

Christianity as Old as the Creation  
or, The  
GOSPEL,  
A REPUBLICATION of the  
Religion of Nature  
By Matthew Tindal

THE PREFACE

The author of the following sheets makes no apology for writing on a subject of the last importance; and which, as far as I can find, has no where been so fully treated. He builds nothing on a thing so uncertain as Tradition, which differs in most countries; and of which, in all countries, the bulk of mankind are incapable of judging. But he thinks he has laid down such plain and evident rules, as may enable men of the meanest capacity to distinguish between Religion and Superstition; and has represented the former in every part so beautiful, so amiable, and so strongly affecting, that they, who in the least reflect, must be highly in love with it; and easily perceive that their duty and happiness are inseparable. Whether he has succeeded in this noble and generous attempt, the reader will be better able to judge, if he reads with the same freedom and impartiality as the author wrote.

The manner of debating a subject dialogue-wise, (as this between A and B) was esteemed by the ancients the most proper, as well as most prudent, way of exposing prevailing absurdities; and Tully's two discourses, *de Natura Deorum*, and *de Divinatione*, (both levelled against the superstition of his country-men) are living monuments of the expediency and usefulness of this way of writing. And certainly, the reader may be better entertained thus, than by that dry way of Objection and Answer, with which controversies are usually managed.

## **The CONTENTS of the First Volume**

### [CHAP. 1](#)

That God, at all times, has given mankind sufficient means of knowing whatever he requires of them; and what those means are. \*

### [CHAP. 2](#)

That the Religion of Nature consists in observing those things which our reason (by considering the nature of God and Man, and the relation we stand in to him and one another) demonstrates to be our duty; and that those things are plain; and likewise what they are.

### [CHAP. 3](#)

That the perfection and happiness of all rational beings (supreme, as well as subordinate) consists in living up to the dictates of their nature.

### [CHAP. 4](#)

That not only the matter of all God's laws, but the penalties annexed to them, are for the good of mankind (even those who suffer for the breach of them).

### [CHAP. 5](#)

That God requires nothing for his own sake. No, not the worship we are to render him, nor the faith we are to have in him.

### [CHAP. 6](#)

That the Religion of Nature is an absolutely perfect religion; and that external revelation can neither add to, nor take away from it's perfection; and that "true religion", whether internally, or externally revealed, must be the same.

### [CHAP. 7](#)

That Natural and Revealed religions having the same end, their precepts must be the same.

### [CHAP. 8](#)

That not adhering to those notions Reason dictates (concerning the nature of God), has been the occasion of all superstition, and those innumerable mischiefs that mankind (on account of religion) have done to themselves or to one another.

## [CHAP. 9](#)

Human happiness being the ultimate design and end of all tradition, as well as Original Revelation, they must both prescribe the same means; since those means, which at one time promote human happiness, equally promote it at all times. \*

## [CHAP. 10](#)

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

## [CHAP. 11](#)

That supposing things merely positive, to be made to ingredients of religion, is inconsistent with the good of mankind, as well as the honor of God.

## [CHAP. 12](#)

That they who magnify Revelation, weaken the force of the Religion of Reason and Nature, strike at all religion; and that there can't be two independent rules for the government of human actions.

## [CHAP. 13](#)

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

*Retyped into eText format by Stephen Dowell, 2003. All of the words of the original text have been retained. However, the spelling, capitalization and punctuation has been altered in many cases to make the text easier to read for modern eyes. Special thanks to Anthony.*

*Note: this edition contains the first 12 chapters and the heading for Chapter 13. The original has 14 chapters. The full original is available through Google.*

Formatted for .pdf – Nature's God – (<http://naturesgod.org>) – March 2009

# **CHRISTIANITY as old as the CREATION;**

OR, THE

**GOSPEL, etc**

## **CHAP. 1**

That God, at all times, has given mankind sufficient means of knowing whatever he requires of them; and what those means are.

A. This early visit, Sir, gives me hopes it will not be a short one.

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

A. Your uncommon temper and candor, in debating even the most important points, will always make your conversation agreeable, though ever so long; but pray, what is to be the subject of our morning's discourse?

B. I was yesterday in company with a great many clergymen, it being our bishop's primary visitation; where the complaint was general, of the coldness and indifference with which people received the speculative points of Christianity and all its holy rites; for which formerly they had shown so great a zeal. This coldness they chiefly imputed to those low church-men, who lay the main stress on Natural Religion; and withal so magnify the doctrine of Sincerity, as in effect to place all religions on a level, where the professors are alike sincere. The promoters of these notions, as well as the notions themselves, were exposed with warmth; how justly I will not determine, till we have talked the matter over with our usual freedom: For which reason, I have made you this early visit, and would be glad to know the sentiments of so good a judge, on these two important points; i.e. Sincerity, and Natural Religion.

A. I thank you for this favor, and shall freely tell you, I so little agree with those gentlemen in relation to Sincerity, that I think a sincere examination into religious matters can't be too much preferred; this being the only way to discover True Christianity. The Apostles thought themselves obliged, in making proselytes, to recommend an impartial search; they both desired and required men to judge for themselves, to prove all things, etc. This they thought necessary, in order to renounce a religion, which the force of education had impressed on their minds; and embrace another directly contrary to the notions and prejudices they had imbibed. Nay, even those very men, who most ridicule

the doctrine of sincerity, never fail on other occasions to assert that infidelity is owing to the want of a sincere examination; and that whosoever impartially considers Christianity, must be convinced of it's truth. And I might add, that could we suppose, a sincere examination would not always produce this effect, yet must it always make men acceptable to God; since that is all God can require; all that it is in their power to do for the discovery of his will. These, in short, are my sentiments as to this point; and as to the other, I think, too great stress can't be laid on Natural Religion; which, as I take it, differs not from Revealed, but in the manner of it's being communicated. The one being the internal, as the other the external revelation of the same unchangeable will of a being, who is alike at all times infinitely wise and good.

B. Surely, Sir, this must be extremely hetrodox. Can you believe that Natural and Revealed religion differ in nothing, but the manner of their being conveyed to us?

A. As heterodox as I may seem at present, I doubt not, but by asking you a few questions, to let you see, I advance nothing in either of these points without Reason; and in order to it, I desire to be informed, whether God has not, from the beginning, given mankind some rule, or law, for their conduct? And whether the observing that did not make them acceptable to him?

B. There can be, no doubt, but the observing such a law, must have answered the end for which it was given; and made men acceptable to God.

A. What more can any external revelation do, than render men acceptable to God? If God, then, from the beginning gave men a religion, I ask, was that religion imperfect, or perfect?

B. Most perfect, without doubt; since no religion can come from a being of infinite wisdom and perfection, but what is absolutely perfect.

A. Can, therefore, a religion absolutely perfect, admit of any alteration; or be capable of addition or diminution, and not be as immutable as the author of it? Can revelation, I say, add anything to a religion thus absolutely perfect, universal, and immutable? Besides, if God has given mankind a law, he must have given them likewise sufficient means of knowing it; he would, otherwise, have defeated his own intent in giving it; since a law, as far as it is unintelligible, ceases to be a law. Shall we say that God, who had the forming human understanding, as well as his own laws, did not know how to adjust the one to the other?

If God, at all times, was "willing that all men should come to the knowledge of his truth"; could not his infinite wisdom and power, at all times, find sufficient means for making mankind capable of knowing what his infinite goodness designed they should know?

B. I grant you that God was always willing that all men should come to the knowledge of True Religion; and we say that the Christian religion, being the only true and absolutely perfect religion, was what God, from the beginning, designed for all mankind.

A. If so, it follows that the Christian religion has existed from the beginning; and that God, both then, and ever since, has continued to give all mankind sufficient means to know it; and that it is their duty to know, believe, profess, and practice it; so that Christianity, though the name is of a later date, must be as old and as extensive as human nature; and as the "Law of our Creation," must have been then implanted in us by God himself.

B. It would be too presuming in us poor mortals, to pretend to account for the methods providence takes, in relation to the discovery of it's will; and, therefore, a person of less moderation might condemn your questions as captious, presumptuous, and founded in heterodoxy.

A. If God never intended mankind should at any time be without religion, or have false religion; and there be but one true religion which ALL have been ever bound to believe and profess; I can't see any heterodoxy in affirming that the means to effect this end of infinite wisdom must be as universal and extensive as the end itself; or that all men, at all times, must have had sufficient means to discover whatever God designed they should know and practice. I do not mean by this that all should have equal knowledge; but that all should have what is sufficient for the circumstances they are in.

B. Since you have asked me questions, let me, in my turn, demand of you, What are your sentiments in this matter? Particularly, What are those means, which, you suppose, God has, at all times, given the whole race of mankind, to enable them to discover what he wills them to know, believe, profess and practice?

A. I asked you those few questions at present, not to determine the point; but only to let you see you had no reason to be surprised at my saying, Natural and Revealed religion only differ as to the manner of their being communicated. I shall now readily answer your questions; and, as I think it my duty never to disown my religious sentiments, so I freely declare that the use of those faculties, by which men are distinguished from brutes, is the only means they have to discern whether there is a God; and whether he concerns himself with human affairs, or has given them any laws; and what those laws are? And as men have no other faculties to judge with, so their using there after the best manner they can, must answer the end for which God gave them, and justify their conduct. For, if God will judge mankind as they are accountable, that is, as they are rational; the judgment must hold an exact proportion to the use they make of their Reason. And it would be in vain to use it, if the due use of it would not justify them before God; and men would be in a miserable condition, indeed, if whether they used it, or not, they should be alike criminal. And if God designed all mankind should at all times know what he wills them to know, believe, profess and practice; and has given them no other means for this but the use of Reason; Reason, human Reason, must then be that means; for as God has made us rational creatures, and Reason tells us that it is his will that we act up to the dignity of our natures; so it is Reason must tell when we do so. What God requires us to know, believe, profess and practice, must be in itself a reasonable service; but whether what is offered to us as such be really so, it is Reason alone that must judge; as the eye is the sole judge of what is visible; the ear of what is audible; so Reason of what is reasonable. If then

Reason was given men to bring them to the knowledge of God's will, that must be sufficient to produce it's intended effect, and can never bring men to take that for his will which he designed, they, by using their Reason, should avoid as contrary to it.

B. If men, having done all in their power, all that God requires of them to find out his will, should fall into opposite sentiments; must it not be the will of God that it should be so? Can God will such a previous examination, and not will what he foreknows must be the necessary consequence?

A. There is, I think, no way to avoid this objection, of "God's willing contrarieties"; but by supposing he requires nothing of men but what is founded on the Nature of Things, and the immutable relations they bear to one another; and what, consequently, they are, as far as concerns them, capable of knowing. But this objection is unanswerable by those who believe the will of God is not always thus founded; but may contain many merely positive things; since men may, after having taken all possible care to be in the right, have very opposite sentiments; and be obliged, by the will of God, to hold and act contrarieties.

B. Though this subject is attended with the utmost difficulties, yet I find little, or nothing, said to solve them. I, for my part, know not how to deny mens being acceptable to God, whatever their opinions may be, after having used all the means God has endowed them with for the discovery of his will; and yet I don't know how to admit it. For then, what religion soever men are of, if they have duly used such means as God ordained for the discovery of his will; That, I say, how opposite soever to Christianity, must be the religion God designed them. And on the other hand, should I own, that the duly using those means would have caused men to have been all of one religion; yet I can't see how that could be the Christian religion, except it has existed from the beginning; and all men, at all times, have had sufficient means to discover it.

For if God was always willing that "All men should come to the knowledge of his truth"; and there never was a time when God intended men should have no religion; or such an imperfect religion, which could not answer the end of it's being instituted by an infinitely wise legislator; this seems to my bewildered Reason to imply that there was from the beginning but one true religion which all men might know was their duty to embrace; and if this is true, I can't well conceive how this character can consist with Christianity; without allowing it, at the same time, to be "as old as the creation". And yet notwithstanding all these seeming difficulties, I am confident the Christian religion is the only true religion; but since these difficulties are of your raising, I may, in justice, expect that you should solve them.

A. This, I must own, is a difficult point; however, I shall tell you my sentiments; which, I, far from being a "dogmatizer," am ready to give up if you can frame any other hypothesis not liable to the same objections, or others equally strong. Though I may venture to say that I take mine to be the only one which can give any tolerable satisfaction to your present doubts. And therefore I shall attempt to show you that men, if they sincerely endeavor to discover the will of God, will perceive that there is a "law of nature," or

"Reason"; which is so called, as being a law, which is common or natural to all rational creatures; and that this law, like it's author, is absolutely perfect, eternal and unchangeable; and that the design of the gospel was not to add to, or take away from this law, but to free men from that load of superstition which had been mixed with it, so that "True Christianity" is not a religion of yesterday, but what God at the beginning dictated, and still continues to dictate to Christians, as well as others. If I am so happy to succeed in this attempt, I hope not only to fully satisfy your doubts, but greatly to advance the honor of "external revelation" by showing the perfect agreement between that and "internal" revelation; and by so doing, destroy one of the most successful attempts that has been made on religion by setting the laws of God at variance.

But first, I must premise, that in supposing an external revelation, I take it for granted that there's sufficient evidence of a person being sent from God to publish it; nay, I further own that this divine person by living up to what he taught, has set us a noble example, and that as he was highly exalted for so doing, so we, if we use our best endeavors, may expect a suitable reward. This, and every thing of the same nature, I freely own, which is not inconsistent with the law of God being the same, whether internally or externally revealed.

B. Your design, I must own, is highly commendable; but in order to succeed, you are to prove two things. First, that the supreme governor of mankind has given his subjects a universal law, which they, when they come to the use of Reason, are capable of knowing. Secondly, that the divine precepts must be the same, whether internally or externally revealed. If you prove these two points, you will entirely clear up my doubts. But I almost despair of your doing it, since you seem to me to advance a new hypothesis.

A. Hear the evidence, and then judge. But before I produce it, lest the supposed novelty of this opinion may prejudice you, I shall put you in mind of what Archbishop Laud says upon a like occasion, "That when errors are grown by age and continuance to strength; they who speak for the truth, though far older, are ordinarily challenged for bringing in new opinions; and there's no greater absurdity stirring this day in Christendom. " Now, by putting me to prove that there is a "law of nature," you, I suppose, have a mind to hear what I can say on this subject; since none that believe that there's a God who governs mankind, but believe he has given them a law for the governing of their actions; and that this is implied in the very notion of Governor and Governed; and consequently, that the law by which he governs men, and his government commenced together, and extends alike to all his subjects. "It is not (as Bishop Tillotson observes) absurd to think that the obligation does solely depend upon the revelation of God's will made known to us in the holy scriptures; it is plain, mankind was always under a law before God made an external, or extraordinary revelation; else how could God judge the world? Or how should they, to whom the word of God never came, be acquitted, or condemned at the last day; for where there is no law, there can neither be obedience, nor transgression."

If, then, it be absurd to suppose that men, though they lived ever so impiously and immorally, could do nothing which God has forbid them; or if ever so piously and virtuously, could not do anything God has commanded them; must there not always have

been a universal law so fully promulgated to mankind, that they could have no just plea from their ignorance not to be tried by it; and consequently, nothing less than its being founded on the nature of things, and the relation they stand in to God, and one another, visible at all times to mankind, could make it thus universally promulgated. But further to illustrate this matter, can it be imagined that if God has been so good to all other animals, as to give them, not in one country only, but in all places whatsoever, sufficient means to act for their own preservation, that he has had less kindness for the immortal souls of those made after his own image, and has not given them at one time as well as another, and at one place as well as another, sufficient means to provide for their eternal happiness?

Or, can it be supposed, an infinitely good and gracious being, which gives men notice by their senses, what does good or hurt to their bodies, has had less regard for their immortal parts, and has not given them at all times by the light of their understanding, sufficient means to discover what makes for the good of their souls; but has necessitated them, or any of them, to continue from age to age in destructive ignorance, or error? To press this matter further, let me ask you, whether there's not a clear and distinct light that enlightens all men; and which, the moment they attend to it, makes them perceive those eternal truths, which are the foundation of all our knowledge; and is it not God himself who immediately illuminates them? And what better reason can you assign, why infinite wisdom should act thus, except it be to give mankind standing rules to distinguish truth from falsehood; especially in matters of the highest consequence to their eternal as well as temporal happiness?

There has, no doubt, been a great number of traditional religions succeeding one another; and as far as we know, there is no traditional religion, which, except in name, has continued the same for any long time; and though there are a great number of sects who go under the same common denomination, yet they are almost as much divided among themselves, as if they owned different religions, and accordingly charge one another with erring fundamentally; yet all these agree in acknowledging a "law of nature," and that they are indispensably obliged to obey its dictates; so that this "Light of Nature," like that of the sun, is universal; and would, did not men shut the eyes of their understanding, or suffer others to blind them, soon disperse all these mists and fogs which arise from false traditions or false interpretations of the true tradition.

## CHAP. 2

That the Religion of Nature consists in observing those things which our reason (by considering the nature of God and Man, and the relation we stand in to him and one another) demonstrates to be our duty; and that those things are plain; and likewise what they are.

B. That we may the better know whether the "Law", or "Religion of Nature" is universal, and the Gospel a republication of it, and not a new religion; I desire you will give a definition of the "Religion of Nature."

A. By "Natural Religion," I understand the belief of the existence of a God, and the sense and practice of those duties, which result from the knowledge, we, by our Reason, have of him and his perfections; and of ourselves and our own imperfections; and of the relation we stand in to him and to our fellow creatures; so that the "Religion of Nature" takes in every thing that is founded on the Reason and Nature of Things. Hence "Grotius" defines the "Law of Nature" to be "Dictatum rectae rationis, indicans actui alicui, ex ejus convenientia aut disconvenientia cum ipsa natura rationali, inesse moralem turpitudinem, aut necessitatem moralem, ac consequenter ab auctore naturae Deo talem actum aut vetari aut praecipere."

I suppose you will allow that it is evident by the "Light of Nature" that there is a God; or in other words, a being absolutely perfect and infinitely happy in himself, who is the source of all other beings; and that what perfections soever the creatures have, they are wholly derived from him.

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

A. Since then, it is demonstrable there is such a being, it is equally demonstrable that the creatures can neither add to, or take from the happiness of that being; and that he could have no motive in framing his creatures, or in giving laws to such of them as he made capable of knowing his will, but their own good.

To imagine he created them at first for his own sake, and has since required things of them for that reason, is to suppose he was not perfectly happy in himself before the creation; and that the creatures, by either observing, or not observing the rules prescribed them, could add to, or take from his happiness.

If then, a being infinitely happy in himself, could not command his creatures any thing for his own good; nor an all-wise being things to no end or purpose; nor an all-good

being any thing but for their good; it unavoidably follows, nothing can be a part of the divine law, but what tends to promote the common interest and mutual happiness of his rational creatures; and every thing that does so must be a part of it.

As God can require nothing of us, but what makes for our happiness; so he, who can't envy us any happiness our nature is capable of, can forbid us those things only, which tend to our hurt; and this we are as certain of, as that there is a God infinitely happy in himself, infinitely good and wise; and as God can design nothing by his laws but our good, so by being infinitely powerful, he can bring every thing to pass which he designs for that end.

From the consideration of these perfections, we cannot but have the highest veneration, nay, the greatest adoration and love for this supreme being; who, that we may not fail to be as happy as possible for such creatures to be, has made our acting for our "present," to be the only means of obtaining our "future" happiness; and that we can't sin against him, but by acting against our reasonable natures. These reflections, which occur to every one who in the least considers, must give us a wonderful and surprising sense of the divine goodness, fill us with adoration, transport and ecstasy (of which we daily see among contemplative persons remarkable instances) and not only force us to express a never-failing gratitude in raptures of the highest praise and thanksgiving; but make us strive to imitate him in our extensive love to our fellow-creatures. And thus copying after the divine original, and taking God himself for our precedent, must make us like unto him, who is all perfection and all happiness; and who must have an inexhaustible love for all, who thus endeavor to imitate him.

The difference between the supreme being, infinitely happy in himself, and the creatures who are not so, is that all his actions in relation to his creatures flow from a pure disinterested love; whereas the spring of all the actions of the creatures is their own good. "We love God, because he first loved us," and consequently, our love to him will be in proportion to our sense of his goodness to us. And therefore, we can't in the least vary from those sentiments, which the consideration of the divine attributes implant in us; but we must in proportion take off from the goodness of God, and those motives we have to love him as we ought.

Our Reason, which gives us a demonstration of the divine perfections, affords us the same concerning the nature of those duties God requires; not only in relation to himself, but to ourselves and to one another. Those we shall discern, if we look into ourselves and consider our own natures, and those circumstances God has placed us in with relation to our fellow-creatures; and see what conduces to our mutual happiness. Of this, our senses, our Reason, the experiences of others as well as our own, can't fail to give us sufficient information.

With relation to ourselves, we can't but know how we are to act, if we consider that God has endowed man with such a nature as makes him necessarily desire his own good; and, therefore, he may be sure that God, who has bestowed this nature on him, could not require any thing in prejudice of it; but on the contrary, the he should do every thing

which tends to promote the good of it. The health of the body, and the vigor of the mind being highly conducing to our Good, we must be sensible we offend our maker if we indulge our senses to the prejudices of these. And because not only all irregular passions, all unfriendly affections carry their own torment with them, and endless inconveniences attend the excess of sensual delights; and all immoderate desires (human nature being able to bear but a certain proportion) disorder both mind and body; we can't but know we ought to use great moderation with relation to our passions, or in other words, govern all our actions by Reason; that, and our true interest being inseparable. And in a word, whoever so regulates his natural appetites, as will conduce most to the exercise of his Reason, the health of his body, and the pleasure of his senses, taken and considered together, (since herein his happiness consists) may be certain he can never offend his maker; who, as he governs all things according to their natures, can't but expect his rational creatures should act according to their natures.

As to what God expects from man with relation to each other; every one must know his duty, who considers that the common parent of mankind has the whole species alike under his protection, and will equally punish him for injuring others, as he would others for injuring him; and consequently, that it is his duty to deal with them, as he expects they should deal with with him in like circumstances. How much this is his duty every one must perceive, who considers himself as a weak creature, not able to subsist without the assistance of others, who have it in their power to retaliate the usage he gives them. And that he may expect, if he breaks those rules which are necessary for mens mutual happiness, to be treated like a common enemy, not only by the person injured, but by all others; who, by the common ties of nature, are obliged to defend, and assist each other. And not only a man's own particular interest, but that of his children, his family, and all that's dear to him, obliges him to promote the common happiness, and to endeavor to convey the same to posterity.

All "moralists" agree, that human nature is so constituted, that men can't live without society and mutual assistance; and that God has endowed them with Reason, speech, and other faculties, evidently fitted to enable them to assist each other in all matters of life; that, therefore, it is the will of God who gives them this nature, and endows them with these faculties, that they should employ them for their common benefit and mutual assistance. And the "philosophers," who saw that all society would be dissolved, and men soon become destitute of even the necessaries of life, and be a prey to one another, if each man was only to mind himself and his own single interest; and that every thing pointed out the necessity of mutual benevolence among mankind; and therefore they judged that men, by their nature, were framed to be useful to one another; "Aduendos conservadosq; homines hominem natum esse," says "Cicero". And therefore, every man, for the sake of others as well as himself, is not to disable his body or mind by such irregularities, as may make him less serviceable to them.

In short, considering the variety of circumstances men are under, and these continually changing, as well as being for the most part unforeseen; it is impossible to have rules laid down by any "external" revelation for every particular case; and therefore, there must be some standing rule, discoverable by the "Light of Nature," to direct us in all such cases.

And we can't be more certain that it is the will of God, that those effects which flow from natural causes should so flow, than we are that it is the will of God that men should observe whatever the nature of things, and the relation they have to one another make fit to be observed, should be so observed; or in other words, we can't but know, if we in the least consider, that whatever circumstances men are placed in by the universal cause of all things; that it is his eternal and immutable will, by his placing them in these circumstances, that they act as these require. It is absurd to imagine that we are obliged to act thus in some cases, and not in others, when the reason for acting thus in all is the same. This consideration alone will direct a man how to act in all conditions of life, whether "father, son, husband, servant, subject, master, king, etc." Thus we see how the Reason of Things, or the relation they have to each other, teaches us our duty in all cases whatever. And I may add, that the better to cause men to observe those rules, which make for their mutual benefit, infinite goodness has sown in their hearts seeds of pity, humanity and tenderness, which, without much difficulty, cannot be eradicated; but nothing operates more strongly than that desire men have of being in esteem, credit, and reputation with their fellow creatures; not to be obtained without acting on the principles of natural justice, equity, benevolence, etc.

In a word, as a most beneficent disposition in the supreme being is the source of all his actions in relation to his creatures; so he has implanted in man, whom he has made after his own image, a love for his species; the gratifying of which in doing act of benevolence, compassion and good will, produces a pleasure that never satiates; as on the contrary, actions of ill nature, envy, malice, etc, never fail to produce shame, confusion, and everlasting self-reproach.

And now let any one say, how is it possible God could more fully make known his will to all intelligent creatures, than by making every thing within and without them a declaration of it, and an argument for observing it.

Having thus discovered our duty, we may be sure it will always be the same; since inconsistency, as it argues a defect either of wisdom or power, can't belong to a being infinitely wise and powerful. What unerring wisdom has once instituted can have no defects; and as God is entirely free from all partiality, his laws must alike extend to all times and places.

