridge he has thrown over the gulphs of error, a bridge narrowed to greater sharpness than that which Mahomet is said to have laid for the transit of the faithful from earth to heaven, he would have done well to consider how many, less experienced than himself, would also venture upon it, and how many may probably be plunged into a gulph of too hopeless a depth to admit return. This is a serious con-

sideration, which he has too much regard for the truths he holds sacred, and too much love for the souls of men, not to be impressed with. He has authority, but that imposes the obligation of severe caution upon the writer who possesses it; and I do hope, though what I can say on the subject cannot be supposed to have great weight with him, that when he reflects upon the number of his readers, and the extent of influence which his commentary possesses; that the opinions of so many of our young people will be formed upon it, and that it is in the nature of man to overlook the good principles in such a work, and to fix chiefly on those which are exceptionable; and especially that the turn of thinking among the young men who are introduced into the ministry, in that body of which he is so distinguished an ornament, will probably be greatly determined by their constant recourse to his biblical labours; that he will feel greatly anxious to remove from a work which will carry down his name to posterity with honour, any principle which, however innocently held by himself, can by probable construction lead to Arian and Socinian errors, and smooth the path

“ ——— *To that Serbonian bog  
Where armies whole have sunk.*”

This remark I apply chiefly to his concluding observations on the subject of reason; a page which, if not entirely cancelled, can only be rendered harmless by being partially expunged. Surely it must be one of the noblest objects of the ambition of the author of a work of so much authority and influence, that, it should not contain an injurious principle, not even a line—

“ Which dying, he would wish to blot.”

Before I conclude a letter, which has lengthened under my hands much beyond my first intention, I shall introduce a few remarks on the arguments from *reason*, which Dr. Clarke has turned against the doctrine of the eternal sonship of our

Lord. From what I have already said, you will perceive that I cannot attach great importance to this part of the discussion. If the principles laid down in the preceding pages be correct, it is of small consideration whether the doctrine in question be to me reasonable or not, provided I find it in the sense of Scripture; and I hold it to be a proper homage to such principles to say, that the truth itself is not to be prejudiced by the reasonings of men. The objections of Dr. Clarke on this subject are, however, by no means inexpugnable, and that they may be before you I quote them below.(3)

To these objections, which to me appear extremely futile, as founded upon mere human analogies, and in which there is substantially nothing beyond a comparison between *man* and *man*, though the comparison is ostensibly what indeed it ought in fairness to have been in reality, between man and God; the following quotation from a note by the Editor of Doddridge's Lectures, printed in 1804, appears an ample answer.

“Persons of opposite sentiments in other respects have objected to the terms *eternal generation*, and *begotten*, when applied to a person properly divine, as implying *derivation* and *inferiority*; and censures have been liberally (or rather illiberally) cast on those who hold the sentiment, as if

(3) “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*, *preceding 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. If Christ be the Son of God as to his *divine* nature, then the *Father* is of necessity *prior*, consequently *superior* to him. Again, if this *divine nature* were begotten of the *Father*, then it must be in *time*; i. e. there was a period in which it *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 he was *begotten* from all eternity, is in my opinion absurd, and the phrase *eternal Son* is a positive contradiction. *Eternity* is that which has 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 these two terms *Son* and *eternity* is absolutely impossible, as they imply essentially different, and *opposite* ideas.” Note on Luke i. 35.

either destitute of common sense, or disposed to digest contradictions. But may we not suppose, without any forfeiture of candour, that such a censure *may possibly* be too precipitate, by assuming that they fully comprehended the sentiment expressed by such terms: The following hints, disclaiming the tone of a dictator, are submitted to consideration :—

“ 1. The terms *generation* and *begetting* do not include any *voluntary* act *ad extra* ; for if so, they who use them would have no cause of difference with Arians ; but rather denote a *necessary* act *ad intra*. They hold that as the divine existence, life and activity are independent on will ; so is personality.

“ 2. Another consideration of great moment in this controversy, but often very much out of sight, is the strict *coexistence of Persons*. For want of due attention to the nature of the subject, the mind is deceived by the sound of words ; for no sooner is it said, that the Son is “ the only begotten of the Father,” than we form, if unguarded, the idea of *priority* in the Father, and *posteriority* in the Son. But even among men, notwithstanding the infinite disparity between the first cause and a human being, between the *voluntary acts* of a creature and a necessary property of God, it would be difficult if not impossible to form an idea of Fatherhood and Sonship, but as *correlative* and *co-existent*. One may indeed exist as a *man* before his son, but not as *the father* of such a son. In the order of existence, as conceived by a Trinitarian, the notion of *essence* is prior to that of personality, as it is prior to that of attributes ; but as to *personal relations*, or positive modes of subsistence, there is no more reason to suppose priority, than there is in saying that goodness in God is prior to wisdom, and power posterior to both.