From these premises, I think, we may boldly draw this conclusion: That if religion consists in the practice of those duties, that result from the relation we stand in to God and man, our religion must always be the same. If God is unchangeable, our duty to him must be so too. If human nature continues the same, and men at all times stand in the same relation to one another, the duties which result from those relations must always be the same; and consequently, our duty to God and man must, from the beginning of the world to the end, always be the same; always alike plain and perspicuous, and can neither be changed in whole or in part; which demonstrates that no person, if he comes from God, can teach us any other religion, or give us any precepts, but what are founded on those relations. "Heaven and earth shall sooner pass away, than on tittle of this eternal law shall either be abrogated or altered."

To sum up all in a few words, as nature teaches men to unite for their mutual defense, and government was instituted solely for this end; so to make this more effectual, religion, which reaches the thoughts, was wholly ordained; it being impossible for God, in governing the world, to propose to himself any other end than the good of the governed; and consequently, whoever acts what is best for himself, both in public and private capacity, does all that either God or man can require. Thus from the consideration of our own imperfections, which we continually feel; and the perfections of our creator, which we constantly view in all his works; we may arrive to the knowledge of our duty, both to our creator and fellow-creatures. Hence I think, we may define true religion to consist in a constant disposition of mind to do all the good we can; and thereby render ourselves acceptable to God in answering the end of his creation.

## CHAP. 3

That the perfection and happiness of all rational beings (supreme, as well as subordinate) consists in living up to the dictates of their nature.

A. To make this, (since all our happiness depends on it) if possible, more plain; the principle from which all human actions flow is the desire of happiness; and God, who does nothing in vain, would in vain have implanted this principle, this only innate principle in mankind, if he had not given them Reason to discern what actions make for, and against their happiness.

B. Wherein do you take the happiness of rational creatures to consist? Without knowing that, this controversy can't be determined; and when it is known, our dispute must soon be ended.

A. The happiness of all beings whatever consists in the perfection of their nature; and the nature of a rational being is most perfect when it is perfectly rational; that is, when it governs all it's actions by the rules of right Reason; for then it arrives to the most perfect, and consequently the happiest state a rational nature can aspire to; and every deviation from the rules of right reason being an imperfection, must carry with it a proportionable unhappiness; and a man's happiness and duty must consist in the same things, since no one can be obliged to do any thing that does not some way or other contribute to his happiness; and consequently according to the sense men have of their own happiness, and of the means which will naturally procure it, they will assuredly attain the knowledge of their respective duties.

B. If we know wherein the happiness of God, who is necessarily happy, consists, we might judge wherein consists the happiness of man made after God's own image; and whether happiness, or misery are the necessary consequence of his actions.

A. Because this is a point of highest consequence, I shall speak my sentiments (that they may the better pass with you) in the words of the judicious Dr. Scot, who says, "That which renders God so infinitely happy in himself, is not so much the almighty power he has to defend himself from foreign hurts and injuries, as the exact agreement of all his actions with the all-comprehending Reason of his own mind. God loves not himself merely because he is himself, but because he is in all respects morally good, and his will and power perfectly compliant with the infallible dictates of his own Reason. Hence arises his infinite complacency in himself, that there's nothing in him but what his own Reason perfectly approves; no inclinations in his will, or nature, but what are exactly agreeable to the fairest ideas of his own mind."

If the perfection, and consequently the happiness of God, consists in the purity and rectitude of his nature, we, as far as we can arrive to a like purity and rectitude; must be so far necessarily happy; since by living according to the rules of right Reason, we more and more implant in us the moral perfections of God, from which his happiness is inseparable. We then, if I may so say, "live the life of God"; that is, we, in our place and station, live after the same manner, and by the same rules as he does in his; and we do what God himself would do was he in our place; and there would be no other difference between his life and ours, but what arises from our different states and relations; since the same rules would determine our wills as determine his will; and by our repeated acts of virtue, we should be continually making nearer and nearer approaches to the most perfect, and the most happy being. By this conduct, we, as the scriptures assure us, should be made partakers of the "divine nature, be born of God", and "be perfect as our heavenly father is perfect"; and can that be without being as happy as we are perfect? Hence we may contemplate the great dignity of our "rational" nature, since our Reason for kind, though not for degree, is of the same nature with that of God's; nay, it is our Reason which makes us the image of God himself, and is the common bond which unites heaven and earth; the creatures, and the creator; and if our happiness is limited, it is because our Reason is so. It is God alone, who has an unlimited Reason and happiness.

The excellent author just now mentioned says, "The best thing we can receive from God is himself, and himself we do receive in our strict compliance with the eternal laws of goodness; which laws being transcribed from the nature of God, from his eternal righteousness and goodness, we do, by obeying them, derive God's nature into our own; so that while we write after the copy of his laws, we write out the perfections of his being; and his laws being the seal on which he has engraved his nature, we, in obeying them, take impression from them, and stamp his blessed nature on our own." Which, certainly, must make us necessarily happy, as a contrary conduct would make us unhappy. And, I think, I may venture to say, that could we suppose God himself to act otherwise, he would then be as unhappy as he now is happy; and his omnipotency could not hinder him from being continually exposed to the reproach of his own infallible Reason.

From these premises, I think, we may conclude, that men, according as they do, or do not partake of the nature of God, must unavoidably be either happy, or miserable. And herein appears the great wisdom of God, in making men's misery and happiness the necessary and inseparable consequence of their actions; and that rational actions carry with them their own reward, and irrational their own punishment. This, I think, can't be denied, as long as there are some actions naturally beneficial to us, and others as hurtful; and that there's no virtue, but what has some good inseparably annexed to it; and no vice, but what as necessarily carries with it some evil; and if our rational nature is to be the same in the next life, as it is in this, our actions must produce effects of the same kind, and that too in a much higher degree.

In this life, it is true, we can't be perfectly happy; as subject to diseases and disasters. We are imperfect ourselves, and have none to converse with but imperfect creatures; and yet if we act according to the dictates of right Reason, we shall receive, even here, true

inward comfort and satisfaction; and hereafter, when we are freed from those imperfections, complete happiness. On the contrary, the man who abandons his Reason, besides the misery of all sorts an irrational conduct will bring on him, must feel in his mind, pain and anguish even in this life; and in the life to come, when there are no sensual things to divert his thoughts, insupportable grief and misery.

Though human lawgivers are forced to have recourse to punishments which are not connected with the things they forbid, yet a being of infinite power is not thus straitened, but may make one the necessary consequence of the other. And indeed, how can it be otherwise, since good and evil have their foundation in the essential difference of things, and their nature is fixed and immovable. And consequently, our happiness depends on the intrinsic nature of the one, and our misery on the intrinsic nature of the other.

As God, whose infinite wisdom sets him above being deceived or influenced by any wrong affections, acts in constant conformity to the Reason and nature of things; and it is a contradiction to his nature for him to do any thing that is not fit and reasonable; so he would have framed our nature in contradiction to his own, if he had obliged us to act otherwise. No, God can never give us commands repugnant to his own nature, or require us to do what he himself abhors to do. The end for which God has given us Reason, is to compare things, and the relation they stand in to each other; and from thence to judge of the fitness and unfitness of actions; and could not our Reason judge soundly in all such matters, it could not have answered the end for which infinite wisdom and goodness bestowed that excellent gift; and for which we can't enough adore the goodness of God.

Had God, from time to time, spoke to all mankind in their several languages, and his words had miraculously conveyed the same ideas to all persons; yet he could not speak more plainly than he has done by the things themselves, and the relation which Reason shows there is between them. Nay, since it is impossible in any book, or books, that a particular rule could be given for every case, we must even then have had recourse to the light of nature to teach us our duty in most cases; especially considering the numberless circumstances which attend us, and which, perpetually varying, may make the same actions, according as men are differently affected by them, either good or bad. And I may add, that most of the particular rules laid down in the Gospel for our direction, are spoken after such figurative a manner, that except we judge of their meaning, not merely by the letter, but by what the law of nature antecedently declares to be our duty, they are apt to lead us wrong. And if precepts relating to morality, are delivered after an obscure manner, when they might have been delivered otherwise; what reason can you assign for it's being so, but that infinite wisdom meant to refer us to that law for the explaining of them. Sufficient instances of this nature I shall give you hereafter, though I must own, I can't carry this point so far as a learned divine who represents the scriptures more obscure (which one would think impossible) than even the "Fathers." He tells us, "That a certain author (viz. Flaccus Illyricus) has furnished us with one and fifty reasons for the obscurity of the scriptures", adding, "I think, I may truly say that the writings of the prophets and apostles abound with tropes and metaphors, types and allegories, parables and dark speeches; and are as much, nay, much more unintelligible in many places, than the writings of the ancients." It is well this author, who talks of people being "Bible-mad"

stopped here, and did not with a celebrated wit cry, "The truly illuminated books are the darkest of all."

The writer above-mentioned supposes it impossible that God's will should be fully revealed by books; "Except" says he, "it might be said perhaps without a figure, that even the world itself could not contain the books which should be written." But with submission to the reverend person, I can't help thinking, but that, (such is the divine goodness) God's will is so clearly, and fully manifested in the book of nature, that he who runs may read it.

This can't be denied, if the book of nature shows us in characters legible to the whole world, the relation we stand in to God and our fellow-creatures, and the duties resulting from thence; for then it must teach us the whole of our duty, since it would be unjust and tyrannical in any being, to require more of others than the relation they stand in to him makes it their duty to pay; it being that relation alone which gives him his just power and authority. We are encompassed with many artificial relations, such a "Governor" and "Governed", "Master" and "Servant", "Husband" and "Wife", etc. and the end of these relations teaches us what they require; and they being entered into for the sake of each others assistance, either party is injured by the others not observing what these relations demand, or by exacting more than the end of entering into them requires.

Though the relation we stand in to God, is not artificial, as most are amongst men, who want each others assistance; but is natural at least on our Part. Yet this does not hinder, but that we may know by Reason the end he had in being related to us as Creator and Governor; and what he requires of his creatures and subjects. This the divine nature which contains in itself all perfection, and all happiness, plainly points out to us. And if we are once certain of the end of God's entering into this relation with man, we may be as certain from his wisdom and goodness, and all his divine perfections, that he will require no more of us than the end he had in entering into this relation requires.

If it would be unjust and tyrannical in an earthly Governor, to exact things of his subjects, that do not contribute to the end for which this relation between them was entered into; can we suppose a Governor of infinite wisdom and goodness, who has always in his mind the end for which he governs mankind, will act the tyrant, and put them under severe penalties for not observing such things as have no relation to the end for which he created, and governs them?

There's no relation among men without a mutual obligation arising from it. Parents owe a duty to children as well as children to parents. But are not we, in a stricter sense, the children of God, and parents only instruments in his hands? Since it is God, who from nothing brings us into being, frames us after the manner that best pleases him, imprints on us what faculties, inclinations, desires and passions he thinks fit. And is not God from his innate goodness and equity, under an obligation to treat us more kindly than earthly parents do their best-beloved children, who beget them without designing it? Whereas God, whose actions are governed by infinite goodness, could have no motive to bring us into being (which of itself is no blessing) but our good; and for the some reason preserves

us in being; nor can so kind and tender a parent play the tyrant, and impose commands on us which do not flow from the relations we stand in to him, and to one another.

If we consider what our Reason will inform us, of the nature of our great Creator and Governor, we can't fail of knowing our duty; for as Dr. Scot justly observes, "If you will serve the great King of the World in such ways as are pleasing and acceptable to him, you must study his nature, and inform yourselves, which way his infinite perfections incline, that you may know how to comport yourselves toward him, and to render him such services as are agreeable to his nature; for there's no rule in the world, but only that of his nature, by which you can certainly conclude what will please him. So that in all our enquiries what is pleasing to God, our last appeal must be to his nature, which is the great standard of Good and Evil; by which we are to measure what is pleasing and displeasing to him."

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

In short, if the relations between things, and the fitness resulting from thence, be not the sole rule of God's actions, must not God be an arbitrary being? And then what a miserable condition will mankind be in! Since an arbitrary will might change every moment, and those things which entitled men to God's favor today, might make them incur his displeasure tomorrow. Nay, he might at the same time have a secret will opposite to his revealed will; or have different wills for every different person; or might reveal his arbitrary commands so obscurely, as to cause the utmost confusion. But if God only commands what the nature of things show to be fit, it is scarce possible that men (though now endlessly divided upon the account of their different traditions) should mistake their duty; since a mind that's attentive can easily distinguish "fit" from "unfit", as the eye can beauty from deformity, or the ear harmony from discord; and if no commands can alter the Nature of Things, or make that "fit" which is in itself "unfit", external revelation must attend the nature and relation of things, and can only speak what those speak. As for instance, it is not in our power, though ever so often commanded, to love the Deity, while we conceive him an arbitrary being acting out of humor and caprice; nor could any commands, supporting such possible, oblige us not to love him, while we believe him a kind beneficent being; so that as long as we have right notions of God, we can't but love and adore him as we ought.

Thus, I think, I have fully proved from the nature of God and man, and the relations we stand in to him and one another, that the divine precepts can't vary; and that these relations which are the permanent voice of God, by which he speaks to all mankind, do, at all times, infallibly point out to us our duty in all the various circumstances of life.

Should revelation require less than those relations require, would it not be an imperfect rule? And if it enjoins more, would it not argue the author of it to be of a tyrannical nature, imposing on his subjects, and under most severe penalties, unnecessary things; and likewise show a design, not of being beloved, but hated and dreaded? And therefore,

those who see the consequences of things, describe the Christian Religion as requiring such things only, as considering the relations we stand in to God and one another, are apparently for our good.

The most accurate Dr. Barrow give this character of the Christian Religion, "That it's precepts are no other than such as physicians prescribe for the health of our bodies; as politicians would allow to be needful for the peace of the state; as Epicurean philosophers recommend for the tranquillity of our minds, and pleasures of our lives; such as Reason dictates, and daily shows conducive to our welfare in all respects; which consequently, were there no law enacting them, we should in wisdom choose to observe, and voluntarily impose them on ourselves; confessing them to be fit matters of law, as most advantageous and requisite to the good, general and particular, of mankind."

That great and good man Dr. Tillotson says, "That all the precepts of Christianity are reasonable and wise, requiring such duties as are suitable to the Light of Nature, and do approve themselves to the best Reason of mankind; such as have their foundation in the nature of God, and are an imitation of the divine excellencies; such as tend to the perfection of human nature, and to raise the minds of men to the highest pitch of goodness and virtue. They command nothing that's unnecessary, they omit nothing that may tend to the glory of God, or the welfare of men, nor do they restrain us in anything, but what is contrary to the regular inclinations of nature, or to our Reason, and true interest. They forbid us nothing but what is base and unworthy to serve our humors and passions, to make ourselves fools and beasts. In a word, nothing but what tends to our private harm, or prejudice, or to public disorder and confusion."

The late Dean of Canterbury, in a sermon preached in defense of Christianity, says, "What can be a more powerful incentive to obedience, than for a rational creature clearly to discern the equity, the necessity, the benefit, the decency and beauty of every action he is called to do, and thence to be duly sensible how gracious a master he serves; One that is so far from loading him with fruitless, arbitrary, and tyrannical impositions, that each command abstracted from his command who issues it, is able to recommend itself; and nothing required but what every wise man would choose of his own accord; and cannot, without being his own enemy, wish to be exempted from." And this character of Christianity he makes to be essential to its being from God, and therefore, must make it the same with Natural Religion, which has this character impressed on it.

"There was none of the doctrines of our Saviour (says the late Archbishop of York) calculated for the gratification of mens idle curiosities, the busying and amusing them with airy and useless speculations; much less were they intended for an exercise of our credulity, or a trial how far we could bring our Reason to submit to our faith; but as on the one hand they were plain and simple, and such as by their agreeableness to the rational faculties of mankind, did highly recommend themselves to our belief; so on the other hand they had an immediate relation to practice, and were the genuine principles and foundation, upon which all human and divine virtues were naturally to be superstructed." Does not everyone see, that if the Religion of Nature had been put instead of Christianity, these descriptions would have exactly agreed with it.

The judicious Dr. Scot affirms, "God never imposes laws on us "pro imperio," as arbitrary tests and trials of our obedience. The great design of them (says he) is to do us good, and direct our actions to our own interest. This, if we firmly believe, will infinitely encourage our obedience; for when I am sure God commands me nothing but what my own health, ease, and happiness requires; and that every law of his is both a necessary and sovereign prescription against the diseases of my nature, and he could not prescribe less than he has, without being defective in his care of my recovery and happiness; with what prudence and modesty can I grudge to obey him?"

Nay, the most considerable men, even among the "Papists", do not scruple to maintain there's nothing in religion but what is moral. The divines of "Port Royal" for instance say, "All the precepts, and all the mysteries that are expressed in so many different ways in the holy volumes, do all center in this one commandment of "loving God with all of our heart," and in "loving our neighbors as ourselves"; for the scripture (it is St. Austin who says it) forbids but one only thing, which is "concupiscence", or the love of the creature; as it commands but on only thing, which is "charity," and the love of God. Upon this double precept is founded the whole system of the Christian religion; and it is unto this, say they, according to the expression of Jesus Christ, that all the ancient law and the prophets have reference; and we may add also, all the mysteries, and all the precepts of the new law; "For love," says St. Paul, "is the fulfilling of the law." And these divines likewise cite a remarkable passage of St. Austin on this subject; viz. "He that knows how to love God, and to regulate his life by that love, knows all that scripture propounds to be known." They also might have quoted a known saying of this father, "Omnia peccata sunt in universum contra rationem & Naturae Legem." And I might add the authority of a greater man, and a "Papist" too, who says, "Religion adds nothing to natural probity, but the consolation of doing that for love and obedience to our heavenly Father, which Reason itself requires us do in favor of virtue." And the famous "Pere Quesnelle" says on "Acts 2:21. Le vrai culte n'est plus attache a un Peuple, Le Christianisme est une Religion universelle."

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

A. When they consider how repugnant it is to the nature of God to give any arbitrary commands, then indeed the force of truth obliges them to declare there's nothing in religion but what tends to the good of mankind; but if at any time they talk otherwise, it is for the sake of such things as either directly or indirectly serve their interest.

But to remove all scruples I shall more fully prove....

## CHAP. 4

That not only the matter of all God's laws, but the penalties annexed to them, are for the good of mankind (even those who suffer for the breach of them).

B. Should I allow you, the natural knowledge we have of God is the foundation of all religion, and that arguing from the divine attributes is a most certain way of reasoning, yet is not God's glory one of his divine attributes? And does not the wisest of men say that "God made all things for himself, and the wicked for the day of evil"; and consequently God's glory, rather than the good of man, occasioned the Almighty to create man, and to give him laws?

A. As to this text, I shall answer you from Archbishop Tillotson, that "If by "God's making all things for himself" be meant that he aimed at and intended the manifestation of his wisdom, power, and goodness in the creation of the world, it is most true, that in this sense "he made all things for himself"; but if we understand it so, as if the goodness of his nature did not move him thereto, but that he has some design to serve, ends and necessities of his own, upon his creatures, this is far from him; but it's very probable that neither of these are the meaning of the text, which may be rendered with much better sense, and nearer to the Hebrew thus; "God has ordained everything to that which it is fit for it, and the wicked hath he ordained for the day of evil"; that is, the wisdom of God hath fitted one thing to another; Punishment to sin, the evil day to the evil doers." This is the sense that "Grotius," and most of the best commentators put on the text. And here let me add, that if there are innumerable places as capable of different interpretations, even with relation to God and his attributes, this sure, will be no argument not to adhere to what the Light of Nature teaches us in this matter; since where texts may be taken in different senses, things are as much left to be determined by our Reason, as if there were no such texts. And when we meet with expressions of God doing anything for his own glory, they can only mean that such is the transcendent excellency of his nature, such the inexpressible marks of his wisdom and power in all his works, that he could not have given greater had he designed nothing but his own glory. And when we impute the glory of all we do to him, we thereby signify that we have no power, but what we derive from him; and that we desire to acknowledge him the author of whatever is praise-worthy in us.

B. Though it be allowed that God framed his laws, and consequently, the sanctions that make them laws, for the good of man; yet a due regard to his own honor, the dignity of his laws and government, will oblige him to punish those who violate his laws, as for an injury done to himself, distinct from the harm that by the breach of them accrues to his creatures.

A. As no man breaks the divine laws out of contempt to his maker, or imagines he can do God an injury; so God does not make laws for one end, and require the observing them for another, that being inconsistent with the dignity of the divine legislator, his laws and government; but as it was for the sake of man that he gave him laws, so he executes them purely for the same reason; since upon his own account, he can't be in the least affected, whether his laws be, or be not observed; and consequently in punishing, no more than rewarding, does he act as a party, much less an injured party, who wants satisfaction, or reparation of honor. And indeed, to suppose it, is highly to dishonor him, since God, as he never can be injured, so he can never want reparation; and he, who is infinitely satisfied in himself, can gain no addition of satisfaction by he creatures observing his laws; nor can he, by their not observing them, be reduced to a condition of wanting satisfaction or reparation of honor, or any of those things, which, depending on the opinion of others, are main ingredients in human happiness; and yet even among men none ought to be punished, (since what is past can't be helped) but to prevent a future breach of the law; and all laws being designed for the good of the governed, "The greatest Monarch is not to punish the breach of his laws any otherwise, than the most petty state." And though all own, it would be tyranny in an earthly Governor to multiply punishments on pretense of vindicating the honor of the legislator; or as the breach of law is an injury done to him, and such like; yet some are not ashamed to impute such tyranny to God, and thereby take off from that esteem and love men must have for him, did they believe he only punished when, and no further than their good required.

Do not we bring God down to ourselves, when we suppose he acts like us poor indigent creatures, in seeking worship and honor for his own sake; nay, do we not clothe him, who has neither parts nor passions, with the worst of our infirmities, if we represent him as an ambitious, suspicious, wrathful and revengeful being.

If we dare consult our Reason, it will tell us that jealousy in point of honor and power, love of fame and glory, can only belong to limited creatures; but are as necessarily excluded from an unlimited, absolutely perfect being, as anger, revenge, and such like passions; which would make the Deity resemble the weak, womanish, and impotent part of our nature, rather than the manly, noble and generous.

Could God strictly speaking, be made angry, provoked, or grieved by the conduct of us wretched mortals, he would not enjoy a moment's quiet; but must be more miserable than the most unhappy of his creatures.

Or, had God any comfort, or satisfaction to gain from the thoughts and actions of his creatures, he would never have been without an infinity of them jointly contributing to this end.

If religion in general, and every part of it, was not useful to mankind, there would be no Reason why they should know it more than other animals; who, though they have wonderful talents (in many of which they exceed men) given them by God for preserving themselves and their species, yet are utter strangers to religion, as a thing wholly useless to them.

The sum of what I have been saying is fully expressed by "Job" in these words, "If thou sinnest, what dost thou against him? Or if thy transgressions be multiplied, what dost thou unto him? If thou be righteous, what givest thou him? Or what receiveth he at thy hands? Thy wickedness may hurt a man as thou art, and thy righteousness may profit the Son of Man."

Or, as Esdras says, "What is man that thou shouldst take displeasure at him? Or what is a corruptible generation, that thou shouldst be so bitter towards it?"

Our greatest felicity consists in having such an impartial and disinterested judge as well as legislator, that whether he punishes, or rewards, he acts alike for our good. That being the end of all his laws, and consequently of the penalties as well as rewards which make them laws; whereas your common systems of divinity represent him full of wrath and fury, ready to glut himself with revenge for the injuries he has suffered by the breach of his laws.

B. Is not God's justice as well as his mercy a divine attribute, and will not that as much oblige him to punish the breakers of his laws, as if he had been, as he is sometimes represented, full of anger, wrath and revenge?

A. Though justice and mercy can't at the same time be exercised in one and the same instance on the same subject; yet your system writers, lest they should limit these two attributes in God, extend them alike to all persons, which is making him neither just, nor merciful; because these attributes drawing contrary ways must hinder each others effect.

B. I must confess, I do not see how the same act can be an act both of justice and mercy in relation to the same person; or how it can be said that God does Justice on a sinner, when he shows mercy to him; and yet we must suppose the justice as well as mercy of God to be infinite.

A. The justice by which God is righteous in all his actions, and the mercy by which he is good or beneficent are infinite, and eternally inherent in the divine nature; but these oblige not God either to punish, or pardon any further than his infinite wisdom sees fit; and such punishing and pardoning are transient acts, the effects of his will, not properties belonging to his nature. Justice and mercy among men relate to different subjects. When the magistrate punishes a criminal, it is an act of justice to the public; and when he pardons him, it is an act of mercy to the criminal, though an act of injustice to the public; except in such circumstances where he has ground to believe that pardoning him may be no disadvantage to the public, whose interest it is not to lose a useful member.

The greatest difference in this case between God and man is, that the most powerful Monarch on earth is of the same nature with his subjects, and his good involved in the good of the whole, and by the breach of his laws may be injured; and as a party injured may exact reparation and satisfaction. But this without blasphemy can't be said of God, whose nature is infinitely superior to that of man; and who, as he was infinitely happy in himself before there was any creature to adore him, or be obedient to his will; so he must

still be such, though none of them did obey his laws, or acknowledge his being; and therefore, in doing acts of justice he can't, like the Monarchs of this world, propose any security to himself, but acts purely for the good of his creatures; and the effects of his justice (they never extending to annihilation) must not only be for the good of others, but even of the persons punished; because God, whose love infinitely exceeds that of mortal parents, chastises his children, (and all mankind are alike his offspring) because he loves them, and designs their amendment; and the reason why God in scripture is said to be "Love," must be because all his acts, by what name soever you call them, are acts of pure, impartial, and disinterested love.

All punishment of punishment's sake is mere cruelty and malice, which can never be in God; nor can he hate anything he has made, or be subject to such weakness or impotence as to act arbitrarily, or out of spite, wrath, revenge, or any self-interest; and consequently, whatever punishment he inflicts, must be a mark of his love, in not suffering his creatures to remain in that miserable state, which is inseparable from sin and wickedness.

As God' infinite goodness appears in the sanctions as well as matter of his laws, so his infinite wisdom knows how to adjust the punishment to the offense; that it may be exactly fitted to produce the desired amendment.

B. Does not your supposing that God has no other motive in executing his laws than he had in making them; viz. the good of his creatures; and that all punishment must bear an exact proportion to the offense it is designed to amend, strike at the absolute eternity of hell-torments, since there's no proportion between temporary injuries done to all men, and eternal misery of but one man; nor can everlasting torment work amendment?

A. I shall at present refer you to Dr. Burnet, de Statu mortuorum, and only say with Archbishop Tillotson, "The right that God hath in his creatures is founded in the benefits he hath conferred on them, and the obligation they have to him on that account. Now there's none who because he has done a benefit, can have, by virtue of that, a right to do a greater evil than the good he has done amounts to; and I think it next to madness to doubt, whether extreme, and eternal misery be not a greater evil than simple being is a good."

But at a proper time I shall consider what may be said from scripture as well as Reason, for the doctrine of the absolute eternity of torments; and what will be the condition of those who die before they are capable of undergoing a trial, or knowing anything of religion. A subject which I think has scarce been considered by any one.

## CHAP. 5

That God requires nothing for his own sake. No, not the worship we are to render him, nor the faith we are to have in him.

B. Your arguing from the nature of God, that everything, consequently faith in him, and even the worship and service we render to him, is solely for our own sake, will hardly go down with the bulk of mankind, who imagine they, by those acts do him some real service.

A. If they think so, it is a sign they have not been well instructed; the most eminent of our divines would teach them, that prayer itself, God knowing before-hand what we will ask, chiefly becomes a duty, as it raises in us a due contemplation of the divine attributes, and an acknowledgment of his great and constant goodness, and serves to keep up a constant sense of our dependence on him; and as it disposes us to imitate those perfections we adore in him, in being kind and beneficent to one another. There are few so gross to imagine, we can direct infinite wisdom in the dispensation of providence, or persuade him to alter those laws he contrived before the foundation of the world for putting things in a regular course.

"It is," says Archbishop Tillotson, "a great condescension and goodness in him, to accept our imperfect praise and ignorant admiration of him; and were he not as wonderfully good, as he is great and glorious, he would not suffer us to sully his great and glorious name by taking it in our mouths; and were it not for our advantage and happiness to own and acknowledge his benefits, for any real happiness and glory that comes to him by it, he could well enough be without it, and dispense with us for ever entertaining one thought of him; and were it not for his goodness might despise the praises of his creatures, with infinitely more reason than wise men do the applause of fools."

"To imagine," as Dr. Scot observes, "that God needs our services, and requires them to serve his own interest, is to blaspheme his all-sufficiency, and suppose him a poor indigent being, who for want of perfect satisfaction within himself, is forced to roam abroad, and raise taxes on his creatures, to enrich and supply himself. So that whatsoever some high-flown enthusiasts may pretend, that it is sordid and mercenary to serve God for our good, I am sure, to serve him for his good is profane and blasphemous."

As able a divine as this, or perhaps any other age has produced, observes, that "Nothing can be more false, or contrary to the nature of the Gospel, than to fancy God in part-designed to show he was Master, by enjoining some commands, which have no relation to the good of mankind. Religion was revealed to us, and not for God; who, absolutely speaking, neither wants what we think of him, nor the worship we pay him, but has manifested himself to us, only to make us happy." And, therefore, if from excess of devotion, a man neglects the duties of civil life, his is so far from doing a thing

acceptable to God, that he mistakes the end of religion, which is to render him as perfect as may be in all moral duties whatever.

If any command was ever given for the sake of God, it must certainly be that relating to the institution of the "Sabbath"; and yet we find it said, "The Sabbath is made for man, and not man for the Sabbath." So true is it in divinity as well as politics, that "The good of the people is the supreme law."

In short, the worship God requires, is either for his own sake, which supposes his happiness some way or other depends on it; or else (except he requires things to no purpose) for the sake of men, to raise and keep in their minds the contemplation of an infinitely good being, and of his laws, all founded on a disinterested love to the whole race of mankind. To imagine the worship of God is ordained on any other account, not only destroys one of the greatest motives of men's doing good to one another; but supposes God not sufficient for, or infinitely happy in himself; but subject to the passions of ambitious and vain-glorious mortals.

The generality of Christians not only believe, that in worshipping God they do him a real service, but think he is extremely uneasy, if public worship is not performed in such a manner, and with such rites and ceremonies; and being endlessly divided about these trifles, think they make their court to heaven, and highly oblige an omnipotent being, in destroying those formidable enemies of God, who presume, without their leave, to worship him after that manner they judge agreeable to his will. And, there are no measures, though ever so destructive, but what they, who do not consider the end of God's laws, may be brought into; as all history sufficiently proves. The Jews not only thought that doing the greatest good on their Sabbath was profaning the day, but were so superstitious as to think that all self-defense was then unlawful; and therefore durst not lift up their hands against their enemies, who butchered them as they pleased. And many of the primitive fathers thought the gospel forbid all self-defense; and herein they are followed by a modern sect who are their strict imitators in most things.

It is no wonder, if some ecclesiastics have not been very forward to teach people that what worship God requires of them is for their own sakes; since then they could not on pretense of worship, have claimed such powers and privileges, as are inconsistent with the common good; and people might then think it their duty so to regulate matters as that their priests, upon the whole, considering the charge of maintaining them, and other incidents, should do more good than hurt; which can never happen, till men are taught it is their duty to do good to all, notwithstanding their widest differences as to worship, or any other matter of mere religion; and it is to the honor of our clergy at present, that so many of them now endeavor to infuse such human and benevolent principles into a people, who not long since, thought they showed a sufficient zeal for religion, in hating those their priests hated, without knowing wherefore; and fired by their pulpit invectives, thought it their duty to pull down houses of religious worship, and were ready at the direction of their impious leaders, to have perpetrated worse crimes.

B. There's one difficulty, which to me seems insuperable, how to make the faith required by the Religion of Nature and of the Gospel, to have the same views, and tend to the same end.

A. If faith in God himself, no more than in any other act of religion, is required for God's sake, but our own; can faith in One sent by God be required for any other end? Especially considering that no person is ever the more known to posterity, when his name is transmitted to them. When we say, "Caesar conquered Pompey," we having no idea of either can only mean, some-body conquered some-body; and have we more distinct ideas of 'Jesus' and 'Pilate'? And though we had a personal idea of the former, he could receive no advantage or disadvantage by what we thought of him. And if faith in him was required for a cause antecedent to his being so sent, founded in his and our nature, and the relation we always stood in him; would not the eternal Reason of Things have made it manifest? That which concerned all, must be knowable by all, for which reason the Apostle says, "That which may be known of God (and none can know that which may not be known) was manifest in the Gentiles."

And, the end of Christ's coming seems not to teach men new duties, but (repentance being the first thing preached by him to his Apostles both to Jews and Gentiles) to repent of the breach of known duties. And Jesus does not say he was "sent to all Israel," but to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel"; and that "the Son of Man is come to save that which was lost." And his parable about the lost sheep, supposed that all were not lost. And when it was objected to him, that he kept company with sinners, he owns the charges, and says, "The whole need no physician, but they that are sick"; which would have been an improper answer, if he thought all stood in need of him and his spiritual physician's care. And to confirm this, he adds, "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance," and that "There's more joy in heaven for one sinner that repents, than ninety-nine just persons that need no repentance."

Which is dividing mankind into two part, the "whole" or "righteous", and the "sick" or "sinners"; and that his business was entirely with the latter. The not observing this distinction has been the occasion of many uncharitable and gross mistakes; and it is somewhat strange, that Jesus, who best knew how far his commission extended, should not be credited in this matter; especially considering that in religion there are no "nostrums," or secrets, but all may know what God requires of all; and there is but one universal remedy for all sick persons, "Repentance" and "Amendment". And if "God, who is no respecter of persons, will judge the world in righteousness"; and "they that in every nation fear him, and work righteousness shall be accepted of him"; they, certainly, are whole, and need no physician, who do of themselves what will make them acceptable to him; living as those whom Christ came to reform were taught to live. Is it not absurd to suppose, that till then none had sufficient means given them to answer the end for which all was created?

The Catholic Epistle of St. Barnabas will inform you of the sentiments of the Ancients on this head. This great Apostle (as translated by Dr. Wake) says, "That Jesus, when he chose his Apostles, which were afterwards to publish his Gospel, took men who had been

very great sinners; that thereby he might plainly show, that he "came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." "

B. This may be a forged passage.

A. Origen owns it to be genuine, for when Celsus (I will give you his words in the latin translation) says, "Jesum ascitis decem undecimve famosis hominibus, publicanis nautisque nequissimis, cum his ultro citroque sugitaffe, corrogantem cibos sordide ac turpiter." Origen says, "Extat sane in Barnabae Catholica Epistola scriptum, "Jesum ad Apostolicam sunclionem elegisse homines omni iniquitate iniquiores." And it may be said in support of St. Barnabus, that the Apostles first became Jesus's disciples upon temporal motives; and the belief of Christ's temporal kingdom was so firmly rooted in them, that Jesus neither during his life, nor even after his resurrection was able to remove it. At the Last Supper there was a strife among them, "who would be accounted the greatest?"

"The meanest (as Bishop Parker expresses it) hoped at least to have been made Lord Mayor of Capernaum." And even at his ascension the only question his disciple asked was, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the Kingdom to Israel?"

But to take away all subterfuges, what can be more required than those qualifications as will make Jesus in the last day declare, "Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the World"? And what are those qualifications, but living up to the Law of Reason, in exercising acts of benevolence, goodness, etc.? That this was the "Unum necessarium" is plain from his answer, "Depart from me ye that work iniquity," made to those who had omitted these things, though they pleaded, "They had prophesied in his name, and in his name cast out devils, and done many wonderful works." St. Paul in the first Chapter to the Romans is very large, in showing that the Gentiles could not plead ignorance of their duty, either to God or man, and as sinning against Knowledge were inexcusable; and pursuing the same subject in the second, he says that, "God who is no respecter of Persons" will deal with every one both Jew and Gentile according to their deeds; and those by which they are to be judged are either moral or immoral; and had there been anything else required by the written law, it could not be said that the Gentiles, who were not ignorant of their duty to God or man, "did by nature the things contained in the law."

And does not Paul, in another place, put our future state on the same foot, in supposing we shall be dealt with at the last day "according to what we have done in the body, whether good or bad." In short, if the tree is to be known by its fruit, and it brings forth good fruit, the means by which this good fruit is produced are not material; but if it does not, no means whatever can hinder it from being "hewn down, and cast into the fire." "The grand deciding question (says Dr. South) at the last day will be, not what you have said, or what you have believed; but what you have done more than others. God is pleased to vouchsafe the best he can give, only to the best we can do."

But to go to the bottom of the matter... Faith considered in itself can neither be a virtue, or a vice; because men can no otherwise believe than as things appear to them. Nay, can there be higher affront to God than to suppose he requires men to judge otherwise than the faculties he has given them enable them to do? Or what can be more absurd than to imagine that God will show his favor to one for believing what he could not but believe; and his displeasure to another for not believing what he could not believe; and therefore faith is only to be esteemed by the works it produces; for the strongest faith may be worse than no faith at all. "The devils themselves (who are held the most wicked beings in the universe) believe, and tremble." Happy had it been for Christendom, if zeal for, what the prevailing parties called "The Orthodox Faith," had made none but themselves to tremble.

Dr. Whitby expresses himself very accurately on this point, "Belief, or disbelief can neither be a virtue, or a crime in anyone who uses the best means in his power of being informed. If a proposition is evident, we cannot avoid believing it; and where is the merit or piety of a necessary assent? If it is not evident, we cannot help rejecting it, or doubting of it. And where is the crime of not performing impossibilities, or not believing what does not appear to us to be true?" What worse opinion can we have of the divine goodness, than to imagine a mean denial of our Reason, or a wretched affectation of believing any point too hard for our understanding, can entitle us to the favor of God.

If charity, which comprehends doing all possible good to our fellow creatures, is to be destroyed for the sake of faith; or if incapacities, fines, imprisonments, rods, gibbets, racks, and fire, are the marks of charity, the Christian world has outdone all mankind in acts of charity; but the description St. Paul gives of charity, is so far from requiring us to make others suffer, that itself "suffers long, seeks not her own, bears all things, endures all things"; and strictly enjoins us so to do.

Here is the practice of the Christian world on the side of faith, sacrificing charity, and all that's valuable to it; and on the other side, Christ and his Apostles preferring charity before it. St. Paul, speaking of himself, says, "Though I have the gift of prophesy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; And though I have all faith, and could remove mountains, and have no charity, I am nothing; Or thought I give my body to be burnt (which shows the highest act of faith) and have not charity, it profiteth nothing." And in another place he says, "Above all things put on charity, which is the bond of perfection." And again, "The end of the commandment is charity; and love is the fulfilling of the law." And, "If any provide not for his own, especially those of his own house (which is but one species of charity) he has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel."

And St. Peter likewise speaks as highly of it in saying, "Above all things have fervent charity among yourselves, for charity shall cover a multitude of sins"; which can't be said of Faith, because that "without charity profiteth nothing"; in not answering the end for which it was given. And St. James calls Love "the royal law." And St. John says, "If any man says I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar." And is not he likewise a liar, who shows all the marks of hatred to his brother, and yet pretends to love him, and makes those very marks an argument of his love? "In Jesus Christ" says the Apostle Paul,

"neither circumcision, nor uncircumcision availeth anything, but faith which worketh by Love. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thy self." And Christ, in saying "By this shall all men know ye are my disciples, if ye love one another," supposes men's loving one another so essential to Christianity, as by that token alone all men may know who are his disciples; and if they who thus love one another are of course his disciples, whose disciples then are they, who, as all men know, make people hate, and harrass one another; and pretend Christ's commission for so doing?

Origen, speaking of the faith of Christians, could not (was there anything peculiar in their faith) have said, "It is the conformity of our faith with the common innate notions of all mankind, that has given it entrance into the minds of candid and ingenuous hearers.

And our divines (since the liberty they enjoy has enabled them to think, and speak their thoughts more freely than formerly) when they write in defense of Christianity, endeavor to show that the faith the scriptures requires, is conformable to what Origen calls, "The common, and innate notions of mankind." I do not find, that the Dean of Sarum is censured for affirming in defense of Christianity, that "The scripture notion of faith is very plain and obvious, viz. not a speculative and philosophical, but a religious and practical faith; and it is built on this principle, That "God is" and that "He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him"; That religious faith is a full conviction of mind, that an eternal, immense being, infinitely wise, just, and good, not only actually exists, but is the Governor of the world; prescribes laws to the consciences, and to the actions of men; takes notice of their compliance with, or transgression of them; and will certainly reward, or punish them, according as their works have been. To live under this sense and expectation, is to live a life of faith, and is co-incident with a life of virtue. All the species, or particular instances of faith may be reduced to this, as so many branches springing from it; and to explain them in any other sense, as if faith and Reason were opposed to each other, and religion and virtue two different things, is to blind men's understandings, and to confound the plainest, and most numerous texts of scripture.

Another learned divine, in defense of the Christian religion, says, "If it should happen, that we cannot so satisfactorily evince the certainty of the scripture-history against scrupulous, nice, and skeptical wits, yet we find ourselves obliged to the belief and practice of what is really the Christian religion; because it is nothing else, as to the faith and morals of it, but Natural Religion.

The great Grotius, in a discourse owned to be the best that was ever written in defense of Christianity, lays it down as a maxim, that "It is absolutely repugnant to the goodness of God, that those, who without respect to worldly advantage, seek after the way which leads to eternal happiness; imploring withal the divine assistance, and submitting themselves entirely to his providence, should not be able to find it. And if this is too evident to be denied, can there be anything either in relation to faith or manners in the way that leads to eternal happiness, but may be found at all times and places of everyone, who diligently searches after it."

And an eminent divine, who is not looked on to have altogether so extensive a charity as Grotius, yet says, "I think we may pronounce safely in this manner, That the goodness and mercy of God is such, that he never deserts a sincere person, nor suffers any one that shall live (even according to these measures of sincerity) up to what he knows, to perish for want of any knowledge necessary; and what is more, sufficient to save him."

Which supposes no faith, or knowledge necessary to salvation, but what all are capable of acquiring by virtue of that "Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." And our saviour himself says, "Seek, and ye shall find." By this you may see what faith is required, and for what end.

If man, as our divines maintain against Hobbs, is a social creature, who naturally loves his own species, and is full of pity, tenderness, and benevolence; and if Reason, which is the proper Nature of Man, can never lead men to anything but universal love and kindness, and there be no part of Natural Religion, or any faith it requires, but highly tends to improve this kind and benign temper; how comes it to pass, that what is taught for religion in so many places of Christendom, has transformed this mild and gentle creature into fierce and cruel; and made him act with rage and fury against those who never did, or intended him the least harm? Is not this chiefly owing to such a "Faith as works" not "by Love"; and such a zeal as, not being according to knowledge, has destroyed all good works; and is utterly inconsistent with the end of all religion. But no wonder, if men, who most uncharitably damn one another for such matters of faith as they dare not trust Reason to judge of, should hate, and persecute each other on the same account.

The Epicureans, though they had exalted notions of their own God's, yet because they asserted it beneath their dignity to concern themselves with human affairs, were at all times censured as Atheists; which shows that it was accounted much the same to believe no Gods, as to believe them useless to mankind. But certainly, believing the Deity to be indolent, can't be so bad as believing him so cruel, as to oblige Christians to persecute, ruin, and destroy even their brethren, for things too, no ways contributing to the good of mankind; since this is downright "Demonism". And yet in what Age of the Church, would not those conscientious people that chanced to be undermost, have thought themselves happy, if the men in power had not had a worse notion of the Deity than that of indolence.

## CHAP. 6

That the Religion of Nature is an absolutely perfect religion; and that external revelation can neither add to, nor take away from it's perfection; and that "true religion", whether internally, or externally revealed, must be the same.

Having proved that God requires nothing for his own sake; I shall now, the way being thus prepared, show you, "That the Religion of Nature is absolutely perfect"; and "That external revelation can neither add to, nor take from it's perfection." And in order to it let me ask you why you believe the Gospel a law of absolute perfection, incapable of any addition, diminution, or alteration?

B. Because it is the law of God's giving.

A. Was it not such in itself, that could not make it so; since the law given to the Jews was for many ages the only external law. And yet, I suppose, you grant that this abrogated law was far from deserving such a character; but were there anything in this argument, it makes wholly for the Law of Nature, since that is not the first, but the last law of God's giving; if that can be said to be "last" which is eternal. A law, by which God governs his own actions; and by which he expects all the rational world should govern theirs. And therefore, notwithstanding the promulgation of the Gospel, he continues daily to implant it in the minds of all men, Christians as well as others; and consequently, it is as necessary for them as for others; as necessary since, as before the coming of Christ. And I may add too, not only necessary to be observed in this world, and ten thousand more, were there so many; but in heaven itself, and that too forever.

B. Should I grant that my argument, from the Gospel's being the last law of God's giving, does not fully prove its absolute perfection; yet it will undeniably follow from the great agreement there is between that and the Law of Nature, it neither forbidding what that requires, nor requiring what that forbids; and in a word, containing nothing in it unworthy, but everything worthy of an absolutely perfect law-giver.

A. In saying this, you own the Law of Nature to be the standard of perfection; and that by it we must judge antecedently to any traditional religion what is, or is not a law absolutely perfect and worthy of such a Being for it's legislator.

B. Indeed, it must be owned, that divines as well as others, make the same concession in relation to Natural Religion, which Dr. Prideaux does in his celebrated letter to the Deists at the end of Mahomet's life: "Let what is written in all the books of the New Testament be tried by that which is the touchstone of all religion; I mean that Religion of Nature and Reason, which God has written in the hearts of every one of us from the first creation; and if it varies from it in any one particular, if it prescribes any one thing, which may in

the minutest circumstances thereof be contrary to its righteousness, I will acknowledge this to be an argument against us, strong enough to overthrow the whole cause, and make all things else that can be said for it totally ineffectual for its support."

A. I desire no more than to be allowed, that there's a Religion of Nature and Reason written in the hearts of every one of us from the first creation; by which all mankind must judge of the truth of any instituted religion whatever; and if it varies from the Religion of Nature and Reason in any one particular, nay, in the minutest circumstance, that alone is an argument which make all things else that can be said for its support totally ineffectual. If so, must not Natural Religion and external Revelation, like two tallies, exactly answer one another; without any other difference between them, but as to the manner of their being delivered? And how can it be otherwise? Can laws be imperfect, where a legislator is absolutely perfect? Can time discover anything to him, which he did not foresee from eternity? And as his wisdom is always the same, so is his goodness; and consequently from the consideration of both these his laws must always be the same. Is it not from the infinite wisdom and goodness of God, that you suppose the Gospel a most perfect law, incapable of being repealed, or altered, or of having additions; and must not you own the Law of Nature as perfect a law, except you will say, that God did not arrive to the perfection of wisdom and goodness till about seventeen hundred years since.

To plead, that the Gospel is incapable of any additions, because the will of God is immutable, and his law too perfect to need them, is an argument, was Christianity a new religion, which destroys itself; since from the time it commenced, you must own God is mutable; and that such additions have been made to the all-perfect laws of infinite wisdom, as constitute a new religion. The reason why the Law of Nature is immutable, is, because it is founded on the unalterable Reason of Things; but if God is an arbitrary being, and can command things merely from will and pleasure; some things today and other tomorrow; there is nothing either in the nature of God, or in the things themselves, to hinder him from perpetually changing his mind. If he once commanded things without reason, there can be no reason why he may not endlessly change such commands.

I think, no man has more fully done justice to the Law of Nature, than a divine of the church which requires so many things contrary to that law; I mean the celebrated "Charron," in his treatise "Of Wisdom," whose authority is certainly not the less for being translated by the late Dean of Canterbury: He says, "The Law of Nature, by which I mean Universal Reason and Equity, is the candle of our maker, lighted up in every breast, to guide, and shine perpetually. This is the dictate of God himself, he is the King, and this the fundamental law of the universe; a ray and beam of the divine nature, which flows from, and has a necessary connection and dependance upon that eternal and immutable law, which the Almighty prescribes to his own actions. A man who proceeds on this principle is his own rule; for he acts in agreement with the noblest, and most valuable part of his nature. This man's honesty is essential to, and inseparable from him, not precarious and uncertain, and owing merely to chance and occasion; for this light and law is born with, and bred in us; a piece of our frame and constitution; and from thence obtains the name of Nature, and the Law of Nature. Such a man, by consequence, will be a good man constantly, and at all times his virtue will be uniform, and every place, every

emergency will find him the same; for this Law of Nature is perpetual, the obligation of it is lasting and inviolable; the equity and Reason of it are eternal, written in large and indelible characters, no accident can deface them, no length of time waste, or wear them out.

These first principles, which are the ground of all moral institutions, admit of no change, no increase, no abatement, no fits, no starts, no ebbings and flowings.

Why then, vain man, dost thou trouble thyself to seek abroad for some law or rule to mankind? What can books, or Masters tell thee, which thou mightest not tell thyself? What can study or travel show, which, without being at the expense of so much pains, thou mightest not see at home, by descending into thy own conscience, and hearkening attentively to its own admonitions?

To what purpose is all this labor and cost? The toilsom tumbling over of codes and institutions? The two tables of Moses, the twelve tables of the Greeks, the law written in the heart of them who had no law, and in short all the rules of equity and good laws that have anywhere been enacted and obtained in the world, are nothing but copies and transcripts produced in open court, and published from that Original, which thou keepest close within thee; and yet all the while pretendeth to know nothing of the matter, stifling and suppressing as much as in thee lieth the brightness of that light which shines within thee. As this invisible fountain within is more exuberant and plenteous, so it is more lively, pure and strong, than any of the streams derived from it; of which we need but this single testimony... That when any disputes arise about the right meaning of any positive law, the constant and best method of understanding the equity and true intent of it, is by running back to it's head, and observing what is most agreeable to the Law of Nature. This is the test and touch, this is the level, and the truth by which the rest are to be judged."

And in truth, all laws, whether the Law of Nations, or those of particular countries, are only the Law of Nature adjusted, and accommodated to the circumstances. Nor can religion, even in relation to the worship of God, as it is a reasonable service, be anything but what necessarily flows from the consideration of God and the creatures. It was this that made the great Mr. Selden say, in an expression somewhat homely, "That men look after religion, as the butcher did after his knife, when he had it in his mouth."