“ 3. Through carnal associations we find a difficulty in preserving the subject itself, and that to which it bears a partial analogy sufficiently distinct. Thus, among men, a father has a *personal* subsistence *prior* to his fatherhood ; but not so in the present subject. In this doctrine no *per-*

*sonal* subsistence is to be conceived prior to fatherhood and sonship; nay, these relations are supposed to *constitute* the personalities. For if there be no Son there can be no *personal* Father, and *vice versa*. The term "Father," is not always used in a *personal* sense, but often answers to the Creator, because we are his offspring; or Governor, because we are his family.

" 4. The proper use of illustrations by comparison is not to *prove* the doctrine, but to shew from analogy the *possibility* of what is apprehended to be the collected meaning of revelation on the subject. Suppose then the infinite mind, as to essence, to be necessarily active, or *life* itself; is there any thing unreasonable in the thought of a *terminus a quo*, and a *terminus ad quem* relative to this essential energy and life antecedent to will? Is it impossible that these *termini* should contribute relative properties, which may not improperly be called subsistences or persons? Is it not possible that this infinite and infinitely active *life*, should be denominated, according to the collective sense of revelation, as a relative property *a-quo*, the *Father*; and the *same life*, as a relative property *ad quem*, the *Son*; while the essential energy of this life terminating *ad quem* is eternal generation, or begetting? Again, is there any thing absurd in the supposition that this infinitely active life proceeding *in medio a duobus terminis* should constitute another distinctive relative property called *Spirit*?

" 5. In all works *ad extra*, the effects of power and will, no one person acts exclusively of the other; therefore no work *ad extra*, whether Creation, Redemption, or any other whatever, can be the *distinguishing cause* of these relative properties. Is it not then a possible and a rational notion and intelligible language, when it is said, that Father, Son, and Spirit, (into the name of whom Christians were to be baptized) are these positive, real, or personal modes of subsistence in God, or one infinitely active life? and, that the Son of God, by eternal generation, assumed our nature into personal union with himself, thus constituting a glorious

Mediator between sinners and the divine nature, which, though in itself Love, is consuming fire to offenders.

“ The sentiment of eternal generation, and that which represents Father, Son, and Spirit, as terms of distinctive personal relations, seems much less exceptionable to many who have long considered both sides, than that which holds these terms as expressive of works or offices *ad extra*, while yet a Trinity of Persons is acknowledged. For it may be urged, either these divine persons have essential distinctive characters, or they have not; if not, with what propriety can they be called *three persons*? The idea of three distinct *beings* is disclaimed, and yet here are supposed *three persons* without any *difference* of distinctive characters; that is, a diversity without any assignable ground of difference. But if they have essential distinctive characters, what are they if not those held by consistent Athanasians, in some respects corresponding with the terms *begetting*, *begotten*, and *proceeding*, as before explained? If it be said, the works of redemption; it may be replied, these are works *ad extra*, and therefore belong to *each person*. Is any divine perfection, as love, goodness, mercy, wisdom, power, or the like, a sufficient ground of personal distinction? Surely that person is not divine that possesses not each alike, and in an infinite degree.”

The sum of this argument, as to the paternity of the first person of the Trinity and the eternal sonship of the second, divested of its scholastic form, may be thus placed against the objections of Dr. Clarke.

“ Son,” says Dr. C. “ implies a father, and father implies, *in reference to son*, precedency in time.” This is, substantially, all that is said in refutation of the doctrine; for the rest is this argument put only in different forms. Now, in “ *reference to Son*,” no priority of the Father is supposed in the doctrine of the divine sonship of Christ: for no father, *as father*, is prior to his son; and no son, *as son*, is posterior to his father; no one is a father who has not a son.

Nor is it true as to the divine nature, that if Christ be the begotten of the Father, he must have been produced in "time," and consequently cannot be eternal; for this mode of existence implies no *voluntary act*, which is merely assumed by Dr. Clarke. It neither necessarily implies it, nor is the term used by divines in this sense. If the whole existence of God be a necessary existence, then all its essential modes and relations are necessarily existent too, and therefore eternal; and if the correlatives, Father and Son, are used to express essential, necessarily existent, and, consequently, eternal relations; in this there is nothing contradictory. Derivation may be an essential attribute, and is often so in fact. It is an essential property of the sun to give light; and the beaming of the light is therefore co-existent with the sun, because an essential property. Christ is therefore called, in the Nicene creed, "*light of light*," in perfect accordance with inspired Scripture, where his designation is "the streaming forth, the refulgence of his Father's glory;" and is therefore coeval with him. Again, among *men* the relation of *son*, though it cannot suppose the priority of a father, as a father, does yet suppose his priority as a *man*, this arises out of circumstances utterly incapable of application to God, though Dr. Clarke has confounded them. Before a man can be capable of the relation of father, he must himself be born and come to maturity; but where is the comparison between such a being and him who is "from everlasting to everlasting *God*;" who has ever existed in the potentiality and energy of his nature. There is and can be no resemblance; he is essential and perfect life, and was so from everlasting. Little, therefore, as I think of the argument from reason, the reason is not on the other side; and no sufficient proofs have been urged against the doctrine by its opponents. For any thing that even reason can demonstrate, Christ may be a Son, and yet *eternal*; eternally flowing from the bosom of paternal Deity, who is the first in order, though not in time. The first person in the adorable Trinity may be a Father without *priority of being*; and we may still, in the sense in which the words have been



commonly understood, join together in our worship and say, "*Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father.*" But a truce to these reasonings; I willingly give them all up for a single word of the testimony of God. I affect them not; they seem to bring me too irreverently near to God; I would not "*break through and gaze;*" and I feel, while I write, how just and yet how reproving are the words of the Poet of paradise,

*"Dark with excessive light his skirts appear  
Yet dazzle heaven; that brightest seraphim  
Approach not; but with both wings veil their eyes."*

I shall conclude, therefore, by only noticing an opinion which has been given by some, that provided the Deity of Christ be held, the tenet of his eternal sonship is of trifling import, whether true or not. From this opinion I dissent for the following reasons.