The Religion of Nature is so entirely calculated for the good of human society, that though a man, hurried with the violence of his passions, breaks it himself, yet he would have all others most strictly observe it; and accordingly all legislators punish the breach of it. Whereas no man rejects any positive institution himself, but is willing that all others should do so too; which plainly shows, men do not apprehend it to be for the general good of mankind. And the contending parties in religion, with equal confidence, cry, "That if our religion be not true, God must be wanting to mankind, in what concerns their eternal happiness; he must be wanting to himself, and to his own attributes of goodness, justice, and truth. It's repugnant to the very notion of a God, to let men be ignorant in a matter of such importance without any help or remedy." This reasoning, if true,

necessarily infers some universal law knowable at all times; and can't be applied to any partial religion unknown to the world for many ages; and, as not being discoverable by Reason, still unknown to the greatest part of it.

In a word, if the highest internal excellence, the greatest plainness and simplicity, unanimity, universality, antiquity, nay, eternity, can recommend a law; all these, it is owned, do, in an eminent degree, belong to the Law of Nature. A law which does not depend on the uncertain meaning or words and phrases in dead languages, much less on types, metaphors, allegories, parables, or on the skill or honesty of weak or designing transcribers (not to mention translators) for many ages together; but on the immutable Relation of Things always visible to the whole world.

And therefore Dr. Scot justly says, "Moral obligations are not founded like positive ones upon mutable circumstances (which suppose they can only oblige in certain circumstances) but upon firm and everlasting reasons; upon reasons that to all eternity will carry with them the same force and necessity as long as we are creatures of an infinitely perfect creator, it will be as much our duty as it is now, to submit our will and affections to our Reason; and as long as we are related to other reasonable creatures, it will be as much our duty as now to be kind, just, and peaceable in all our intercourses with them. So that these are such duties as no will can dispense with, no Reason abrogate, no circumstances disannul; but as long as God is what he is, and we are what we are, they must, and will oblige us."

I could, form many other considerations, show you the absolute perfection of Natural Religion; for instance, must we not, except we speak without any meaning, or have no true meaning of the "Word of God", intend by it a Being of all perfections, free from all those defects which belong even to the most perfect creatures? And must we not have an idea of these perfections, before we can know whether there is any Being who has enjoyed them from eternity; and must we not know there is such a Being from our Reason, before we can come to this question... "Whether he has made any external revelation?" Nay, examining into this questions would be to very little purpose, except we could know whether this Being is bound by his eternal word, and had not either, at the time of giving it a secret Will inconsistent with his revealed Will? Or has not since changed his Will? This can't be known from any external revelation, though it expressed itself ever so plainly; because the question being, "Whether God is obliged to do, as he in it says he will do." This must be resolved antecedently by the Light of Nature, which must discover to us the veracity of God, and the immutability of his Will; and the same reasons which will prove he could not change his Will since he made an external revelation, will prove his will was always unchangable, and at all times the same; whether internally, or externally revealed. Nor could we take a step towards proving the veracity of God, or the Immutability of his Will; or indeed, any of his perfections besides Power, without knowing that the Will of God is always determined by the Nature and Reason of Things; Otherwise, falsehood and mutability might be the Will of God, and there could be no such thing in nature as Good and Evil, but an arbitrary Will would govern all things.

Were we not capable by our Reason of distinguishing Good from Evil, or knowing from the consideration of the invariable perfections of God, what the divine Goodness could command, or forbid his creatures antecedently to any external revelation, we could not distinguish the true instituted religion from the many false ones. Or if by accident we stumbled on it, avoid running into many absurdities in the interpretation of it, through the difficulties that must attend a book written in a dead language, and so many ages since; and where through the vast variety of readings we might mistake the true reading; and though we were certain of the letter, even "the letter killeth."

If man had not natural abilities to distinguish between Good and Evil, or to know what is pleasing, or displeasing to God; how could we say he was a moral agent, or even an accountable creature?

Did we not allow that men, by the Light of Nature, are capable of forming a sound judgment in matter of religion, they may be so imposed on by controverted, or misinterpreted, not to say forged, texts, as to admit several objects of divine worship in their practice, while in their words they own but one; or, in order to advance a supernatural charity, destroy all natural humanity; and believe our love to God may be best shown by our hatred to our fellow creatures; and introduce such abominable notions, as may make religion, instead of a benefit, become a mischief to mankind.

Whereas, if we allow the Light of Nature sufficient to enable us to judge rightly in these matters, and consequently to distinguish Truth from Falsehood, we must own, since there can be no disagreement in Truth, that there's an exact conformity between internal and external revelation, with no other difference but as to the manner of their being revealed. Or, in other words, that the Gospel, since it is impossible for men at the same time to be under different obligations, can't command those things which the Law of Nature forbids, or forbid what it commands; nor can anything be a part of religion by one law, which by the other is superstition; nor can external revelation make that the Will of God, which the Light of Nature continually represents as unworthy of having God for its author.

The judicious writer of the "Rational Catechism" lately reprinted, says, "That one of the most universal causes of the great differences among men in matters of religion, is, that they have not examined things to the bottom; they have failed in their foundation work; they have too much slighted that philosophy which is the Natural Religion of men; and which being natural, must needs be universal and eternal. They have forsaken the Rule of Right Reason, which is only capable to produce true symmetry in their intellectual buildings; and they have applied themselves without any rule to the interpretation of words and phrases, which being easily susceptible of various senses, have produced as many deformed irregularities."

Though all parties alike pretend to aim at Truth, yet none of them, I think, inform us what Truth is, or wherein it consists. Now if Truth in general, implies an agreement of our ideas with the things themselves, Religious Truth, or True Religion must consist in the agreement of our ideas with those things which are the subjects of our religious inquiries; viz. The Nature of God and Man; and false religion must consist in having ideas that are

not agreeable to, or do not truly represent those subjects. And this agreement we call Truth in respect to "Theory", is what we term, in relation to "Action", fit, just, good, or reasonable. Thus God is frequently styled in scripture the "God of Truth," because his ideas of things, and the things themselves exactly correspond; and all his actions are agreeable to the relation things have to one another. And when our actions are such, we do all that's fit, just, and reasonable, all that God or man can require; and from hence too it follows, that iniquity is the same in action, as falsity is in theory.

## CHAP. 7

That Natural and Revealed religions having the same end, their precepts must be the same.

B. Allowing that the natural knowledge we have of God, ourselves, and our fellow creatures, is the foundation of all religions, may not external revelation, building on this foundation, erect a larger and nobler edifice, by extending it to such things as the Light of Nature could not reach, without contradicting anything it teaches?

A. I thought I had obviated this objection, by proving that the Religion of Nature was so perfect, that nothing could be added to it; and that the truth of all revelation was to be judged of by its agreement with it. However, since this objection is the most plausible of any you have yet made, I reply, That if our natural notions of the divine perfections demonstrate that God will require nothing of his creatures but what tends to their good; whatsoever is of this kind, is a superstructure that belongs to the Law of Nature. Or, in other words, what the reason, or Nature of Things themselves plainly point out to us; and for all other matters, which have no such tendency, you must seek another foundation, another nature very different from the divine, to build "your hay and stubble upon".

And, if it be evident from the Light of Nature, what are those relations we stand in to God and our fellow creatures; and that neither God nor man, without acting tyrannically, can require more than those require; can external revelation any more than internal exceed these bounds?

If original revelation comprehends everything obligatory on the account of its excellency. That is, everything which tends to the honor of God, or the Good of man; and these are the only ends of "traditional" religion; no arbitrary, or merely positive precepts, as not tending to the honor of God, or the good of man, can belong either to Natural, or Revealed Religion.

By the Law of Nature as well as the Gospel, the honor of God, and the good of man, being the two grand, or general commandments; all particular precepts must be comprehended under these two, and belong alike to the Law of Nature as well as the Gospel; and what does not, can belong to neither. Thus any particular precept, if by change of circumstances it ceases to contribute to the honor of God, or the good of man, much more if it become prejudicial to either, must lose its obliging force.

There must be some rule, or rules, which bind without exception, "because every exception to a rule is built on some rule or other"; and as there can't be rules, so there can't be exceptions, ad infinitum; and I suppose you will not deny, but that these two grand rules, or commandments, "The honor of God, and The Good of Man", are

obligatory without exception. And yet these would be to little purpose, could not Reason tell man how to apply them in all conditions and circumstances of life.

B. Supposing no particular precepts can oblige, if they chance to clash with either of those commandments, yet what is to be done if these two interfere with one another; must the good of man, or the honor of God take place?

A. These two Grand Laws are in effect the same, since what promotes the honor of God necessarily promotes the good of man. The more we love and honor God, the more we shall imitate him in our extensive love to our fellow creatures; who are equally the children of God. The greater our veneration is for our maker, the more it will excite us to copy those perfections of goodness and benevolence we adore in him; so that the duty of a truly religious person, and of a good subject and citizen are the same with relation to God and man; for the more he honors God, the more zealous will he be to act the patriot; and the more he does that, the more he honors God; because the happier men are, the more Reason they have to honor that God, who made them so. The way to "glorify your Father which is in Heaven," is to "let your Light so shine before men, that they may see your good works." And indeed, nothing can be plainer from scripture, than that these two great duties of the "Love of God," and "our Neighbor", include each other.

"If," says the Apostle, "a man say I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar." And, "If we love one another, God dwelleth in us; and the Love of God is perfected in us." Again, "Let us love one another; every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loves not, knoweth not God. But whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him; how dwelleth the Love of God in him?" And it was this consideration that made the great Emperor and Philosopher Marcus Antoninus say, "Thou wilt never do anything purely humane in a right manner, unless thou knowest the relation it bears to things divine; nor anything divine, unless thou knowest all the ties it has to things humane."

In a word, as man is by nature qualified to answer all the purposes of a social life, and to act a part agreeable to Reason, so in doing this he gives glory to his maker, by fulfilling the end of his creation; but if he goes contrary to the Light of Nature in acting an unsociable and hurtful part, he reflects dishonor on his creator by defeating, as far as in him lies, the design of God in making him a social creature.

But, because bigots represent these two Grand Obligations as frequently clashing; and oppose things which are for the good of man, on pretense that the Honor of God will either directly, or indirectly suffer by it; and on this pretense have frequently done such mischiefs to their fellow creatures, as to give occasion for that proverbial saying, "In Nomine Domini incipit omne malum." Give me leave to say, That we can no otherwise honor God, since that consists in having the most exalted ideas of him, than by supposing him benevolent in the most universal and impartial manner; and consequently, to imagine he can command anything inconsistent with this universal benevolence, is highly to dishonor him; it is to destroy his impartial goodness, and make his power and wisdom degenerate into cruelty and craft.

Though we have received our all from God, we can give him nothing, nor do him the least kindness, much less return kindness for kindness; and therefore, the only way we have to show our real gratitude to our great Creator and Benefactor, is to be as useful as we can to his creatures, whom we ought to love as ourselves; and if there can now be a Sin against the Holy Ghost, I should not scruple to say, It is making religion the means of destroying the end of all religion, and rendering the creature miserable on pretense of doing honor to the Creator; who, as he has impressed on "bodies," in order to preserve the natural world, a tendency to each other; so he has implanted in "minds," the better to support the moral world, a tendency to be kind and beneficent to one another. And so deep is the impression of benevolence, that we can't but applaud a person who does brave and generous actions, even though we suffer by them; and as much condemn him who acts basely and treacherously, though we are ever so great gainers.

"Is there then (says a noble author) a natural beauty of figures; and is there not as natural one of actions? No sooner the eye opens upon 'figures', the ear to 'sounds' than straight the 'beautiful' results, and 'grace' and 'harmony' are known, and acknowledged. No sooner are actions viewed, no sooner the 'human affections' and 'passions' discerned (and they are most of them as soon discerned as felt) than straight 'an inward eye' distinguishes, and sees the 'fair' and 'shapely', the 'amiable' and 'admirable' apart from the 'deformed', the 'foul', the 'odious', or the 'despicable'." How is it possible therefore not to own, "That as the distinctions have their foundation in nature, the discernment itself is natural, and from nature alone."

B. This, I own, is a beautiful description of human nature, and a strong evidence of the goodness of its author; but do men act as if they had such an innate love for virtue, or such a 'benevolent disposition'?

A. An execrable superstition has in many Christian countries, in a manner, extinguished these kind sentiments, and even all humanity and pity; insomuch that the tender sex can rejoice to hear the shrieks, and see the agonies of men expiring under the most cruel tortures; and there's scarce any place, so much does this cursed bigotry prevail, where we do not almost daily see too much reason to cry, "*Tantum Religio potuit suadere malorum.*"

The noble author now quoted justly observes, "If there be a religion that teaches the adoration and love of a God, whose character is to be captious, and of high resentment, subject to wrath and anger, furious, revengeful, and revenging himself, when offended, on others than those who gave the offense; and if there be added to the character of this God, a fraudulent disposition, encouraging deceit and treachery among men; favorable to a few, though for slight causes, and cruel to the rest; it is evident that such a religion as this being strongly enforced, must of necessity raise even an approbation and respect towards the vices of this kind, and breed a suitable disposition, a capricious, partial, revengeful, and deceitful temper. For even irregularities and enormities of a heinous kind must in many cases appear illustrious to one, who considers them in a Being admired and contemplated with the highest honor and veneration. Whensoever, therefore, a religion teaches the love and admiration of a Deity that has any apparent character of "Ill"; it

teaches at the same time a love and admiration of that "Ill", and causes that to be taken for good and amiable, which is in itself horrid and detestable."

Archbishop Tillotson, than whom none better understood human nature, says that, "According as men's notions of God are, such will their their religion be; if they have gross and false conceptions of God, their religion will be absurd and superstitious. If men fancy God to be an ill-natured Being, armed with infinite power, who takes delight in the misery and ruin of his creatures, and is ready to take all advantages against them, they may fear him, but they will hate him; and they will be apt to be such towards one another, as they fancy God to be towards them; for all religion doth naturally incline men to imitate him whom they worship.

Dr. Scot, to root out all such injurious notions as derogate from the goodness of God, very justly observes that, "God being infinitely good in his own nature, it is impossible we should conceive him to be better than he is; and therefore every false notion we entertain of his goodness must detract from it; and so much as we detract from his goodness, so much we detract from the principle reason and motive of our loving him."

And indeed, power and knowledge of themselves can't engage our love; if they could, we should love the Devil in proportion to his power and knowledge; it is goodness alone which can beget confidence, love, and veneration; and there's none of those questions, whether relating to God or man, but what may be easily determined, by considering which side of the question carries with it the greatest goodness; since the same Light of Nature, which shows us there is such a good Being, shows us also what such goodness expects. And did men consider how repugnant it is to his goodness, to require anything of them which they had no reason to obey, but because they had no power to disobey; they must abhor the notion of all arbitrary commands.

And therefore, I shall not scruple to affirm, that he who steadfastly adheres to what the Light of Nature teaches him concerning the divine goodness, as he will avoid the comfortless prospect of the atheist; the perpetual anxiety of the superstitious, the wild perturbation of the enthusiast, and the pernicious fury of the bigot; so he can't fail of the True Religion, happily feared in the middle between these extremes. And, as such a person can't but love God as he ought, so in imitation of the divine goodness, which influences all his actions, he will contribute his utmost to the good of others; and his love and kindness will be as extensive as human nature; and going on rational and evident principles, which must give him entire satisfaction, he will act a steady uniform part. And what can be wanting to a man, who has this heavenly, this god-like disposition, which renders him happy in himself; and as far as it is in his power, makes the world so too.

And since it is not easy to part with a subject, which one can scarce think of without rapture; I must say, that men can never have true sentiments of the goodness of the divine legislator, or esteem his laws as they ought, till they are convinced he requires nothing of them but what is for their good; and that they can't but be miserable as long as they swerve from rules so essential to their happiness; and that the longer they do so, the more difficult will it be to acquire a contrary habit. These notions early inculcated, will cause

men with joy to obey the divine laws, and make them in reality love God as well as be beloved by him; who has the chief regard to the heart, and above all things requires the purity of the mind; and that men should act, not out of a principle of slavish fear, but from "perfect love void of all fear."

Plutarch, speaking of religion, as it stood in the heathen church, and in his own time, represents it as full of satisfaction, hope, joy, and delight; and says, " It is plain, and evident from most demonstrable testimonies, that neither the societies, nor public meetings in the temples, nor any other diverting parties, sights, or entertainments are more delightful, or rejoicing, than what we ourselves behold, and practice in the church worship. Our disposition and temper is not on this occasion, as if we were in the presence of worldly potentates, dread sovereigns and despotic princes; nor are we here found meanly humbling ourselves, crouching in fear and awe, and full of anxiety and confusion, as would be natural to us in such a case. But where the Divinity is esteemed the nearest, and most immediately present, there horrors and amazement are the furthest banished; there the heart, we find, give the freest way to pleasure, to entertainment, and this even to excess."

And, Christians in addressing to the divine Majesty, must be filled with inexpressible joy and delight, did they consider the true notion of God; "Who (as Archbishop Tillotson says) would appear to be so lovely a Being, so full of goodness and all desirable perfections, that even those who are of so irregular understanding, as not to believe there is a God, yet could not refrain from wishing with all their hearts there was one; who takes particular care of every one of us, and loves us, and delights to do us good; who understands all our wants, and is able and willing to relieve us in our greatest straits. Is it not every man's interest, that there should be such a Governor of the world as really designs our happiness, and has omitted nothing necessary to it; as governs us for our advantage, and will require nothing of us but what is for our good; and yet will infinitely reward us for doing of that which is best for ourselves; that will punish any man that shall go about to injure us, or to deal otherwise with us than himself in like cases would be dealt withal. We have reason to believe God to be such a Being, if he be at all."

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

A. With submission, I think not, since there can be nothing in God but what is God-like; he either must be perfectly good, or not be at all. It would be well, if all who in words give this character of the Deity, were consistent with themselves, and did not impute such actions to him, as make him resemble the worst of beings, and so run into downright demonism. And let me add, men of good sense, and who mean well, will naturally fall into the same sentiments; a Shaftsbury will say the same as a Tillotson.

"If there be (says that noble author) a general mind; it can have no particular interest. But the general good, and the good of the whole, and its own private good, must of necessity be one and the same. It can intend nothing besides, nor aim at anything beyond, nor be provoked to anything contrary. So that we have only to consider, whether there be really

such a thing as a 'mind that has relation to the whole', or not. For, in unhappily, there be no Mind, we may comfort ourselves, however, that Nature has no malice. If there be really a Mind we may rest satisfied, that it is the 'best natured one in the world'. The last case, one would imagine, should be the most comfortable; and the notion of a 'common Parent' less frightful than that of 'forlorn Nature', and a 'fatherless world'. Though as religion stands amongst us, there are many good people who would have less fear in being thus exposed; and would be easier, perhaps, in their minds, if they were assured they had only mere 'Chance' to trust to. For nobody trembles to think there should be no God; but rather, that there should be one. This however would be otherwise, if Deity were thought as kindly of as Humanity; and we could be persuaded to believe, that if there really was a God, the highest Goodness must of necessity belong to him, without any of those defects of passion, those meannesses and imperfections, which we acknowledge such in ourselves; which, as good men, we endeavour all we can to be superior to, and which, we find, we every day conquer as we grow better."

In recapitulating what I have said of the agreement of Natural and Revealed Religion, I can't do it more fully than in the words of Dr. Sherlock (now Bishop of Bangor) who, in a sermon for Propagating the Gospel (where we may expect everything which recommends it) says that, "The Religion of the Gospel is the true original Religion of Reason and Nature. That the doctrine of repentance, with which the Gospel set out in the world, had reference to the Law of Reason and Nature, against which men had everywhere offended; and since repentance infers the necessity of a future reformation, and a return to that duty and obedience, from which, by transgression we are fallen; the consequence in manifestly this, that the Gospel was a 'Republication of the Law of Nature', and its precepts declarative of that Original Religion, which was as old as the creation.

This (continues he) will appear, by considering the nature of the thing itself. The notions of Good and Evil are eternally and unalterably the same; which notions are the rules and measures of all moral actions, and are consequently necessary, and constituent parts of religion. And therefore, if the Religion of Nature in her primitive state was pure and uncorrupt, which will not, I presume, be denied, though there was sufficient reason for a republication of it, because of the great ignorance and superstition which had grown upon the world; yet there could be no reason for any alteration of it. For though the world was the worse for the abusing the Religion of Nature, and might want to be reformed by a divine instructor; yet the Religion of Nature was not the worse for being abused, but still retained its first purity and simplicity. The Duties of Religion, considered as the Rules of Action, flow from the relation we bear to God, and to one another; and religion must ever be the same, as long as these relations continue unaltered. If our first parent was the creature of God, so are we; and whatever service and duty he owed in virtue of this dependance, the same is due from us; nor can this relation be ever made the ground of different duties in his case, or ours. If therefore, Nature rightly instructed him at first how to serve his Maker, our obligations being the same with his, our rule must be the same also. The case is the same with respect to the duties owing from man to man; and it would be as reasonable to suppose, that the three angles of a triangle should be equal to two right ones in one age, and unequal in another, as to suppose that the Duties of

Religion should differ in one age from what they were in another; the habitudes and relations from which they flow continuing always the same.

That the case is in fact what I have represented it to be, might be shown from the particular Laws of the Gospel, and their dependance on the maxims and principles of Natural Religion; I will content myself with one general proof, which reaches to every part of the Christian doctrine. If the Law and the Prophets hang on these two Grand Commandments, viz. The Love of God, and The Love of our Neighbor; then the doctrine of our Saviour, which is the perfection of the Law and the Prophets, must hang on them likewise. Now, if you will allow, that the Love of God, and the Love of our Neighbor are fundamentals in the Law of Reason and Nature (as undoubtedly they are) you must also allow, that whatever may be deduced from them by rational consequence, must be a precept of the Law of Nature. Whatever, therefore, hangs on these two commandments, must necessarily be a part of Natural Religion; and that all the Law and the Prophets do so hang, and consequently, the Doctrine of the Gospel, which is the perfection of them; you have had our Saviour's express testimony. Since then it appears (as I think) that the Religion of the Gospel is the True Original Religion of Reason and Nature; that it has, as such, a claim to be received independent of those miracles, which were wrought for its confirmation, will be admitted by all, who allow the force and obligation of Natural Religion; and can be denied by none who know, or understand themselves. The principles of religion are interwoven with the very frame and make of our minds, and we may as well run from ourselves, as from the sense of the obligations we are under."

B. But does not this right Reverend prelate in this sermon affirm, that there are doctrines in Christianity, which, though not different, yet are distinct from the Principles of Reason and Nature?

A. There's nothing more common with learned authors, than distinctions without any difference; yet the Bishop very cautiously words what he says, "That the Doctrines of Christianity, though not different, are distinct from the Principles of Reason and Nature;" but he does not say they are distinct from those doctrines, which flow from the Principles of Reason and Nature. And what he immediately adds, that "Our Saviour came into the world to supply the defects, not of religion, which continued in its purity and perfection, but of Nature;" plainly shows, that he thinks nothing could be added by our Saviour, to a Law that had no defects; and that the defects of Nature could only be supplied, by obliging people to live up to this Natural Law of unchangeable purity and perfection.

This is doing justice to Revealed as well as Natural Religion, and shows the author of both to be at all times, equally wise, good, and beneficent; and the Bishop ought to be valued for speaking thus plainly: O si sic omnia dixisset.

And to this Right Reverend Father, I may add the authority of the late Most Reverend Archbishop Sharp, who says, "That religion (taking that word as it signifies that universal duty we owe to God, and by which we are to recommend ourselves to his favor) is not so variable, uncertain, and arbitrary a matter, as some men do perhaps suppose it; but is a constant, fixed, permanent, immutable thing. The same now that it was in the days of the

old law; and the same then that it was in the days before the law was given; and the same both then and now that it shall be a thousand years hence, if the world should last so long. True Religion, and that which is from God, was, and is, and ever will be the same in substance in all countries, and in all nations, and among all sorts and conditions of men whatsoever; and the sum of it is, "To love the Lord our God with all our Hearts, and with all our Minds, and with all our Strength;" and next to that, "To love our Neighbor as ourselves." This was the religion that the patriarchs, and all the pious men of old lived in, and by which they obtained God's favor and acceptance; when as yet there was no revealed instituted religion in the world. That this is the sum of the Christian religion, no man can in the least doubt that has ever read the New Testament. In our Saviour's institution there is hardly any one thing recommended to us, that doth not directly relate to this matter; that is not either an instance wherein we are to express our love to God, and our neighbor; or a means whereby we may be furthered in the practicing of those duties; or an argument, and motive, and encouragement to excite us to the practicing of them. It is the design of all his doctrines to give us right notions of God, and our neighbor; to teach us how excellent, how good God is in himself, and how kind, how gracious to us; and therefore, what infinite reason we have to love and serve him; and to love and serve all mankind (who are our neighbors) for his sake.

We have an easy, and true notion of that religion which is from God, and we can never be at a loss to find out in what it doth consist; it is not a thing to be altered at pleasure; both the Law of Nature, and the Law of God; both the natural dispensation under which all men are born, and the revealed dispensation as we have either in the Old or New Testament; do sufficiently instruct us in the main heads of it. Nay, I dare be bold to say, so long as mankind do retain their nature, and are not transformed into another sort of creatures than what God made them at first; it is impossible that there should be any true religion, but what may be summed up in these two things; To love God, and our Neighbor.

## CHAP. 8

That not adhering to those notions Reason dictates (concerning the nature of God), has been the occasion of all superstition, and those innumerable mischiefs that mankind (on account of religion) have done to themselves or to one another.

Having in general shown the absurdity of not being governed by the Reason of Things in all matters of religion, I shall now in particular, show the fatal consequences of not adhering to those notions Reason dictates concerning the nature of God.

Charron, though a priest of that church which abounds with superstition, the most pernicious as well as absurd, seems to have a right notion of superstition as well as justly to abhor it, in saying that, "Superstition, and most other errors and defects in religion, are, generally speaking, owing chiefly to want of becoming, and right apprehension of God. We debate, and bring him down to us; We compare, and judge him by ourselves; We clothe him with our infirmities, and then proportion, and fit our fancy accordingly. What horrid prophanation and blasphemy is this!"

It is to this absurdity of debating God, and clothing him with our infirmities, and judging of him by ourselves, that the mediatory Gods amongst the heathen owe their rise. Had they believed a supreme Being was everywhere, and at all times knew their thoughts, they could never have taken such a round-about way of addressing him; who not only knew what they desired, but their real wants, and what would relieve them better than any mediatory Beings whatever.

B. They addressed to mediatory Beings to show their greater respect to the supreme Being; and their own unworthiness to approach him.

A. This shows what unworthy notions they had of the supreme Being; since it would be an affront even to a temporal Prince, if he was present, and heard everything you said, not to address to him, but to another, to let the Prince know what you wanted from him.

The heathen must think, if they thought at all, that those mediatory Gods could either suggest to the supreme God some reasons he before was ignorant of; or that by their importunities they could prevail on his weakness, to do what otherwise he was not willing to do.

This heathen notion, as it supposed the supreme God either ignorant or weak; so it made the mediatory Gods to have a greater kindness for, and readiness to do good to mankind; and that their solicitations made him better natured than otherwise he would be. This of course took off their love from the Supreme, and placed it on those mediatory Gods, upon

whose powerful intercessions they so much depended. However, these heathens, allowing one, and but one Most High God, did not so far derogate from the honor of the One True God, as to pretend that the most distinguished among their several Mediators was equal to him; equality and mediation being as inconsistent as equality and supremacy. And they would have made their religion an errant jumble, if they had worshipped these Gods sometimes as Mediators only; sometimes as sovereign Disposers of Things; and sometimes as both together.

Had the heathen believed God to have been a purely spiritual, invisible Being, they could never have supposed him visible to mortals; or have thought that an unlimited Being could appear under the limited form of a man, or other animal; or that an omnipresent Being could any more be in one place, or creature, than another; or that such a Being could be confined to a small spot of earth, while another equally omnipresent was in heaven, and a third descending from thence, etc. Or that one God could be sent on the errand of another God, after the manner that God Mercury was by God Jupiter; though there was nothing too absurd for the heathen to believe, after they had destroyed the unity of God; except it was, that Jupiter and Mercury, the Sender and the Sent were the same God.

The primitive fathers bitterly inveighed against these heathenish notions. Justin Martyr for instance says, "None who have the least sense, will dare to affirm, that the maker and father of the universe did appear in a small spot of earth; the God of the universe can neither ascend, nor descend, or come to any place."

Tertullian says, "He would not believe the sovereign God descended into the womb of a woman, though even the scripture itself should say it."

"It is impossible" says Eusebius, "that the eyes of mortals should ever see the supreme God; viz. Him, who is above all things, and whose essence is unbegotten and immutable." Again, "It is absurd, and contrary to all Reason, that the unbegotten and immutable nature of the Almighty God should take the form of a man; or that the Scripture should forge such like falsities."

Minutius Felix in his Apology says that, "The Deity can't die, nor can anything which is born be a God. That only is divine, which has neither beginning nor end. If the Gods get children, they would get them immortal. We must conclude those Gods to be men, of whose birth and burial we are fully satisfied."

Thus the Fathers exposed the pagan "Polytheism".

A great deal more, as you may well imagine, might be said on this head; but now I shall briefly consider what pernicious effects the having wrong and unnatural conceptions of the Deity, has occasioned among men with relation to themselves, and one another.

If we take a general view of those mischiefs mankind have at all times practiced on a religious account, either upon themselves or others; we shall find them owing to their

entertaining such notions of God, as are entirely inconsistent with his nature; and contrary to what their Reason, if attended to, would inform them of the design and end of the laws of God.

Had not numbers in all ages thought that God delighted in the pain and misery of his creatures; they could never have imagined that the best way to render them acceptable to him, was by tormenting themselves with immoderate watchings, fastings, penances, and mortifications of all sorts; and the greater the more pleasing. And even at present there are among Christians, Mahometans, and Pagans, numbers of men who devote themselves to exercises full of pain and corporal sufferings, and either wound, or mangle their own persons, or find other ways of tormenting themselves; and indeed, the superstitious everywhere think, the less mercy they show to their bodies, the more mercy God will show to their souls.

Many of the primitive Christians, instead of flying, as the Gospel directs, not only ran voluntarily to execution, but provoked their Judges to do them that favor. And under Trajan, all the Christians in a city in Asia came in a body to the Proconsul, and offered themselves to the slaughter; which made him cry, "O! ye unhappy people, if ye have a mind to die, have ye not halters and precipices enough to end your lives; but ye must come here for executioners." And this was a general practice under the Antonini; and Marcus Antoninus severely reflects on the obstinacy of the Christians, in thus running headlong into death. And St. Cyprian labors to comfort those who might be so unhappy, by the ceasing of the then persecution, to miss the Crown of Martyrdom; though one would think there were but few who wanted this consolation; since he says, "Many of the clergy, and the far greater part of the laity apostatized." But when by the Empire's becoming Christian, the Crown of Martyrdom was no longer to be obtained by the prevailing party of Christians, then exercising cruelties on themselves was esteemed the next best thing; and many devotees put monstrous hardships on themselves, while others chose poverty, rags, and nastiness; or else retired to caves, deserts, and other solitary places to sigh away their miserable lives. And ecclesiastic history is full of miracles done by such madmen as Simeon Stylites, who had no other dwelling than a pillar, on which he spent the best part of his life; and it was owing to these superstitious notions, that such numbers of Monasteries and Nunneries were soon founded to the great oppression and depopulation of the Christian world; not but that the impudent forgeries of Athanasius, and other such like Saints about miracles done by Monks, helped to increase this superstition; whilst the Prelates, though they encouraged those severities on others, were far from practicing any on themselves.

Had such notions been adhered to concerning the divine Goodness, and the Light of Nature dictates, the Egyptians, and some other pagan nations could never have thought that cutting off the foreskin (not to be performed without great pain and hazard) could have been esteemed a religious duty acceptable to a good and gracious God; who makes nothing in vain, much less what requires the cutting off, even with extreme danger as well as anguish. Had Nature required such an operation, Nature, being always the same, would still have required it.

This institution, as is proved by Marsham, and others, seems to be owing to the Egyptians, who thought all to be profane who used it not; and it was after Abraham had been in Egypt, that circumcision was instituted; in order, it is likely, to recommend his posterity to the Egyptians, on whom they were for some ages to depend; and what makes this more probable, is, that it was not until after the Lord had ordered Moses into Egypt, that "the Lord met him by the way in the Inn, and fought to kill him" for not circumcising his son. And upon Joshua's circumcising the Israelites (circumcision not being observed during their stay in the wilderness, when they had no communication with Egypt) the Lord himself says, "This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you."

The heathen world must have very gross conceptions, not only of their inferior Gods, but of the Father of Gods and men; when they imagined him of so cruel a nature, as to be delighted with the butchering of innocent animal; and that the stench of burnt flesh should be such a "sweet-smelling savor in his nostrils," as to atone for the wickedness of men; and wicked, no doubt, they were, when they had such an atonement at hand. So that the harmless were burnt to save the hurtful; and men, the less innocent they grew, the more they destroyed the innocent beasts.

Non Bove mactot Caelestia Numina gaudent;

Sed, auae praestanda est, & sine Feste, Fide.

If the pagans believed beasts were not given them for food, why did they eat them? Or, if they thought they were, why did they ungratefully throw back the Gifts of God on the donor? Or, why did they not drown, or bury them, rather than make such a stench in burning them, as many times by the number of sacrifices, might infest the very air?

It is probable, that the heathen priests who shared with their Gods, and reserved the best bits for themselves, had the chief hand in this as well as in all other gainful superstitions; while the deluded people, who many times suffered by the scarcity of provisions, caused by the great number of sacrifices, were at vast expense in maintaining these holy butchers, whose very trade inspired them with cruelty.

And it is probable, this absurd notion prevailed like all other absurdities by degrees, and at first sacrifices were only religious feasts, either in commemoration of some national benefit; where after God, their great benefactor, was celebrated, they commemorated their particular benefactors; or else feasts were made on a private account by the master of a family, upon shearing his sheep, gathering in the fruits of the earth, etc. where those that assisted him were entertained, and joyfully joined in giving thanks to the Author of those blessings, without destroying, or burning any part of the creature given for their use; and the master of the family was, no doubt, master of the ceremonies at his own feast. But this simple method not pleasing certain persons, who were resolved to have the best share in all those religious feasts, they persuaded the people that it was necessary some part of the flesh of animals was to be burnt to feed the hungry nostrils of the Deity, delighted with the sweet savor of burnt flesh; and the better part to be reserved unburnt for themselves, to whom the slaying of animals, and the offering them up was

appropriated. It is then no wonder the number of the Gods multiplied, since the more Gods, the more sacrifices, and the priests had better fare; and that they might not want plentiful feastings, the people were made to believe, that they could learn their fortunes from the entrails of the beasts they sacrificed; and this method continues to this day in those places where they have not found out an easier and better way of cheating the people.

B. You seem to be of the sentiment of the poet, who says,

Natural Religion was easy first, and plain;

Tales made it Mystery, Offerings made it Gain;

Sacrifices and Shows were at length prepared,

The Priests eat roast meat, and the people stared.

A. The pagans sacrificing of beasts was not so bad in itself, as what it soon occasioned, Human Sacrifices; which, men being of greater value than beasts, were believed to be more acceptable; and parents, stifling all natural affections, offered up their own children, as the most precious gifts they could bestow on the Gods; except offering up their own lives, and sacrificing themselves. And as this sacrifice was thought most meritorious, so the more excellent the persons, the more agreeable the sacrifice; and there are even at this day, a number of superstitious people in India, who out of great devotion throw themselves under the wheels of those heavy chariots, which carry the images of their Gods, and are crushed to death; and others, out of the same mistaken zeal, cut off their flesh, and mangle their limbs till they fall down dead; which makes the people rejoice at their sufferings, and reverence them as most holy martyrs; concluding that nothing but the truth of their religion could enable them to show such terrible marks of zeal on themselves, and become voluntary martyrs.

B. I pity those deluded people, and wonder how men can persuade themselves that the mercy of heaven can be purchased by such barbarities, as human nature left to itself would start at.

A. That the priests were everywhere for human sacrifices is no wonder; since they had the appointing the men, whom the Gods did the great honor to accept for burnt offerings. And indeed, after people once gave themselves up to believe in their priests, there was nothing too absurd to be received as divine. When Ethiopians, for instance, were once persuaded that their priests were intimately acquainted with the will of the Gods, it was too late to dispute any orders they pretended to bring from them; and therefore, their kings as well as private persons, well knowing that the commands of the immortal Gods were not to be disputed by mortals, most religiously executed themselves as soon as the pleasure of the Gods was signified to them by those sacred messengers of their will; and

this blind devotion might have continued until now, had not an infidel Prince, bred up in the profane philosophy of the Greeks, put a stop to it by surprising, and destroying at once all those holy impostors.

We learn from Bernier and others, that it has been an immemorial custom in Indostan, for the women (so great a power has superstition even over that fearful sex) to burn themselves with their dead husbands, adorned with all the incombustible riches they could procure on their own account; or that the folly of others would send by them to their dead friends. These their priests secure to themselves, by telling the credulous people that the ashes of the dead, and all burnt with them, are too sacred to be touched by any but themselves.

B. Though human sacrifices obtained among the heathen, yet sure the Levitical Law did not approve, or countenance any such practices.

A. Authors are divided, and they who maintain the affirmative say that the Levitical Law distinguishes between ordinary vows, and those vows where anything is "devoted" to the Lord; and this they pretend is plain from Leviticus 27, where after many surprising things about common vows, by which the things themselves, or money in lieu of them, were to be given to the priests; at verse 28 it comes to things devoted, and says, "Notwithstanding, no devoted thing that a man shall devote unto the Lord, of all that he hath, both of men and beasts, and of the field of his possession, shall be sold or redeemed; every thing devoted is most holy unto the Lord." And what is meant by being "most holy unto the Lord," is explained in the next verse, "None devoted, which shall be devoted of man shall be redeemed; but shall surely be put to death." And they say it was before declared that whatever was the Lord's, as the first born of man and beast, was to be slain; if God did not order its redemption. "The first-born of man was to be redeemed;" and that of "an ass, if not redeemed by a lamb, was to have its neck broke;" and the "Captives taken in war, which fell to the Lord's share," there being no order for redeeming, were, as is owned by all, "to be slain."

The prophet Micah reckons the putting every devoted thing to death among the Jewish institutions, in saying, "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousand of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first born for my transgression; the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee; but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

Here the sacrificing of a man's own children is mentioned equally with the sacrificing of beasts, which is allowed to be a Jewish institution; how absurdly must the prophet be supposed to have argued, after he hath preferred Justice and Mercy to a thing commanded by God, if he should go on to prefer it before a thing abhorred by God!

If there could be any doubt in this matter, Jephtha's Vow would clear it up; for this Jewish hero made the vow when the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and after making it he

wrought a great deliverance for Israel. The words of the vow are, "Whatsoever (or rather Whosoever) cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the Lord's; and I will offer it up to him for a burnt offering." A vow made by such an extraordinary person, and upon such an extraordinary occasion, looks as though something extraordinarily pleasing to God was designed by that vow; which, though domestic animals might have been sacrificed, must relate to persons capable of acting with design; viz. of coming out of his house to meet him after the victory; which to his great grief his only child did. Had there been any way of dispensing with this solemn vow, he, since he had two month's time to consider, would no doubt have found it out; but he says, "I have opened my mouth unto the Lord, and I cannot go back;" and he did with her according to his vow. And his daughter, worthy of a better fate, was willing her father should execute his cruel vow, only regretting that she died without being a mother in Israel; for that reason she was yearly mourned by the daughters of Israel.

St. Jerome, as well as the author of the 'Questions to the Orthodox', thinks that Jephtha's piety in sacrificing his daughter, was the reason of St. Paul's numbering him among the Just persons.

And Bishop Smalridge, in his sermon about Jephtha's Vow, says, "That all fathers, as well as our own Homilies, own that he sacrificed he daughter."

The Jews could not think it absolutely unlawful for a father to sacrifice an innocent child; since Abraham was highly extolled for being ready to sacrifice his only son, and that too without the least expostulation; though he was importunate with God to save an inhospitable, idolatrous, and incestuous city.

No wonder that a single person in the power of another might be devoted to God, since free and independent nations were so devoted; and it was by virtue of such a vow, which Israel vowed unto the Lord, that the Canaanites, who had never done Israel the least injury, men, women, and children were to be utterly destroyed.

Had the author of the epistle to the Hebrews, who reckons Jephtha among the Jewish heroes, thought the Jews abhorred all human sacrifices, he would not, at least without some apology for the lawfulness of human sacrifices, have declared one such sacrifice, where the same person was both sacrificer and sacrifice, to have been of infinite value, in saying that, "Christ offered up himself;" and that "He put away sin by the sacrifice of himself;" and endeavors to show the Hebrews that the blood of the beasts that were sacrificed, was of no value in comparison of the "Blood of Christ, who, though the eternal Spirit, offered up himself without spot to God."

B. Admitting the Jewish Law allowed human sacrifices, yet the Christian Religion, sure, forbids (since Christ, according to the Apostle, "sacrificed himself") all human sacrifices.

A. If putting innocent, and conscientious men to death on account of religion may be called "sacrificing" them, there have been more human sacrifices than ever were before in

the world, and those too not offered up to God, but to the Devil, by burning their bodies and sentencing their souls to Hell; and even at this day the Papists to persuade the spectators that those they condemn to the flames immediately go to Hell, dress them up in a San Benito, or a coat painted all over with flames and devils; and then take their leave of each sufferer with this charitable expression, "Fam animam tuam tradimus Diabolo."

B. I must own, this bigotry, which has had such terrible effects among Christians, was little felt, or known in the pagan world.

A. Is not this cursed bigotry owing to the most unworthy notions bigots have entertained of the divine perfections, imagining they do service to the Creator, by hurting and destroying his Creatures? The fiery zeal of such wretches is capable of any mischief. Most other men, though ever so wicked, have some remains of pity and humanity, some checks of conscience, and though ever so much provoked, time will assuage their anger; but the bigot feels not the least remorse, nor can time abate his fury; and he is so far from having any pity, that he glories in the cruelest actions, and thinks the more hellish acts he commits, the more he merits heaven; and very often gets the reputation of a Saint for acting the part of a devil. So that his notions of God and Religion, serve only to make him infinitely a worse man than if he had been without any belief; for then he could have no motives from the next world for doing mischief; nor would his disbelief strip him of his humanity, or hinder him, if he judged rightly of his own interest, from acting so by his fellow creatures, as, taking in the whole of his life, was best for him to do.

B. You represent bigotry more odious than it is, in making it worse than Atheism itself.

A. As bigotry is the worst sort of superstition, so you know the philosophers in general suppose superstition to be worse than Atheism itself. Plutarch, in particular, make it his business in his Tract of Disidemony, or Superstition, to prove that Atheism, though an opinion false, and even stupid, yet is far less hurtful to men than superstition; and reflects less dishonor on the Deity itself. For he interprets Disidemony, to be the "Continual dread of a Deity no less mischievous than powerful;" which is the most odious character that can belong to any intellectual Being, and "has given birth to those shocking notions, and dismal rites in divine worship, that have either run men into Atheism, and exposed religion itself to ridicule and contempt; or made mankind the dupe of designing knaves, and taught fierce bigots to exercise, and then sanctify the most inhuman barbarities."

He says, "The Atheist knows no God at all; the Superstitious none but what is monstrous and terrible; mistaking for dreadful, what is most kind and beneficent; for tyrannical, what is truly paternal; for mischievously inclined, what is full of providential care; nay, for a Being brutally savage and fierce, what is mere goodness itself. Shall then (he adds) the Atheist be counted impious, and not this superstitious person much more so? I, for my part, had rather men should say there is no such person as Plutarch, than that he is a man inconstant, fickle, prone to anger, ready to revenge himself upon the slightest occasion, and full of indignation for mere trifles, etc. And yet this is no more than what the superstitious think of the Deity; whom of consequence they must as well hate as fear. They worship, indeed, and adore him; and so do men even those very tyrants they would

be glad of an opportunity to destroy. The Atheist contributes not in the least to superstition; but superstition having given out so hideous an idea of Deity, some have been frightened into the utter disbelief of any such Being; because they think it much better, nay, more reasonable, that there should be no Deity, than one whom they see more reason to hate, and abominate; than to love, honor and reverence. Thus inconsiderate men, shocked at the deformity of superstition, run directly into its opposite extreme, Atheism, heedlessly skipping over true piety, that is the Golden Mean between both."

So much for this philosopher of the Gentiles. I shall now quote a noble Christian philosopher, who says, "Atheism leaves a man to sense, to philosophy, to natural pity, to laws, to reputation; all which may be guides to an outward moral virtue, though religion were not. But superstition dismounts all these, and erecteth an absolute monarchy in the minds of men. Therefore Atheism did never perturb states; for it makes men wary of themselves, as looking no further. And we see the times inclining to Atheism (as the time of Augustus Ceasar) were civil times. But superstition hath been the confusion of many states, and bringeth in a new "Primum Mobile," that ravisheth all the spheres of Government."

I grant that next to a real bigot an Atheist in masquerade may do most mischief; but then it is hiding the Atheist, and impersonating the bigot; and under color of promoting religion, advancing priest-craft. And there are no small number of these Atheists, if what the famous Scaliger says is true, "Quicumque Jesuitae vel Ecclesiaslici Romae in honoribus vivunt, Athei sunt." And men must have a great deal of charity to think better of any protestant, whose pretended zeal carries him, contrary to the principles of his religion, into persecuting measures.

Had the heathen distinguished themselves by creeds made out of spite to one another, and mutually persecuted each other about the worship of their Gods, they would soon have made the number of their votaries as few as the Gods they worshipped; but we don't find (except in Egypt that Mother-land of superstition) they ever quarreled about their Gods; though their Gods sometimes quarreled and fought about their votaries. No, it was a maxim with them, "Deorum injurie, Diis curae."

By the universal liberty that was allowed amongst the Ancients, "Matters (as a noble author observes) were so balanced, that Reason had fair play; Learning, and Science flourished; wonderful was the harmony and temper, which arose from these contrarieties. Thus superstition and Enthusiasm were mildly treated; and being let alone, they never raged to that degree as to occasion bloodshed, wars, persecutions and devastations; but a new sort of policy has made us leap the bounds of natural humanity, and out of a supernatural charity, has taught us the way of plaguing one another most devoutly. It has raised an antipathy that no temporal interest could ever do, and entailed on us a mutual hatred to all eternity. And savage zeal, with meek and pious semblance, works dreadful massacre; and for heaven's sake (horrid pretense) makes desolate the earth."

And as this noble author observes, "The 'Jupiter of Strangers' was, among the Ancients, one of the solemn characters of divinity, the peculiar attribute of the supreme Deity;

benign to mankind, and recommending universal love, mutual kindness and benignity between the remotest, and most unlike of the human race. Such was the ancient heathen charity and pious duty towards the whole of mankind; both those of different nations and different worship."

But, good God! how different a character do bigots give us of the Deity, making him an unjust, cruel, and inconsistent Being; requiring all men to judge for themselves, and act according to their consciences; and yet authorizing some among them to judge for others, and to punish them for not acting according to the consciences of those judges, though ever so much against their own.

These bigots thought they were authorized to punish all those that differ with them in their religious worship, as God's enemies; but had they considered that God alone could discern men's hearts, and alone discover whether any, by conscientiously offering him a wrong worship, could become his enemies; and that infinite wisdom best knew how to proportion the punishment to the fault, as well as infinite power how to inflict it; they would surely have left it to God to judge for himself, in a cause which immediately related to himself; and where they were not so much as parties concerned, and as likely to be mistaken as those they would punish. Can one, without horror, think of men breaking through all the rules of doing as they would be done unto, in order to set themselves up for standards of truth for God as well as man? Do not these impious wretches suppose that God is not able to judge for himself; at least, not able to execute his own judgment? And that therefore, he has recourse, forsooth, to their superior knowledge or power; and they are to revenge his injuries, root out his enemies, and restore his lost honor, though with the destruction of the better part of mankind?

But, to do the propagators of these blasphemous notions justice, they do not throw this load of scandal on the Law of Nature; or so much as pretend from thence to authorize their execrable principles; but endeavor to support them by traditional religion; especially by misinterpreted texts from the Old Testament; and thereby make, not only Natural and Revealed Religion, but the Old and New Testament (the latter of which requires doing good both to Jews and Gentiles) contradict each other.

But to return.... If what the Light of Nature teaches us concerning the divine perfections, when duly attended to, is not only sufficient to hinder us from falling into superstition of any kind whatever; but, as I have already shown, demonstrates what God, from his infinite wisdom and goodness, can, or cannot command; how is it possible that the Law of Nature and Grace can differ? How can it be conceived, that God's Laws, whether internally, or externally revealed, are not at all times the same, when the author of them is, and has been immutably the same forever.

## CHAP. 9

Human happiness being the ultimate design and end of all tradition, as well as Original Revelation, they must both prescribe the same means; since those means, which at one time promote human happiness, equally promote it at all times.

B. Should I grant you that Natural and Revealed Religion, as they have the same author, must have the same ends; and that the ultimate end of all God's laws, and consequently, of all religion, is human happiness; yet there are several things to be considered as subordinate ends. And here, may not Original and Traditional religion differ, since it is allowed by all that how immutable soever these subordinate ends are, yet the means to promote these ends are various and mutable?

A. Your allowing these means to be various and mutable, supposes no such means so prescribed in the Gospel; but that, agreeably to the Law of Nature, they are to be varied as best suits that end for which they were ordained. To imagine the contrary, is to make things, dependent on circumstances, independent. Things that are proper only under some circumstances, necessary under all circumstances; nay, to make ends mutable, and means immutable; and that these are to continue the same, though by change of circumstances they become prejudicial; nay, destructive to the end for which alone they were ordained.

The more necessary any end is, there's the more reason for people to be left at liberty to consider in the vast variety of circumstances, and those too perpetually changing, what means may be most proper for obtaining that end; since these have no worth in themselves, can only be valued according as they more or less conduce to the purpose they were intended for; and where God does not interpose, it is incumbent on human discretion, chiefly ordained for this end, to make such alterations as the Reason of Things requires.

Did not God always employ the most fit and most suitable means, he would act contrary to the rules prescribed him by his own unerring Reason; and so he would, did he not leave men at liberty to use such means, as their Reason, given for that purpose, told them was fittest to be done, in all those circumstances in which he had placed them; because that would be requiring of them a conduct contrary to his own; and consequently, and conduct highly irrational. And therefore to alter one's conduct, as circumstances alter, is not only an act of the greatest prudence and judgment, but is consistent with the greatest steadiness.