1. No man who loves the truth can consent to a doctrine, great or small, which has even any show of being taught in the word of God, being given up, except on *scriptural* evidence. The principle of rejecting it, because it is not a reasonable doctrine, is one which, if the doctrine itself were of minor importance, is so serious in its consequences, as to unsettle the faith of men in all Christian mysteries, from the great "*mystery of Godliness, God manifest in the flesh,*" to every other.

2. I cannot consider any thing which the Bible has declared concerning Christ to be unimportant. What God has determined to be so important as to make the subject of a revelation, is surely of sufficient importance for man to consider it with all seriousness.

3. But the subject *is in itself of the highest importance*, connected as it is with the personality of our Lord. If there be not a Trinity of persons in the Godhead, I cannot conceive of a divine atonement for sin. If God had not had a *Son* to send into the world, by whom the world might be saved, no other being in heaven or earth was

adequate to offer a full, perfect, and sufficient oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the human race. The notions of a Trinity, and of such an atonement have, as might be expected from their necessary connexion, in most cases stood or fallen together. Any doctrine therefore which at all goes to weaken the evidence of the essential personality of Christ, ought to be considered a very serious one; and the denial of the eternal sonship of Christ is unquestionably a great abatement of this evidence. Besides "*Son of God*," there is, as far as I recollect, no other term applied to Christ, which *simply and in itself*, and without recurring to other evidence, expresses his *divine* personality. "LORD" does not—that may apply to the authority of the Deity considered as one, or may be an official name of Christ; "JESUS" does not—that is a designation of his humanity; "CHRIST" does not—that too is an official term; "WORD" does not—if it signify *discourse*, it is a term of office; if *reason* or *wisdom* it is, as far as the mere term goes, nothing more than the name of a quality; and has been considered by the perverters of God's word, in the first chapter of St. John's gospel, as no more than an attribute of God personified; but let the term "SON OF GOD" be established as the scriptural designation of the divine nature of our Lord and Saviour; and the idea of divine and proper personality is eternally preserved in our opinions respecting him—let us show first, that the Son is *divine*, and we escape Socinianism; and second, that he is divine *as a Son*, and we shun the Sabellian heresy; that sliding path which infallibly, though by easy descent, has conducted thousands to join the ranks of those who "deny the Lord that bought them."

It has, I know, been urged as a reason by some, for adopting Dr. Clarke's views on the sonship of Christ, that they remove a difficulty from the doctrine of the Trinity. This indeed is their most delusive aspect and the more may cursory readers be influenced by the fallacy, as they feel that the Deity of Christ is an essential doctrine of Christianity. But does the difficulty from which they think

themselves relieved, press upon their *faith*, or upon their *reason*? If upon the former, a moral defect is to be suspected; for whoever feels it difficult to admit the testimony of God in his word, is not brought under the full moral influence of the gospel. The question still recurs, Is the eternal sonship of Christ a doctrine of Scripture? If it be rejected because the Bible is silent on the subject, the proceeding is legitimate; if, because it is a difficulty, and the depositions of Scripture are to be disregarded that the difficulty may not press, the ground is changed; and we have laid down the principle that we will believe no difficult doctrine, though the Scriptures declare it. On such a basis no Christian system can possibly stand; it is a pyramid on its point nodding to its fall. But if a difficulty be removed from our *reason*, our joy in the discovery ought not to be suffered to take its excursions of airy delight, until we first interrogate ourselves, whether the doctrine be one which can in its nature be tested by reason? whether in this process we have proceeded on authority? Sober theologians would also inquire, whether by freeing ourselves from one difficulty we do not entangle ourselves in many others; whether we shall not find, on the newly adopted scheme, additional difficulty in establishing the personalities in the Godhead; whether we shall not find it, not merely more difficult, but even impossible, to make out any meaning of half the passages in the sacred volume which speak of Christ as the Son of God, except by those lax and paraphrastic interpretations which we so justly protest against in those whose heresies we condemn, and which yield a meaning much below our present faith. This would be to purchase a relief from difficulty at much too dear a price; but in itself, and separate from consequences, the relief is worth nothing. It is, to my mind at least, a very strong argument *à priori*, against any scheme, that it renders a doctrine of pure revelation less difficult to reason. I am inclined to say of it as CHILLINGWORTH of novelties, "*What is new in divinity is false.*" All such doctrines, as to human reason, whether they are contrary to it, or tran-