As far as divine wisdom excels human, so far the divine laws must excel human laws in clearness and perspicuity; as well as other perfections. Whatever is confused and perplexed, can never come from the clear fountain of all knowledge; nor that which is obscure from the Father of inexhaustible light; and as far as you suppose God's Laws are

not plain to any part of mankind, so far you derogate from the perfection of those laws, and the wisdom, and the goodness of the divine legislator; who, since he has the framing of the understanding of those to whom he dictates his laws, can't but adapt one to the other. But how can we say that infinite wisdom speaks plainly to mankind through all generations, except we allow that his commands extend not beyond moral things; and that in all matters of a mutable nature, which can only be considered as means, he obliges them to act according as they judge most proper for bringing about those ends.

Upon any other hypothesis, human laws have vastly the advantage of the divine; as being published in the language the subjects understand, in a plain simple style, without any allegorical, metaphorical, hyperbolic, or other forced way of expression; and if time discovers any inconvenience, or any unforeseen difficulties want to be cleared up, the Legislator is ready at hand; or if in the mean time, any doubts about interpreting the law arise, there are standing judges (accountable to the Legislator) in whose discriminations people are to acquiesce. But mankind are not to expect that the divine Legislator will, from time to time, make any changes to his laws, and communicate them to all nations in the languages they understand; nor can there be any judges with a power to oblige people by their determinations; because such a power being without any appeal, is the same as a power to make divine laws; and consequently, the only tribunal God has erected here on earth (distinct from that he has mediately appointed by men for their mutual defense) is every man's own conscience; which, as it can't but tell him, that God is the author of all things, so it must inform him that whatever he finds himself obliged to do by the circumstances his is in, he is obliged by God himself; who has disposed things in that order, and placed him in those circumstances. It is for want of observing this rule, that the divine writings are rendered so obscure; and the infinity of sermons, notes, comments and paraphrases, which pretend to speak plainer than God himself, have increased this obscurity. If whatever tends to the honor of God and the good of man, is evident from the Light of Nature, whence comes all this uncertainty, perplexity, doubts and difficulties? Is it not chiefly owing to the denying people that liberty, which God, out of his infinite goodness, has allowed them by the Law of Nature; and hindering them from judging for themselves of the means, which best tend to promote this end; and imposing on them, by the terrors of temporal and eternal punishment, such needless speculations and useless observances, as can't be considered either as means or ends?

B. You know that divines, though they can't deny what you say to be true in general; yet they think there's an exception as to church-matters, and that here men are not permitted to use such means as they themselves think best; but such only as those, who set up to be their "Spiritual Governors", shall appoint.

A. Nothing can be more absurd, than to suppose God has taken this power from the people, who have an interest to preserve religion in its purity (every deviation from it being to their prejudice) and placed it uncontrollably in the hands of men, who, having an interest in corrupting it, do, generally speaking, so manage matters, as if religion was the means, and their power the end for which it was instituted. We do not find that the Mahometan clergy cause any confusion or disorder among the Musselmen; and the Pagan priests are scarce taken notice of in story, so little mischief did they do; while all Church

History is full of the vilest, and most pernicious things perpetrated by Christian priests. The Christian morals, you must own, are too pure and plain to cause this difference; what then can it be imputed to, but that independent power, which those priests usurped; which, though they claimed it as derived from heaven for promoting Godly discipline, has occasioned general disorder and confusion? Endless have been the quarrels ambitious priests have had with Princes upon the account of this power, to the stopping of justice, and subversion of almost all civil polity. Nor have the Ecclesiastics been less embroiled among themselves, each set striving to engross a power which can belong to no mortal. And the Bishops, when they had no others to contest with, have ever contended among themselves about superiority, the rights of their Sees, and the limits of their jurisdictions; and when their choice depended on the people, they frequently, especially in their contentions about the greater Sees, run things on to blood and slaughter. And I appeal to their own historians, whether the Ecclesiastics ever scrupled any method to obtain this power; and whenever they got it, whether an insupportable tyranny over body and mind, with the utter ruin of religion, was not the consequence? And whether it had not, where exercised to the height, more fatal effects than all the superstition of the Gentiles? Look the world round, and you shall everywhere find men more or less miserable, as they have been more or less debarred the right of acting according to the best of their understanding in matter relating to religion.

While every church or congregation of Christians, as in the Apostolical days, chose and maintained their own ministers, and ordered among themselves whatever required a special determination no inconveniences happened; but as soon as this simple and natural method was broke, and the Clergy were formed into a closely united body, with that subordination and dependence they had on one another; the Christian world was enslaved, and religion forced to give way to destructive superstition.

Which could never have happened if the Christians had observed these general rules, obligatory by the Light of Nature, as well as the Gospel; and which are alike given to every Christian, and oblige one as well as another; such as, "Doing all things for the honor of God, for edification, for order, for decency; for fleeing false teachers, seducers, deceivers; for avoiding scandal, and offending weak brethren, etc." And here since everyone must judge for himself, and can't make over this right to any other, must not all Church-matters be managed by common consent?

In a word, if we consider the infinite variety of circumstances; the different manners and customs that prevail in different places; the prejudices of the weak, ignorant, and superstitious; and the designs of ambitious men; there's nothing of a mutable nature, if once esteemed immutably fixed by God, but must sometimes become prejudicial to the end it was intended to promote; especially in a religion designed to extend over the whole world, as well as to last to the end of it. There are but two ways of avoiding this inconvenience; either to suppose that the founder of this religion will, from time to time, himself ordain such alterations in things of a mutable nature, as those circumstances, which are different in different places do require; or else, that he has left the parties concerned, to act in all places according to discretion in such mutable matters.

B. You labor this point; but there are few of your sentiment.

A. If you mean Ecclesiastics, perhaps you are in the right; though I'm sure I have the Church of England on my side, if judicious Hooker may be allowed to understand its constitution, as well as the nature of 'Ecclesiastical Polity'. He, in the tenth section of his third book, maintains this proposition, that "Neither God being the author of laws, nor his committing them to scripture, nor the continuance of the end for which they were instituted, is reason sufficient to prove they are unchangeable." Where he admirably well distinguishes between things in their own nature immutable, and matters of outward order and polity, which he supposes daily changeable; and says, "The nature of every law must be judged by the end for which it was made; and by the aptness of the thing therein prescribed to the same end. When a thing does cease to be available to the end which gave it being, the continuance of it must appear superfluous. That which the necessity of some special time doth cause to be enjoined, binds no longer than that time; but does not afterwards become free. Laws, though both ordained of God himself, and the ends for which they were ordained continuing, may notwithstanding cease, if by alteration of time, or persons, they are found insufficient to attain to that end. In which respect why may we not presume, that God doth even call for such a change or alteration, as the very Nature of Things themselves doth make necessary? God never ordained anything which could be bettered, yet many things he hath, that have been changed, and that for the better; that which succeedeth as better now, when change is required, had been worse, when that which is now changed was initiated. In this case, men do not presume to change God's ordinance, but yield thereunto, requiring itself to be changed." And he applies this reasoning honestly in saying, "The best way for us were to hold, even as they do, that in the scripture there must needs be found some particular form of Church-polity, which God has instituted, and which, for that very cause belongeth to all churches, to all times; but with any such partial eye to respect ourselves, and by cunning to make those things seem the truest, which are the fittest to serve our purpose, is a thing we neither like, nor mean to follow."

And let me add, that most, if not all our divines from the Reformation till the time of the Laudean Faction, were in the same sentiments; and from the mutability of such things as are means to an end, proved there could be no particular form of church polity established by divine authority. And they argued from the example of good King Hezekiah, who, without regard to the salutiferous virtue the Brazen Serpent once had, broke it to pieces when perverted to a superstitious use.

And all who believe means in their own nature are mutable, must, if consistent with themselves, agree with Mr. Hooker. This is so very apparent, that nothing but interest can make anyone talk otherwise; therefore, I shall only quote the late Dean of Canterbury, who, in a sermon preached before the University of Cambridge, and published at their request, says, "That the very temper and composition of the scripture is such, as necessarily refers us to some other rule; for this is a system of mixed, and very different duties, some of eternal and universal obligations; others occasional and particular, limited to times and circumstances; and when these occasions and circumstances ceased, the matter of the command was lost; and the whole reason and force of it sunk of course.

Now those things being oftentimes delivered promiscuously, and in general terms, men must of necessity have recourse to some other rule to distinguish and guide them in making the just difference between the one, and the other sort."

And what other rule is there, by which we can distinguish rightly in this important matter, but what arises from the things themselves; those which have an innate worth and goodness are of an eternal and universal obligation; others, which have no such worth, can be considered on as means occasionally accommodated to particular times, places, persons, and circumstances; which, of course, must cease to oblige, when they cease to conduce to the end for which they were appointed; or others become more conducive. And this will more fully appear, if we consider, as the above mentioned author observes, that, "The circumstances of human life are infinite, and depend on a multitude of accidents not to be foreseen; and consequently not to be provided against. Hence laws must run in general terms, and sometimes the intent of the law is best fulfilled by running contrary to the letter; and therefore, reason and honesty, must guide us to the fitness of the thing, and a great scope must be left to equity and discretion." And surely, we must not suppose, that reason, honesty, equity, and discretion will teach us one thing, and the traditional law another; especially considering that in all God's laws, it is Reason of the law that makes it a law.

B. By the reasoning of such divines, I can't perceive the use of any occasional command, since they suppose these can't oblige people longer than they judge it fit to observe them; otherwise there could be no difference between occasional and eternal precepts; and what they judge fit and proper to be done, they are obliged to do without any occasional commands; so that according to them, whether there are, or are not any occasional commands, human discretion is left at liberty to judge what is fit, or not fit to be observed; which, I think, is supposing all such commands needless; yet the authors you quote suppose, contrary to your hypothesis, there have been such command; particularly in relation to the Jewish state.

A. The Jews, taking the story to be literally true, being upon their coming out of Egypt a free people, had a right by the Law of Nature to choose what Government and Governor they pleased; and God would not act so inconsistent a part, as to deprive them of any of these rights he had given them by the Law of Nature; and therefore did not take upon him the civil administration of their affairs, till he had obtained their express consent; so that here he acted not as Governor of the Universe, but by a power derived from the people by virtue of the Horeb Covenant; and the presumption is that where there is no such contract, God will not exercise such a power; especially considering that though the Jews rejected God himself from reigning over them, and were for choosing a new King, yet he bids Samuel thrice in the same chapter to "hearken to the voice of the people;" but of this, and all other arguments of this nature, more fully hereafter.

B. The Reasons you have given do not fully satisfy me, but that some things may be required by God as Governor of the Universe, which are merely positive; nay, that rites, and ceremonies, signs or symbols might be arbitrarily enjoined, and so intermixed with

matters of morality, as to bind the consciences of all men at all times; and therefore, if you please, we will review this point.

A. With all my heart; for this alone is the point that must decide this question, "Whether Natural and Revealed Religion do really differ?" As for Natural Religion, that, as you well know, takes in all those duties which flow from the Reason and Nature of Things, and the relations we stand in to God and our fellow creatures; and consequently was there an instituted religion which differs from that of Nature, its precepts must be arbitrary, as not founded on the Nature and Reason of Things, but depending on mere will and pleasure; otherwise it would be the same with Natural Religion. And though it is difficult to prove a negative, yet, I think I fully show you, by adding other reasons to those already mentioned, that God, the Great Governor of the Universe, can't give mankind any such precepts; and consequently, that Natural and Revealed Religions only differ in the manner of their being delivered.

## CHAP. 10

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

In order to settle this point, it is necessary to see how far this Natural Law extends; it not only commands that evil doers should be punished, but that men, according to the different circumstances they are under, should take the most proper methods for doing it, and vary as exigencies require; so it not only requires that justice should be done men as to their several claims, but that the readiest, and most effectual way of doing it should be taken; and the same may be said of all other instances of this nature. If God interposes further, and prescribes a particular way of doing these things, from which men at no time, or upon no account ought to vary; he not only interposes unnecessarily, but to the prejudice of the end for which he thus interposes. And as to matters relating to the worship of God, it is the Voice of Nature that God should be publicly worshipped; and that men should do this in the most convenient way, by appointing among themselves time, place, persons, and all other things which require special determination. And certainly there's as much reason that things of this nature should be left to human discretion, as any other whatever; considering the different conditions and circumstances which Christians may be under, and the handle designing men might otherwise take to impose upon weak persons what they please, on pretense of divine right.

This being premised, the sole question is, Whether God, who, for many ages, did not command, or forbid anything but what was moral or immoral; nor yet does so to the greatest part of mankind, has, in some cases, broke into the rule of his own conduct, and issued out certain commands which have no foundation in Reason; by obliging men to observe such things as would not oblige were they not imposed; or if the imposition was taken off, would immediately return to their primitive indifference?

To suppose then, such commands, is it not to suppose God acts arbitrarily, and commands for commanding-sake; and that too under the severest penalties? Can such commands be the effects of infinite wisdom and goodness: or, if there be no Reason, why a thing should be done at all; or if be done, why it should be done rather this way than that way; or why men should not vary means, as they judge most conducive to the end, for whose sake alone they were designed? Can there be any cause, why a Being, which never acts unnecessarily, and whose commands are all the effects of infinite wisdom, should interpose? It is so far from being necessary for God to interpose in such cases as these, that it only serves for a handle to human imposition; for there's nothing so indifferent, but may, if believed to have divinity stamped upon it, be perverted by designing men to the vilest of purposes; and in truth, there's nothing of this nature introduced into religion; but what, I'm afraid, has been some time or other so perverted.

One would think it a thing wholly indifferent, who sprinkled an infant, or from whose hands we received the sacramental bread and wine, as long as the rules of decency and order were observed; yet has there not been a set of men, who, on pretense of a divine right to do those things, have made the Christian world believe they have a discretionary power to bestow or withhold the means of salvation; and, by virtue of this claim, have overawed them into slavish obedience, and a blind submission.

There's no good or hurt in drawing two lines cross one another, and yet what have not priests made the poor people believe they could do by virtue of it; as curing diseases, driving away devils, and doing an infinity of other miracles? And in short, they have made it one of the chief engines of their craft, for the better carrying on of which, they persuaded the people to adore the cross, miraculously found after it had been buried about three hundred years, and the wood of it has since so wonderfully increased, as to be able to make innumerable crosses, whereof each bit contained the virtue of the whole.

Confession of Sins to honest and judicious persons, might be of service, by the prudent advice they gave how to avoid the like sins for the future; but the Popish Priests claiming a power by divine right to absolve people upon confession, have been let into the secrets of all persons, and by virtue of it have governed all things; and have made the sins of people, not to be pardoned but on their terms, and harvest of the priests.

Among the Jews, the 'anointing with oil' was looked on as very medicinal, and generally used in sickness; they prayed, and anointed the sick in hopes of a recovery. But though the anointing in these colder climates is thought of no use in sickness, yet the Papists have built a most superstitious practice on it, which, for the greater reverence, they call the Sacrament of Extreme Unction; and which their priests are not to administer as long as there's hopes of recovery.

What can be more indifferent or harmless, considered in themselves, than the ceremonies of 'Oiling the heads of Kings', and 'Laying hands on the heads of Elders or Presbyters'; and yet what absurd pretenses have not priests, who have the art of turning the most indifferent things to a superstitious use, drawn from thence to the prejudice of both Church and State.

It was an ancient custom among the Hebrews, when they prayed for a blessing on any person, to lay hands on him. Thus Jacob laid his hands on the sons of Joseph, and Moses on Joshua. And among the primitive Christians, when any congregation chose their minister, they prayed that he might duly execute that office, to which they had ordained him; and in praying, he that was the Mouth of the Congregation (the whole assembly not being able conveniently to do it) laid his hands on him.

This gave rise to the clergy to pretend that their 'Laying on of hand upon a man' was necessary to qualify him for the Ministry; they by that act having given him the Holy Ghost, and an indelible character with certain spiritual powers; so that the people must either be without Ministers, or take one they had thus ordained, however unqualified they might think him.

It's a thing indifferent in itself, whether men meet to pray in this or that place; but the Christians out of a superstitious reverence to the relics of the Martyrs, usually praying at their tombs, came by degrees, as their reverence for them increased, to offer their prayers to them; which was a great change from their praying for them among their other dead, as was in the first ages a general practice; and which, some of our High-church priests are zealous for restoring, and pretend we have better proof for its being a Catholic doctrine, than for the authority of several books of scripture.

The primitive Christians frequently consulting their clergy in relation to marriages, gave them a handle to set up for Judges by divine right in all matrimonial causes; and many prohibited degrees as well as spiritual relations, such a 'God fathers' and 'God mothers', etc. were introduced, to give the clergy frequent opportunities to grant, at their own price, Dispensations; by which means the succession and inheritance not only of private estates, but of principalities and kingdoms, in a great measure depended on them. And as an appendix to this spiritual usurpation, they hooked in the cognizance of all 'carnal causes', incontinence in single as well as married persons. Thus you see how easily mankind may be abused where it is believed that religion can require anything inconsistent with the rights and liberties God has allowed them by the Law of Nature; and how dangerous it is to trust anything with men, who pretend a divine right to whatever they can lay hands on. To give an instance how severely this divine right was exerted by the Pope, as head of the Church, "Robert, King of France, having married a Lady of the House of Burgundy, a match very advantageous to the State, and though he had the consent of his Bishops, yet he, and the whole Kingdom were excommunicated by the Pope, because this Lady was in the fourth degree of consanguinity, and the King had been God-father to her child by a former husband; which so distressed the poor King that all his servants, except three or four, deserted him; and no one would touch the victuals which came from his table, which were, therefore, thrown to the dogs."

I shall give one instance more, Men are obliged to avoid as much as they conveniently can the infectious conversation of immoral persons; and it was, no doubt, at first a duty in a special manner, for Christians, compassed round with pagans, to observe this rule in relation to their own body, and agree to shun any such person as one who had his father's wife; and though this is no more than what is done in private societies, and was easily practiced amongst Christians when they were but few; yet because the Minister might collect the votes and declare the Opinion of the Assembly, the Clergy by degrees not only excluded the congregation from this their natural right; but claimed, as given them by Heaven, a power to excommunicate whom they pleased, even their own sovereign; and that too for things relating to their own interest. And they forbid not only their own congregations, but all Christians, on peril of their salvation, to avoid all commerce with the excommunicated, and ordained that if he did not in forty days give the Church satisfaction, the Magistrate was bound to imprison him, and confiscate his estate. And the Princes, instead of resenting these encroachments on their power, had so little sense as to pass this into a Law; not imagining this treatment would reach them; but they soon felt that the Church claimed the same power over them as over other Christians; looking on all to be alike subject to their spiritual power. And accordingly Kings were often excommunicated, their subjects absolved of their Oath of Alligiance, and their dominions

given to more orthodox Princes to be held of the Church; which, no doubt, was in a flourishing condition, when she, as often as her interest required it, absolved Princes of their oaths to their subjects, and Subjects of theirs to their Sovereigns; and by virtue of her spiritual power, disposed, as she thought fit, of men's estates, honors, and even lives. What has been may be! And in all probability would be, were the Clergy as united among themselves as formerly.

In a word, there's nothing in itself so indifferent, either as to matter or manner; but if it be engrafted into Religion, and monopolized by the priests, may endanger the substance of it. This has been plainly shown by those divines, who, at the Reformation, and since, have argued against all impositions; they have proved that most of the corruptions of Popery began at some rites, which seemed at first very innocent; but were afterwards abused to superstition and idolatry, and swelled up to that bulk, as to oppress and stifle True Religion with their number and weight. And, indeed, there's no sect, but complains how superstitiously rites and ceremonies are used by all, except themselves; and since I am defending the liberties given by God to mankind, and which, without ingratitude to the donor, as well as injury to ourselves, we can't give up; I do not doubt you will hear me with patience, because if I prove my point, I shall, it may be hoped, in some measure put an end to those otherwise endless disputes, which divide and distract the Christian world.

Whatsoever is in itself indifferent, whether as to matter or manner, must be so to an all-wise Being, who judges of things as they are; and for the same reason that he commands things which are good, and forbids those which are evil, he leaves men at liberty in all things indifferent; and it is in these only, that our liberty of acting as we please consists.

Things, which are of no value in themselves, can be no motives to an all-wise Being to punish us; or to clog our happiness with any such needless observances. And consequently, men, as far as they assert our future happiness, or any part of it, to depend on such things, do so far derogate from the wisdom and goodness of God; and from those motives we have to love and honor him. The arbitrary commands of a Tyrant may be obeyed out of fear, but just and rational laws alone can move the affection of rational creatures.

It is reasonable to believe an all-wise and gracious Being is so fond of indifferent things that he subjects his children to suffer even in this life on their account? And yet you must own, if he has made these the subject of his commands, they ought to suffer everything rather than not observe them; but if God will not have men punished in this world, and much less in the next, upon the account of things indifferent; they can never be the subject of his commands.

Though a judicious author supposes a form of divine worship in itself indifferent, may be required by God for the sake of peace and unity; yet at the same time he contends that "God does not expect we should comply with that form, if it brings misery on ourselves, or confusion to the public; because that would be preferring a thing in itself indifferent to the happiness of our lives, and the peace of the public; and that to suppose the contrary,

would be breaking in upon the spotless character of our heavenly Father, by representing him not as a wise and good, but as a peevish and ill-natured Being; who takes an unreasonable resentment at the prudent conduct of his children." But will not this as strongly infer, that God could not command the observing such things, which, if observed, would destroy his moral character; and which, instead of preserving peace and unity, would bring misery on private persons, and confusion on the public; whereas these blessings of peace and unity can never be obtained by a forced conformity, nor by any other method than allowing people their natural liberty in all such matters.

And if Religion consists in imitating the perfections of God, what perfection of God do the superstitious imitate, when they contend, as "pro Aris & Focis", for forms, rites, and ceremonies?

If in heaven there's no room for arbitrary precepts to incumber that moral goodness which is the sole business of the blessed above; what could hinder us, did we but make that too our only concern here, from enjoying a sort of Heaven on Earth, free from all tyrannical impositions and endless quarrels about indifferent things?

In a word, If there's nothing in a religion which comes from God, but what is most excellent; what room can there be for indifferent things? Can such things as have no worth or excellency contribute to the worth or excellency of religion? If they could, the more they abounded, the more excellent would religion be; which yet is so far from being true, even in the opinion of those who contend for such things, that even they, when they are to show the excellency of the Christian religion, recommend it for having but few of those things; which is supposing it loses it's excellency in proportion to what it has of this nature; and that they have a higher and more honorable conception of it, who believe it has no such mixture to spoil its beauty, and destroy its simplicity; but that, like its author, it is wholly spiritual, and as such, worthy in its divine original.

One would think these men must appear ridiculous to themselves, who, though they recommend the Christian religion, as purely spiritual, in opposition to the carnal religion of the Jews; yet at the same time contend, it has some ordinances as little spiritual as any the Jews had; and put a greater stress upon them, than ever the Jews did on any of theirs.

If God's word shows infinite wisdom, there's no reason to imagine but his laws do the same; but then they must be moral laws, for these alone can speak his wisdom as plainly to all mankind as his works do. They both alike have the character of infinite wisdom impressed on them, and both alike discover their divine original.

If all God's laws are of a piece, must they not all be built on the eternal Reason of Things? Nay, if that be sufficient to determine him in one case, it must be so in all; but on the contrary, if God acts arbitrarily in any one instance, he must, or at least may, do so in all; since no foreign cause, nothing but his nature, could make him act so. But God forbid we should imagine that any of his laws have not impressed on them the same character of the highest wisdom and goodness that is impressed on the whole frame of nature, and on every part of it.

It is impossible men should have an just idea of the perfections of God, who think that the dictates of infinite wisdom do not carry their own evidence with them; or are not by their own innate worth discoverable to all mankind. Were it not so, how could they be distinguished from the uncertain opinions of weak and fallible men; not to say the whimsies and reveries of crack-brained Enthusiasts? How shocking it is to hear divines cry that, "Certain things were they not to be adored as mysteries, ought to be exploded as absurdities."

If we suppose any arbitrary commands in the Gospel, we place Christians in a worse condition than those under no law but that of Nature, which requires nothing but what is moral; and consequently the greatest part of mankind, who are judged by the law they know, and not by the law they do not know, are, on this supposition, in a better condition as to the next world than Christians; because they do not hazard the favor of God by any mistakes, or omissions in such matters.

To suppose some men, who, though they exactly obey the Law of Nature; may yet be punished, even eternally, for not obeying another law besides, would be to make God deal infinitely less mercifully to them than those that have no other law. And yet in this miserable case are all Christians involved, if the Gospel requires such things as the Law of Nature does not; and that too under the severest penalties. And I may add, that even as to temporal happiness, they who think original and traditional revelation don't differ, are in the better state, since they must delight in their duty, as having nothing required of them, but what they most evidently see tends to their good; and consequently are free (no small happiness) from all panic fears; while they, who believe there are things merely positive in religion, of which Reason affords no light how they are to be performed, or even what they are, must lie under endless doubts and fears; and according to the measure of their superstition, be wrought upon by designing men to hate, damn, and persecute on another about such observances, as we see is actually done everywhere by the different sects; who are so absurd as to believe a God of infinite wisdom and goodness can give his creatures arbitrary commands.

When men are at a loss to know from the Nature and Reason of Things, what to believe, and what to practice, and see everywhere endless divisions; they must be in continual dread of such an arbitrary Being, as their unmanly and irrational fears represent God to be. Plutarch makes this difference between the Atheist and the Superstitious; "One believes no Deity, the Other wishes there was none; if he believes, it is against his will; mistrust he dares not, or call his thoughts into question; but could he, with security, at once throw off that oppressive fear, which, like the Rock of Tantalus, impends, and presses over him, he would with equal joy spurn his enslaving thoughts, and embrace the Atheist's state and opinion, as the happiest deliverance. Atheists are free of superstition, but the superstitious are in will and inclination Atheists, though impotent in thought, and unable to believe of the divine Being as they willingly would."

And I am afraid this is now the case with most of these superstitious persons, who represent God as a most cruel Being, damning men to eternity, even for mistaken opinions; or about such things too as have no foundation in Reason. And perhaps, the

endeavoring to drown all thoughts of such a tyrannical Deity, is no small occasion of that gross immorality, which does everywhere prevail, and must ever do so where superstition abounds.

It is mens not being governed by the Reason of Things, which makes them divided about trifles; and lay the utmost stress on such things as wise men would be ashamed of. It is on the account of these, that the different sects set the highest value on themselves, and think they are the peculiar favorites of heaven; while they condemn all others for opinions and practices not more senseless, than those themselves look on as essentials. And were it not in so serious a matter, it would be diverting to see how they damn one another for placing religion in whimsical notions, and fantastical rites and ceremonies, without making the least reflection on what they themselves are doing.

What reason has a Papist, for instance, to laugh at an Indian, who thinks it contributes to his future happiness to die with a cow's tail in his hands, while he lays as great a stress on rubbing a dying man with oil. Has not the Indian as much right to moralize this action of his, and show its significancy; as the Papist any of his mystic rites, or Hocus Pocus tricks, which have as little foundation in the Nature and Reason of Things?

Suppose one came from the furthest parts of the earth, vouching it as a divine revelation, that the nails of our children are, at certain times, to be pared by certain persons with certain ceremonies, in order to make them capable of salvation; and that such as died before their nails were thus pared, remained forever in a very wretched state; would not everyone here, without examining into the man's mission, or without regard to those spiritual things signified under Paring of Nails, reject this belief as unworthy of having God as its author? And yet as absurd as this may appear to us, the superstitious Mahometans think they are obliged to have their nails pared during their sickness, if they apprehend it to be mortal.

They must be very little acquainted with the nature of a spiritual religion, who think it can any ways consist in not going to rest when men are sleepy; not eating, when they are hungry; or abstaining from, or using certain meats and drinks at stated times; and in washings, sprinklings, and lustrations by blood or water; and yet these things were in so high a repute with most of the Pagans, that they thought they would atone for the greatest immoralities.

Ah nimium faciles, qui crimina caedis

Flumineae Tolli posse putetis aqua.

The Taurobolia, or the bedawbing a man in a pit, all over with the blood of a bull, which fell on him through holes made in the plank on which the beast was slain, was believed to wash away all his sins, and he, happy man, regenerated to eternity, provided that once in twenty years he renewed this mystical regeneration; and not only great persons, but whole cities might perform this religious ceremony by deputation, and receive the

benefit. A short account of this you meet with in Fontenelle's History of Oracles taken from Prudentius.

Though the heathen priests made the people believe they could be clean from their sins by sacrifices, and other external things, yet it was as themselves had the application of them; they were the persons to whom the Gods had committed the "Religious Rubbing Brushes"; though the men of sense among the Pagans were not thus to be imposed upon; which made Tully say, "Animi labes nec diuturnitate evanescere, nec amnibus ullis elui potest."

Lactantius seems to be of another opinion, in saying, "Give us one that is unjust, foolish, and a sinner; and in one instant he shall be just, prudent, and innocent; with one laver all his wickedness shall be washed away."

In a word, while priests of what denomination soever pretend authority to absolve sinners, and the people are so void of sense as to rely on their absolution; Natural Religion, which puts the whole stress on internal penitence and true virtue in the soul, will be despised; as allowing no Succedaneum, no commuting, or compounding with heaven. And, indeed, all such commuting, or compounding powers, wherever they are supposed to be lodged, serve as a Bank of Credit for the transgressors; and are a mighty incitement to all manner of villainy. And in former days, the great men, after having oppressed and plundered people, thought to compound with heaven, by letting the clergy share in the spoil; and it is on this notion so many Abbies and Monasteries have been founded; and the superstitious, as long as they are persuaded there is any virtue in externals, will, as we see by constant experience, chiefly depend on such things.

And I may add, this doctrine, that one man may not only merit for himself by doing more than God requires of him; but that the merit of such actions may be transferred to another who has done less than God requires of him, has been a great incitement to wickedness; and those who have believed they might comfortably rely on it; nothing being thought too hard for Merit and Meditation.

There are none, I think, now so absurd, as in words to maintain that there is the least variableness in God, much less that he is an arbitrary Being, commanding things for commanding-sake; yet are not they, who assert there are merely positive things in the Christian Religion, guilty of this absurdity; in supposing that God, who had the goodness for a long time, not to confine mankind to any indifferent things; yet at length changed his mind, and repented of this great goodness; and arbitrarily deprived, they will not say, all mankind, but no small number of this liberty; and required of them the belief of certain useless speculations, and the practice of certain indifferent things on the severest of penalties? And when they lament that the Christian world, even from the earliest days, has been in perpetual broils about such things, do they not suppose that God can give arbitrary commands, and that those commands are involved in great obscurity? Whereas, if merely positive things were required, those, not being like matters of morality, discoverable by their own light, would be made as plain as infinite wisdom could render them; and to prevent their being perverted to serve ill purposes, we should have been

punctually told when, how, and by whom, those arbitrary things should be applied, as well as that they were to be obligatory forever.

B. If God has revealed anything in a way liable to be mistaken, he can't be displeased with sincere people for mistaking it.

A. And that's very true, but certainly the end of God's giving any precepts, was not to deliver them so obscurely that people might be faultless if they mistook; but to make them so plain that they could not well mistake. And this is agreeable to infinite wisdom directed by infinite goodness, which certainly, will give us equal degrees of evidence for religious truths, which so much concern us, as it had done for truths of less importance.

For my part, I can't help being of the sentiments of a learned divine, who, after having proved at large, that morality is capable of demonstration, concludes with saying, "I shall only here repeat, that man being a reasonable agent, Reason is the Law and Rule of his actions; there's no truth in mathematics more clear, and incontestable than this. Now it is as easy for him, when he examines his actions by this rule, to see whether they agree together, as to know when two lines are compared, whether they are of the same, or different length. Why should demonstration be confined only to numbers and figures? Nay, if we argue from the importance of morality, it will be found much more agreeable to the Goodness of God, who gave us our intellectual faculties, that the truths which are of the greatest concern to us, should, if we make a due use of those faculties, admit of the greatest evidence." I think, I need only add, that was there anything but morality necessary to constitute true religion, we might be certain that the goodness of God would give us a demonstration for it, equal to that he has given us for morality.

But if there are now things which are not moral in religion, does not that suppose a change of mind in God; and then where will you stop? For if changeableness was not a perfection, it would not be in him; and if all his perfections are infinite, must not this be so too? And is it not reasonable to suppose, he may command some indifferent things today, and others tomorrow; or some in this part of the world, and some in another; as at first to command moral, and then super-add indifferent things? If indifferent things can contribute to the perfection of revelation, there may be endless revelations; and the last always more perfect, as having new indifferent things. It was not about things of a moral nature that there were divisions in the primitive times, and that Montanism spread itself over a great part of the Christian world; the followers of Montanus, as Eusebius writes, boasting that he was the Paraclet, and that Priscilla and Maximilla his companions were his prophetesses? And Tertullian, as is owned by the translator of his Apology, says, "That the law, and the prophets were to be looked on as the Infancy; and the Gospel, as it were, the Youth; but that there was no complete perfection to be found, but in the instruction of the Holy Ghost, who spake by Montanus:"

But to make some apology for his lapsed father, he says, "The Arch-heretic Montanus supported the character of a most holy, mortified, and extraordinary person for a considerable time; the world rung with the visions and prophecies of him, and his two damsels; and the face of severity and saintship consecrated their reveries, and made real

possession pass for inspiration. The churches of Phrygia, and afterwards other churches, divided upon the account of these new revelations; and even the very Bishop of Rome himself for some time espoused the vanity, and made much of the impostor."

And had he continued to do so, it might, perhaps, have obtained; since we find the Christians in the primitive times came entirely into a more gross imposture, and had faith for the most palpable forgery of the Sybilline Oracles being writ by real prophetesses under divine inspirations. And the whole Christian world for more than the two first centuries believed the Millenarian Heresy, as it is now called; for which, indeed, they pretended other proofs than the divine authority of the Sybils. And there has scarce been an age since, but where some such attempt has been made, and that of Popery, which is the grossest attempt on the credulity of man succeeded; though the monks in the twelfth century were not satisfied even with that; and therefore endeavored to introduce a new Gospel called "Evangelium eternum", or the Gospel of the Holy Ghost; and affirmed that this Gospel of the Spirit excelled that of Christ's, as much as the Light of the Sun does that of the moon.

In short, to this belief, that there may be things in religion not founded on Nature and Reason, and that these may be reserved for this, or that period of time, are owing all the visions and reveries among the Papists, and other Enthusiastic Christians; and upon this absurd notion is founded the most spreading religion of Mohomet; who pretended to be the Paraclet promised by Jesus to complete and perfect all things.

And in a word, to this belief are owing all the false revelations that ever were in the world; and except we allow there are certain tests flowing from the Nature of Things, whereby the meanest capacities may distinguish truth from falsehood, we shall forever be liable to be imposed on by madmen as well as impostors.

If God can command some things arbitrarily, we can't be certain, but that he may command all things so; for though some commands should relate to things in their own nature good, yet how can we know that an arbitrary Being commands them for this Reason; and, consequently, since an arbitrary will may change each moment, we can never be certain of the will of such a Being.

And to suppose that God by the Law of Nature leaves men at liberty in all indifferent things, and yet by a positive law restrains this liberty in certain parts and ages of the world; is to suppose God determines one way by immediate, and another way by mediate revelation; both laws too subsisting at the same time.

B. We say that the Law of Nature, however immutable as to good and evil, has enjoined nothing in relation to indifferent things; so that there's a large field in which all legislators, human as well as divine, may exert their power.

A. It's true, the Law of Nature leaves men at liberty to act as they please in all indifferent matters; and if any traditionary law abridges this liberty, so far it is contrary to that of Nature, and invades those rights which Nature and it's author has given mankind.

Human legislators are so far from having a right to deprive their subjects of this liberty, that their main end in submitting to government is to be protected in acting as they think fit in all such cases where no one is injured; and herein the whole of human liberty consists, the contrary being a state of mere vassalage; and men are more or less miserable, according as they are more or less deprived of this liberty; especially in matters of mere religion, wherein they ought to be most free.

To suppose God has "in these last days", as it is called in scripture, deprived any part of mankind of that liberty which before was granted to all, would be to make him act unreasonably; since all those reasons which obliged him to command good, or forbid evil things, must wholly cease in relation to a subject, which by being indifferent partakes of neither; and was there any reason to deprive men of their liberty in indifferent things, they would then cease to be indifferent; on the contrary the same reasons which oblige him to interpose in things, whose nature is either good or evil, forbids it in indifferent things; since men's happiness depends on their liberty in all such things. Whatever is unreasonable for God to do, is contrary to the eternal law of his nature; and consequently, to deprive men in any of these cases, is to make the dictates of his nature, and his revealed will to clash.

In short, the Law of Nature either is, or is not, a perfect law; if the first, it is not capable of additions; if the last, does it not argue want of wisdom in the Legislator, in first enacting such an imperfect law, and then in letting it continue thus imperfect from age to age; and at last thinking to make it absolutely perfect, by adding some merely positive and arbitrary precepts. To what end does God continually impress on Christians, as well as others, this Law of Nature; since that was needless, had they another more perfect, and more plainly revealed.

If men have been at all times obliged to avoid superstition, and embrace True Religion, there must have been at all times, sufficient marks of distinction; which could not arise from their having different objects, since God is the object of both; but from the having different notions of him and his conduct. Nay, allowing that the Light of Nature was sufficient to teach men, that True Religion consists in entertaining such notions of God as are worthy of him, and superstition in such as are unworthy of him; yet that alone would not enable men, when they came to particulars, to distinguish one from the other. And, therefore, the same Light of Nature must teach them what notions are worthy, and what unworthy of having God for their author. But how can there be such marks flowing from the nature of religion and superstition, if what is superstition by the Light of Nature, can, notwithstanding these marks, be made a part of religion by revelation?

If he, who resembles God most is like to understand him best, is it not "because (as Bishop Tillotson observes) he finds these perfections in some measure in himself, which he contemplates in the divine nature; and nothing gives a man so sure a notion of things as practice and experience; every good man is in some degree partaker of the divine nature, and feels that in himself, which he conceives to be in God; so that this man does experience what others do but talk of; he sees the image of God in himself, and is able to discourse of him from an inward sense and feeling of his excellency." But this would not

be just arguing, if God was an arbitrary Being, and could command his creatures things which carried no perfection or goodness with them.

In a word, if the essence of religion consists in believing and practicing such things, as have a real worth and excellency in them, tending to the honor of God, and the good of man; the essence of superstition, which is its opposite, must consist in imagining to propitiate an all-wise and gracious Being by such things as have no worth or excellency in them; such as may as well not be done, as done; or as well done this as that way. Superstition is defined by Dr. H. More (and all our divines speak to the same purpose) to be "That impiety, by which a man considers God to be so light or passionate, as with trivial things, either to be appeased, or else moved to wrath." Can anything be more trivial, than useless speculations, and unnecessary observations?

How numerous soever Christians may be, though they are but few in comparison of the rest of mankind, yet the Church of Christ, by the confession of all parties, is a very small body of men; each sect, though they complain of one another's uncharitableness, yet they, excluding all other sects either as Schismatics or Heretics, confine salvation to their own church. Dr. Scot says, "While men behold the state of religion thus miserably broken and divided, and the professors of it crumbled into so many sects and parties, and each party spitting fire and damnation at its adversary; so that, if all say true, or indeed any two of them in five hundred sects, which there are in the world; (and for ought, I know, there may be five thousand) it is five hundred to one, but that every one is damned, because every one damns all but itself; and itself is damned by four hundred and ninety-nine." How, I say, can these differences be avoided, as long as men take into their notion of religion; nay, make unnecessary things necessary parts of it; and if many of our divines have got rid of these absurd notions, is it not because they are, what in contempt they are called, "Rationalists"?

The pious Bishop Taylor says, "He could not expect, but that God would some way or other punish Christians, by reason of their pertinacious disputing of things unnecessary, undeterminable, and unprofitable; and for their hating and persecuting their brethren (which should be as dear to them as their own lives) for not consenting to one another's follies and senseless vanities.

But is there any certain way of judging what are unnecessary or unprofitable things, but by the rules here laid down, of judging things from their nature and tendency? Without observing this rule, there's nothing so trifling or senseless, but people may be persuaded to place religion in, and be in continual broils about it. If a dispute between two preachers, whether the first words in the Lord's Prayer should be translated "Father our" or "Our Father", could cause such disturbances as it lately did at Hamburgh; what is there so indifferent, if once believed to belong to religion, but may have pernicious effects? And there are a number of instances in all ages, where things as trifling have occasioned strange disorders.

And the primitive times were not free from them, the memorable Mr. Hales gives this account of the then quarrel about the time of keeping Easter; "It being (says he) upon

error taken for necessary, that an Easter must be kept; and upon worse than error, if I may so speak, (for it was no less than a point of Judaism forced upon the Church) thought further necessary, that the ground for the time of our keeping that feast, must be rule left by Moses to the Jews; there arose a stout question whether we were to celebrate it with the Jews on the fourteenth moon, or the Sunday following? This matter, though most unnecessary, most vain, yet caused as great a combustion as ever was in the Church; the West separating from the East for many years together. In this fantastical hurry, I can't see but all the world were Schismatics, neither can anything excuse them from that imputation, excepting only this, that we charitably suppose that all parties, out of conscience did what they did. A thing which befell them through the ignorance of their guides; and because through sloth and blind obedience, men examined not the things they were taught; but like beasts of burden patiently crouched down, and indifferently underwent whatever their superiors laid upon them."

"And can we (says Dr. Burnet) think without astonishment, that such matters, as giving sacrament in leavened or unleavened bread; or an explication of the procession of the Holy Ghost, whether it was from the Father and the Son, or from the Father by the Son; could have rent the Greek and Latin churches so violently one from another, that the Latines, rather than assist the other, looked on till they were destroyed by the Ottoman family?"

And other instances he gives of fatal disturbances from disputes about trifles; as the removing the pictures of certain Bishops out of a church occasioned Image-worship; for those who opposed their removal, went so far as to maintain that pictures ought not only to be set up, but worshipped; which caused not only great disorders in the East, but made Italy to revolt at the Pope's Instigation. This contest too begat another... Whether the Sacrament was only the image, or the very substance of Christ?

I might add, that the dispute between the Lutherans and Calvinists about the Sacrament, though it has created such fierce animosities, is merely verbal; since both sides are against any change in the elements, and both sides maintain a real presence of the body of Christ.

I need not have gone to distant times and places for instances, our own late divisions and persecutions about such trifling things, as rites and ceremonies, nay, habits and postures, would in all likelihood have ended in the utter ruin both of Church and State, had not the blessed revolution interposed.

B. I would not have you treat what you call Postures so irreverently; ought not people to kneel at their devotions?

A. The whole Christian world for many ages thought not; and the Anti-Nicene Fathers, as well as the Council of Nice, forbad kneeling on all Sundays, and all other days between Easter and Whit-sunday.

In a word, if those sentiments must be true, which tend most to make men love and honor God, by giving the brightest and noblest ideas of his wisdom and goodness; and which free him from the imputation of change and inconstancy, and from imposing from time to time arbitrary commands; and from partiality and respect of persons; what I have laid down must be true; and the contrary, not only false, but impious. But however, since this is a point of the utmost consequence, I shall proceed to other arguments, and show how inconsistent it is with the Good of Mankind, to suppose any merely positive things to be part of the ingredients which constitute True Religion.

## CHAP. 11

That supposing things merely positive, to be made to ingredients of religion, is inconsistent with the good of mankind, as well as the honor of God.

The happiness of human society, and of every particular member consisting in the due observation and practice of morality; whatever diverts or discourages that, must be highly injurious. Now it is certain that the mind may be overloaded as well as the body; and the more it is taken up with the observation of things, which are not of a moral nature, the less it will be able to attend to those that are; which requiring the application of the whole man, can never be rightly performed, while the mind, by laying stress on other things, is diverted from attending on them; especially if it is to be considered that superstition, if once suffered to mix with religion, will always be gaining ground. If Reason is to be heard, no unnecessary things will be admitted; but if it be not, where shall we stop? If people are once brought to believe such things are good for anything, they will be apt to believe they are good for all things; at least, pretenses will never be wanting for a thousand things of this nature; and there's nothing of this kind that men will not come into, if they are made to believe they carry any merit with them. These they will be punctual in observing, in hopes to atone for indulging themselves in their darling vices; which they, not knowing how to leave, and yet willing to secure their future happiness, hope by the help of such expedients, to compound with heaven; and then vainly imagine that they cannot have too many of these things; or show too great a zeal for the practice of them, when assured by their priests (who, as they fondly imagine, know the whole Counsel of God) that they are acceptable to the Deity; and tend to make him propitious to the religious observers of them.

The Banditti, and Bravoës most religiously observe the orders of their church about not eating flesh, etc. and instances of this nature might be produced from the most immoral in all churches; who, not satisfied with practicing such things themselves, think it highly meritorious to compel others to do the same. And indeed, the substance of religion has been destroyed in most places to make room for superstition, immorality, and persecution; which last, when men want reason to support their opinions, always supplies its place. And are there not even now, numbers in the best reformed churches, of the same sentiments with those Dr. Scot complains of? "Who (he says) persuade themselves that God is wonderfully concerned about small things, about trifling opinions and indifferent actions, and the rites and modes, and appendages of religion; and under this persuasion the hope to atone for all the immoralities of their lives, by the forms and outsides of religion; by uncommanded severities, and affected singularities; by contending for opinions, and stickling for parties; and being pragmatically zealous about the borders and fringes of religion."

And I'm afraid it is but too true, as is observed in the 'Letters concerning Inspiration'; that "Men have thought it an honor to be stilled that which they call zealous orthodox, to be firmly linked to a certain party, to load others with calumnies, and to damn by an absolute

authority the rest of mankind; but have taken no care to demonstrate the sincerity and fervor of their piety, by an exact observation of the Gospel morals; which has come to pass by Reason that Orthodoxy agrees very well with our passion; whereas the severe morals of the Gospel and incompatible with our way of living."

And one would be apt to think that zeal for speculative opinions, and zeal for morality were scarce consistent, should he form his judgment from what he sees most practiced. "Moral goodness (says Dr. Scot) is the great stamp and impress that renders men current in the esteem of God; whereas on the contrary, the common brand by which Hypocrites and false pretenders to religion are stigmatized, is their being zealous for the positives, and cold and indifferent as to the morals of religion.

And, in general, we find mere moral principles of such weight, that in our dealings with men, we are seldom satisfied by the fullest assurance given us of their zeal in religion, till we hear something further of their character. If we are told a man is religious, we still ask "What are his moral?" But if we hear at first that he has honest moral principles, and is a man of natural justice and good temper, we seldom think of the other question, "Whether he be religious and devout?"

It is a general observation in history, that where anything has had the appearance only of piety, and might be observed without any virtue in the soul, it easily found entertainment among superstitious nations. Hence Tacitus says, "Men extremely liable to superstition are at the same time as violently averse to religion." Le Clerc not only makes the same remark, but says, "Those who had a confused notion of Christian piety, believed it could not maintain itself without the help of outward objects; and I know not what heathenish pomp, which at last extinguished the spirit of the Gospel, and substituted Paganism in its room."

Whatever appearance it might have of piety, what virtue did it require in the practice to make war with the Sacacens for the Holy Land; (though considering the impieties committed there, it might be called Unholy); yet so highly meritorious was this project for several ages thought to be, that vast shoals of Bigots for its sake have frequently gone from the West to fight men in the East, who never did them any harm; and these Bigots, presuming on the merits of this sacred expedition, were most enormously flagitious.

B. If this was superstition, it was built on a notion which had long before prevailed, of believing it a piece of piety to visit Jerusalem, and the holy places there. The great St. Jerome says, *Certe adorasse ubi steterunt Pedes Domini, Pars Fidei est*, etc. "That it was undoubtedly a part of faith, to go and worship in those places, where the feet of our Saviour had once stood; and to have a sight of tracks, which at this day continue fresh, both of his nativity, cross, and passion."

A. I believe St. Jerome, when he says "We ought to worship where the feet of our Lord stood", chiefly intended his last footsteps when he mounted up to heaven; "the print of which" says Sulpicius Severus, "remain to this day."

Quaecunque applicabantur, insolens humana suscipere terra respueret, excussis in ora apponentium saepe marmoribus. Et cum quotidie confluentium Fides certatim Domino calcata diripiat, damnum tamen aerean non sentiat; & eadem adhuc sui speciem, velut impressis signata vestigiis, terra custodit. And Paulinus says the same.

A strict observance of such things as require no virtue in the practice, and may with great ease be punctually observed, makes the superstitious liable to be everywhere cheated by your Tartuff's, or Mackw????hs; while men who put the whole stress on morality, are represented not only as enemies to religion, but even as encouragers of immorality, and mere Libertines, because they are for liberty in thinking; though this can't fail to make men see the folly of licentiousness in acting.

And indeed, we shall generally find those Ecclesiastics who inveigh most against Freethinking, are the real encouragers of immorality; by screening, not only the most immoral of their own order on pretense of preserving the honor of the Church, though to the dishonor of religion; but also by laying the most moral, if they differ from them in speculative points, under constant sufferings, to enforce them to play the hypocrites with God and man; and who is it that the corrupt part of the clergy show more inveteracy against, than the very best men of their own order, for not approving these methods?

It's worth while to remark how differently men are treated for civil and ecclesiastical offenses. "In civil cases (as a right reverend and excellent author observes) the offender, if his crime be not capital, suffers a temporary punishment, proportioned to the fault he has committed; and when he has undergone that, nothing further is required of him, except in some cases to find security for his good behavior for the future. But in cases of heresy, there is no regard to the 'degree' of the offense, in the punishment inflicted. Nor is there any end of it. It is not enough to have suffered the severest punishment, though for the smallest offense; it is not enough to give security of not offending for the future. The innocent offender must declare (what it is oftentimes impossible he should declare) that he has changed his sentiments, and is become Orthodox; and this, though perhaps no methods of conviction have been used, except that of Punishment be one. This is the miserable condition of a Convict-Heretic: The punishment which fell on him for expressing thoughts heretical, he must continue to endure for barely thinking; which is a thing not in his own power, but depends on the evidence that appears to him. He must forever (cruel Justice!) forever suffer for his own private thoughts (though they go not beyond his own heart) the punishment which some overt act has once drawn upon him. To punish, "toties quoties," as often as those overt acts are repeated, will not satisfy the Holy Office. If an offender can't be convicted of heresy, he may however be convicted of writing, or speaking against the established doctrine of the Church; and that will draw on him all the same consequences that heresy would do." Well does this author advise, "Whatever you do be Orthodox. Orthodoxy will cover a multitude of sins, but a 'cloud of virtues' cannot cover the want of the minutest particle of Orthodoxy.

It may, I doubt not, be demonstrated with the greatest evidence, that all Christian churches have suffered more by their zeal for orthodoxy, and by the violent methods

taken to promote it, than from the utmost efforts of their greatest enemies. But for all that, the world will still think the same methods necessary."

A man who has, or pretends to have a blind zeal for those things, which discriminate his sect, though he be ever so immoral, too often finds countenance and credit from them; and though thought a devil by others, passes for a Saint with his own party. So that the superstitious lie under strong temptations to be vicious, and the vicious to act superstitious.

Nay, "The way that men are apt to take to pacify God, is (as Archbishop Tillotson observes) by some external piece of religion. Such as were sacrifices among the Jews and Heathens. The Jews pitched upon those which were most pompous and solemn, the richest, and most costly; so they might but keep their sins, they were well enough content to offer up anything else to God; they thought nothing too good for him, provided he would not oblige them to become better. And thus it is among ourselves, when we apprehend God is displeased with us. We are content to do anything, but learn righteousness."

"As to the Church of Rome (he says), They (as they pretend) are the most skillful people in the world to pacify God. I do not wrong them by representing them enquiring after this manner: Shall I go before a crucifix, and bow myself to it, as to the High God? To which of the Saints or Angels, shall I go to mediate for me, and intercede on my behalf? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of Paternosters, or with ten thousand Ave-Maries? Shall the host travel in procession, or myself undertake a tedious Pilgrimage? Or shall I lift myself a Soldier for the Holy War? Shall I give my estate to a Convent? Or chastise and punish my body for the sin of my soul?"

The Heathen Priests, knowing what would render them most acceptable to the people, made the chief part of their religion to consist in gaudy shows, pompous ceremonies; and other tricks as served to amuse and divert them, who, provided they entertained such notions as created a reverence for their priests, and believed they could discover them the will of their Gods; might be as lewd and wicked as their Gods themselves: "Are the Gods angry? Must we repent of our crimes, and re-enter into the paths of Natural Justice to divert their thunder? Not at all; only take a calf of such a color, calved at such a time, and let his throat be cut by a religious butcher, in such a dress, with a consecrated knife; and the Gods, as you will find by the entrails, will be straight appeased."

The Mahometans make the going a Pilgrimage to Mecca, the highest act of religion; and there, out of deep devotion, play many monkey-tricks; and then, they return cleansed from all impurity. As to the Jewish priests, and the Doctors who depended on them, we learn from our Saviour how they made the moral law void by their vain traditions; and the Temple then, as the Church in after-times, was made the grand pretense. And what vile things has not the abused name of the Church patronized? Nay, even in the best constituted Church, have we not lately had numbers of men fond of the name of High-Church, whose religion chiefly consists in drinking for the Church; cursing, swearing, and lying for the Church; raising riots, tumults, and sedition, in favor of a Popish

Pretender, and all for the security of the Protestant Church of England; and in having a profound veneration for black gowns, no matter what the wearers are; and a great contempt for men in black cloaks, how deserving soever; and in firmly believing, that those who go to places with steeples can never be in the wrong; and that those who go to places without them can never be in the right; without knowing what either hold, or so much as what is the true meaning of even the word "Church"?

What advantage have not the Popish Priests gained by their arts of reconciling the practice of vice, with the prospect of heaven. The Jesuits, though the youngest order, yet flourish most, being the most expert in this artifice; as may be seen in Monsieur Pascal's Provincial Letters. But all the Popish Priests agree, in defending their superstition by fire and faggot; while their Churches are open sanctuaries for the most flagitious; which shows how sensible they are, that superstition and immorality support each other. And perhaps, it is but reasonable, that the places where they have learned vile things should protect them, when they have committed the vilest. It is by these means that Holy Church gets a terrible party, who can't refuse to maim or murder, as their spiritual protectors direct, for fear of being delivered up to civil justice; and not only your mean Rogues, but even the greatest have been frequently screened this way.

The supposing indifferent things equally commanded with matters of morality, tends to make men believe they are alike necessary. Nay, the former will, by degrees, get the better with the superstitious; and acquire such a veneration by age, as to make men have recourse to them upon all occasions, though ever so unseasonable. If people can be so far imposed on, as to admit such things into their religion, they will as easily be persuaded to put a greater stress on things, though of some use in religion, than their nature will bare; to the confounding things of the greatest moment with those of the smallest; and if this is reckoned superstition, much more ought the other to be thought so.

The not distinguishing means from ends, has been the occasion of endless superstition; and there have been numbers, in all ages, especially of the female sex, who have thought themselves very religious, if they, though to the neglect of their family concerns, went from Church to Chapel, from Chapel to Church; and were punctual in observing all Church ceremonies, without regarding the end, for which alone they could be instituted; so that instead of being humble, affable and good, they have proved big with the worst sort of pride, spiritual pride; censuring and despising their neighbors, though ever so good, if they were not as punctual as themselves in observing those things; and the conceit they had of their own Godliness, had made them as troublesome at home as abroad, as bad wives, as neighbors.

Upon the whole, nothing can be of worse consequence, than thus to depreciate morality, by mixing things of an indifferent nature with it; because, as experience shows, men are more or less virtuous according to the value they put on virtue; and can a man, who acts contrary to Reason not be an enemy to a religion founded on Reason? The precepts of natural religion, and the rules of right Reason, can't but make strong impressions on rational creatures; what is fixed on the minds of men, and wrought in as it were with their very constitution, can't easily be broke through; human nature is apt to start, and recoil at

any such attempt. And yet some have found a most effective way to break through it, by teaching men that the most moral actions, without a right notion forsooth in certain things of another nature, are to be looked on as "Splendida Peccata," and partaking of the nature of sin.

It is the chief business of preachers, to show the reasonableness of the doctrines they teach, as the most effectual way of operating on rational creatures; and all the laws of natural religion being built on their own reasonableness, they, who attend to the dictates of their Reason, can scarce fail to pay a ready and cheerful obedience to all its laws; but when men take things merely on authority, and would have taken the contrary on the same authority; Reason is discarded, and rational motives cease to operate; nor can men any longer perform moral duties with a free and cheerful mind; but slavishly obey, out of fear, the supposed arbitrary commands of a Being, too mighty to be contended with; and that only with a view to atone for immoralities.

As long as men believe the good of society is the supreme law, they will think it their duty to be governed by that law; and believing God requires nothing of them but what is for the good of mankind, will place the whole of their religion in benevolent actions, and to the utmost of their abilities copy after the divine original; but if they are made to believe there are things which have no relation to this good accessory to Salvation; they must suppose it their duty to use such means as will most effectively serve this purpose; and that God, in requiring the end, requires all those means as will best secure and propagate it.

And it is to this principle we owe the most cruel persecutions, inquisitions, crusades and massacres; and that Princes have endeavored, not only to destroy their subjects, but to disinherit their own issue, to make room for supposititious children.

And it is to this principle we also owe innumerable tumults, seditions, and rebellions, even against the best of Princes; as well as endless feuds and animosities in private families, and among the nearest relations. They who are governed by this principle can't be good men, good subjects, good citizens, or good neighbors; no ties of friendship or gratitude, no vows or oaths can bind them, when the interest of such things, as they think, they are obliged to promote on pain of God's displeasure, requires the contrary conduct.

The Jews, as they were most superstitious, so were they most cruel; and as the Papists have, beyond all other Christians, introduced into religion, things which are far from contributing to the good of mankind; so they have exercised a matchless cruelty for the support of them. And no wonder; since their priests gain by the superstition of the people, and consequently, inspire them with a proportionate hatred against all who will not comply with it.

And among Protestants of what denomination soever, they who lay the greatest stress on useless speculations, rites, modes and ceremonies, are for the most part for ill-natured persons, ready to come into any persecuting measures for their sake. But nothing has done so much mischief as that most monstrous opinion of "Imperium in Imperio." Those

who pretended to a spiritual empire, claimed as well they might, a divine right to judge of the extent of that empire, and to do all they judged necessary for its support; and consequently, that they had a right, since temporal things must give place to spiritual, to depose the Governors of the State, whenever they judged it necessary for the safety of the Church. It is from hence there have been so many tumults, seditions, insurrections, rebellions, civil wars, murders and massacres upon the pretense of religion; and which at last ended in the enslaving of the Christian world to the Pope, as head of the Church; whose power of deposing heretical Princes, was for many ages universally allowed; no nation, no university declaring against it; nor so much as one divine, civilian or casuist. Nor were things mended, when, by reason of the great schisms about the Popedom, councils pretended to govern the Church. They then carried their power to such a height, as disposed Princes to enter into agreements with the Popes, to whom they yielded a great deal, to be protected in what they had reserved to themselves. They, therefore, who maintain that people may forfeit their properties by schism, heresy, infidelity, etc, play the Hypocrites, when they pretend the power of Princes is more sacred than the properties of the people, for whose sake they have all their power. And therefore, we may justly conclude that they who are for soliciting Kings and Magistrates to assist the Church in punishing misbelievers, are equally enemies to the power of Kings, as well as to the rights of the people; and they have never failed to show it, whenever they have found it their interest.

And though at first those Princes were idolized, who were the instruments of their cruelty; yet when by their means, the people were entirely at the devotion of the Clergy, they too were soon forced to submit; and had just cause to curse their own, and predecessors Bigotry, which enabled the Ecclesiastics to insult them as they pleased. And what disturbances have not your Becketts, Lauds, etc. created here, when they got into power, and became then as insolent, as before they were submissive. Father Paul, no stranger to our constitution, in one of his letters written in the reign of King James I, says thus, "As for the English, I am in fear; the great power the Bishops have, though under a King, makes me very jealous; for should they have an easy Prince, or an Archbishop of a high spirit, the Kingly power must sink by the Bishops aspiring to an absolute dominion."

I believe you will allow, that in the late times, men were as much in earnest about religion as ever; and yet by their mixing several things, not of a moral nature with it, and thinking all means proper to promote them lawful; imposture and zeal, bigotry and hypocrisy, were strangely blended together. And as we are assured by an eminent historian, it was the opinion of Cromwell, that, "the moral laws were only binding in ordinary cases; but that upon extraordinary ones these might be superseded; he, and that set of men, justifying their ill actions from the practice of Ehud and Jael, Sampson and David."

Here, indeed, they were no longer hypocrites; but frankly confessed what at the bottom influences all those, who, though they have not the grace to own it, make things, not of a moral nature, necessary ingredients of religion; and thereby give too just occasion for this remark of Archbishop Tillotson's, "That it will be hard to determine, how many degrees of innocence and good nature, or of coldness and indifference in religion, are necessary to

overbalance the fury of a blind zeal; since several zealots had been excellent men, if their religion had not hindered them; if the doctrines and principles of their church had not spoiled their natural disposition." What can be a greater satire on any religion, than that it is able to spoil the best disposition; and that, if it does not make men arrant devils, it is only because nature is too hard for principles?

B. These sure are uncommon principles.

A. Not so uncommon as you may imagine, since all religion inclines men to imitate what they worship; and they who believe that God will damn men for things not moral, must believe that in order to prevent damnable opinions from spreading, and to show themselves holy, as their heavenly Father is holy, they can't show too much enmity to those against whom God declares an eternal enmity; or plague them enough in this life, upon whom in the life to come God will pour down the plagues of eternal vengeance. Hence it is, that animosity, enmity, and hatred, has overrun the Christian world; and men, for the sake of these notions, have exercised the utmost cruelties on one another; the most cursing and damning Churches having always proved the most persecuting. The Papists, though they declare it to be their duty to love their own enemies, yet looking on all Protestants as God's enemies, think it meritorious to murder them; and Protestants had no sooner renounced those persecuting principles of Popery, but they too shamefully practiced the same themselves, for the support of such trifling notions as the public had not the least interest in. And before the happy revolution, the spirit of persecution was so outrageous, that Protestants ruined Protestants upon the account of rites, ceremonies, habits, etc. to the great joy of the common enemy.

And though there may be, even now, some, who will not forgive their being debarred the exercise of their former tyranny, and would be glad, at any rate, to destroy that hated liberty we are now blessed with; yet, I may venture to say that all who have so just an opinion of religion, as to think it requires nothing but what is for the good of mankind, are to a man zealous for the present government established on the principles of civil and religious liberty.

To preserve which, the Legislator has not only excluded all Papists, as men of persecuting principles from the Crown; but, by affording protection to Dissenters, has set the differing Churches in the South and North-Britain on a level; well knowing that neither Civil nor Ecclesiastical liberty can be preserved on any other foot. Had they gone a step further, and excluded on the strictest tests, men of persecuting principles from inferior posts, as well as the persecuting Papists from the highest; they had acted up to those principles of Protestantism upon which the revolution is founded. And all who are in earnest about religion, would have been highly pleased to have seen it an established maxim, that 'no man ought to suffer in his person, his property, or reputation, for his opinion in matters of mere religion'.

They, who think force lawful for the support of such opinions as can't be supported by Reason, (as what Church, when it has power, does not); can't but think fraud so too; especially when it is used not only for mens eternal but temporal good, and to prevent

such severities as otherwise would be thought wholesome and necessary. How can men of these principles think any untruth not lawful, when it is necessary to guard fundamental truths? Nay, must they not think it much more their duty to deceive men for the sake of their eternal good, than to deceive children or sick people for an infinitely less good; especially when the temporal interest of the deceivers is joined with the spiritual interest of the deceived; who, happy men, have the good luck to be cheated into paradise; and by the stratagem of a pious fraud to obtain a heavenly crown? If it be lawful to deceive melancholy persons, who design to poison themselves, and put a remedy in the place of the poison; can any think such an artifice unlawful, when he believes it is to hinder millions from imbibing such notions, as are rank poison to their immortal souls?

It is with an ill grace that those Protestants, who are for restraining the liberty of the press, of suffering nothing to be printed, but what has undergone their sponges, rail at the Papists for their "Index Expurgatorius." These men may, indeed, plead authority; since as Daille observes, "This opinion has always been in the world; that to settle a certain and assured estimation upon that which is good and true, (that is to say, upon what we account to be such); it is necessary to remove out of the way whatsoever may be a hinderance to it. Neither ought we to wonder, that even those of the honest, innocent, primitive times made use of these deceits, seeing for a good end they made no scruple to forge whole books."

They, indeed, (and such there are, to the honor of the present time, not a few); who think sincerity will carry men to heaven, lie under no temptation to use pious frauds; but for men of other principles, though they go under the name of Fathers and Saints, there's no depending on them; since a desire to deceive people into their opinions, will hold in proportion to the zeal they have for propagating those opinions.

If those men, in whose hands the sacred books from time to time have been chiefly deposited, did allow that every man was to judge for himself of their meaning, in order to make him acceptable to God; there could be no danger of their being designedly corrupted. But if they believed, that a certain set of opinions was necessary to salvation, then they must have thought themselves in charity obliged, to take the most proper methods to bring men to embrace them; and consequently, must have believed it their duty to substitute some words of their own, which would best express those opinions, on which mens salvation depended, in the room of others, which were apt to lead them into fatal errors; since by thus changing of sounds, they might save millions of souls; who, they were confident, would otherwise everlastingly perish. Must not the same principle, that obliged them to impose their own words, instead of the words of God, in their Creeds and Articles on Pain of Damnation, equally obliged them to act the same part in relation to the Scripture? And if men have stuck so close to this principle, that they have, (wherever they had a convenient opportunity) left out, added to, or altered all other books of religion whatever, which have fallen into their hands; there can be no reason to think, they would not do the same with the Bible, where the motives were so much stronger. "It is no wonder (says that primitive Father, Dionysius, Bishop of Corinth) that some attempt to adulterate the holy writings of our Lord; since they have basely falsified such as are of an inferior authority." And it must be either to put a stop to, or prevent this practice, that

the Revelation concludes with a curse on all who should make any alteration in that book. And it is morally impossible, but that they, who thought it their duty to commit the most barbarous acts of cruelty for propagating of opinions, should not think it lawful to use deceit for the same end. Which they can never imagine to be an evil, while they suppose it so useful for the saving of mens souls, without giving up all other indirect methods, they took to hinder men from seeing what may be said for, or against any opinions.

Nor is there any one thing in which all parties agree, but in taking it for granted, that their adversaries will scruple no means to gain credit to their own opinions, or to discredit those of their adversaries; and in order to it, misrepresent their persons as well as opinions, and make men Saints or Devils, as it serves their cause; which, as you will find in Church history, had afforded a number of miracles for the Orthodox, and as many judgments on the Heterodox. And if there be miracles on both sides, ours to be sure are divine, and yours are diabolical.

If ever the words of David, that "All men are liars," were literally true, it has been in this case; and all history shows the justness of my Lord Bacon's remark, "Maxime habenda sunt pro suspectis, quae pendent quomocunque a Religione; ut Prodigia Livii."

The Arabian writers are full of miracles done by Mahomet, which they impose on people by telling them that "Mahomet's enemies would not invent them; and his friends are forbid telling lies of him on pain of damnation."

B. You may make as bold as you will with Mahometans; but can you charge Protestant writers, much less the holy Fathers, with any such practices?

A. I hope, it is no crime to take notice, that one of the ten reasons the celebrated Chillingworth gives for his turning Papist, is, "Because the Protestant cause is now, and hath been from the beginning, maintained with gross falsifications and calumnies, whereof the prime controversy Writers are notoriously, and in high degree, guilty." And upon his return to the Church, he says, "illiacos intra muros peccatur & extra"; which in plain English, "Priests of all denominations will lie alike." And I may add, that it is so fully proved in the 'Historical Essay of the Thirty-nine Articles', that, that clause in the twentieth article, that "the Church has power to decree rites and ceremonies, and authority in controversies of faith," had neither the sanction of Parliament or Convocation; that no one has offered the least reply, though for the honor of those good churchmen who first forged it, and those who since defended it, we might expect all that could be said, though the clause had not given them a power which can only belong to Parliaments, of "decreeing rites and ceremonies"; and another power, which can belong to no mortal, "authority in controversies of faith." What credit ought to be given to the representations of modern divines, we may, in some measure, learn from a pamphlet entitled "The Representation of the present State of Religion; with Regard to the late excessive Growth of Infidelity, Heresy and Profaneness, as it passed the lower Half of Convocation"; where there are almost as many notorious falsehoods as there are paragraphs; not to say anything of a certain Pastoral Letter. And if we look into Church-story, we shall find it to have been the constant practice of a certain set of men, not only

to impute their adversaries opinions which they disowned, but to represent those opinions as ready to prevail, was it not for their interposition. By which means they hoped not only to be highly revered for their great zeal, but to have new powers granted them to oppress mankind. Thus the consequences of belying the followers of Wickliss, was the Statute "de Haeretico comburendo," granted at the petition of the Clergy; and the belying the Albigenses, Waldenses, etc. raised a Crusade against those poor people.

As for the holy Fathers, they, as Daille has a whole chapter to prove, did not think themselves in their controversial writings (and most of theirs were such) obliged to speak the truth; but that everything was lawful which served to gain the victory. They thought they might, by way of Oeconomy or Dispensation, say one thing and mean the contrary. "Origen, Methodius, Eusebius, Apollinaris, (say St. Jerome) have written largely against Celfus and Porphyry; Do but observe (says he) the manner of their arguing, and what slippery problems they used. They alleged against the Gentiles, not what they believed, but what they thought was necessary; Non quod sentiunt, sed quod necesse est, dicunt. And adds, I forbear mentioning the Latin writers, as Tertullian, Cyprian, Minutius, Victorinus, Lactantius, and Hilary; lest I should seem rather to accuse others, than defend myself."

And yet he goes on charging, not only St. Paul, but even Jesus Christ himself with the same practice. And there was nothing so sacred that could escape being charged, either in whole or in part; even the Canons of the famous Council of Nice, as well as the Canons of other Councils, have been falsified; and those forged Canons of Nice the Popes for many ages imposed on the Christian world as genuine; and the ancient Liturgies, though things of daily use, underwent diverse alterations. Nay, even the Creeds themselves, though thought to be the sacred Depositum of the Faith, have had the same fate. "It is well known (says an eminent Divine) that the Apostles Creed has received various additions to the original form; That the Nicene Creed was enlarged by the Constantinopolitan Fathers, and has also, with respect to the Silioque, been interpolated by the Latin Church; that it is probable, the Latin Church has interpolated the Athanasian Creed too, with respect to the Silioque;" Nay, the Athanasian Creed itself, as Bishop Burnet has shown, was a forgery of the eighth century. Nor did they confine their forgeries to Church matters, but practiced on the imperial Laws, and inserted in the Theodosian Code, a rescript of Constantine, relating to the power of Bishops, long before repealed.

The further back we go, the greater was their recourse to pious frauds. Scaliger speaking of the primitive Christians, says, "Omnia, quae putabant Christianismo conducere, bibliis interferuerunt." And as he supposes, nothing certain of the Church till the times of Pliny, so he says, speaking of the Second Century, "Adeo verbum Dei inessicax esse censuerunt, ut regnum Christi sine mendacio promoveeri posse diffderunt, ut qui utinam illi primi mentiri caepissent." And Casaubon says, "Illud me vehementer movit, quod videam primis Ecclesiae temporibus quam plurimos extitisse, qui facinus Palmarium judicabant, caelestem veritatem figmentis suis ire adjutum; quo facilius nova illa doctrina Gentium sapientibus admitteretur." And the learned Blondel says, "That the second century of Christianity, whether you consider the immoderate impudence of imposters, or

the deplorable credulity of believers, was the most miserable time, and exceeded all others in holy cheats; and that, to the disgrace of Christianity, there was a greater aversion to lying, more fidelity, and a greater simplicity not to depart from the truth, to be found in profane authors, than the Christian writers."

Our most learned Bishop Stillingfleet, says, "That antiquity is most defective where it is most useful; namely, in the times immediately after the Apostles. And that the Fathers were often deceived with pious frauds; but then it was made for the Christians." And the pious Bishop Fell does not speak quite so tenderly in saying, "*Tanta fuit primis seculis fingendi licentia, tam prona in credendo facilitas, ut rerum gestarum fides exinde graviter laboraverit; nec orbis tantum terrarum sed & dei Ecclesia de temporibus suis mysticis merito queratur.*"

How unhappy were we of the Laity, had we not the Reason and Nature of Things (which no priest can alter) to depend on; but were entirely obliged to take our religious sentiments from men, who as far as we have any account of things, have, even from the earliest times, not scrupled to forge, not only whole passages, but whole books; and left nothing entire on which they could lay their foul hands. Which, as that great and honest critic Daille observes, "has rendered the Writings and venerable monuments of antiquity so embroiled and perplexed, that it will be the hardest matter in the world for any man to make out any clear or perfect discovery of those things, which so many several artists have endeavored to conceal from us." As to this imposing temper of the Ecclesiastics, I shall only say, that it is plain from history, that the ambitious, domineering part of the Clergy, the Imposters of Creeds, Canons and Constitutions, have proved the common plagues of mankind; and the true authors and fomenters of the most general and most fatal calamities, which have befallen the Christian world. What the consequence was of imposing Creeds, may be learnt from an eminent Father, who flourished when this trade of Creed-making was at its height. "It is (says St. Hilary) a thing equally deplorable and dangerous, that there are at present as many Creeds, as there are opinions among men. We make Creeds arbitrarily, and explain them as arbitrarily. We can't be ignorant, that since the Council of Nice (There it seems the fatal mischief began) we have done nothing but make Creeds. We make Creeds every year, nay, every moon; we repent of what we have done; we defend those that repent; we anathematize those we have defended; we condemn the doctrine of others in ourselves, or our own in that of others; and reciprocally tearing one another in pieces, we have been the cause of one another's ruin."

Thus you see how fraud and force are unavoidable, when it is believed things, having no foundation in Nature or Reason, are necessary part of religion; and Ecclesiastical history contains a continued scene of villainy, for the support of such notions. And that the more good sense, piety, and virtue any man was endowed with, the more, if he did not come into those notions, was he hated and persecuted as a most dangerous enemy.

But before I leave this melancholy subject, I must observe, these men have done their best to justify a remark of Uriel Acosta, who, in his '*Exemplar vitae humanae*', says, "That when men depart ever so little from Natural Religion, it is the occasion of great strifes and divisions; but if they recede much from it, who can declare the calamities

which ensue?" And can men more depart from it, than by imposing on their brethren, either by fraud or force, things no ways tending to the Good of Mankind?

Though we cry up the great advantage we have above all other animals, in being capable of religion, yet those animals, we despise for want of it, herd most socially together; except such carnivorous creatures which necessity separates. The ants, notwithstanding they have stings, are crowded in vast numbers in the same hillock; and, having all things in common, seem to have no other contention among them, but who shall be the most active in carrying on the common interest of their small republic. And much the same may be said of bees, and other animals; yet men, though they can't subsist but in society, and have hands, speech, and Reason to qualify them for the blessing of it above all other animals; nay, what is more, have religion, designed to unite them in the firm bonds of love and friendship, and to engage them to vie with one another in all good offices; and the goodnatured laity too have, at a vast expense, hired persons to inculcate these generous notions; yet alas! in spite of all these helps and motives, religion has been made by these very persons, a pretense to render men unsociable, fierce and cruel; and to act every thing destructive to their common welfare. And the greater the number of these religious, and the more expense people have been at in maintaining them, the more of these mischiefs have they most ungratefully occasioned to their generous benefactors.

B. Granting that a deluge of everything that's ill has overflowed the Christiandom, and does so still in most places; and that religion has been made a handle for such barbarities, as human nature, left to itself, would startle at; yet how is this to be remedied?

A. Education is justly esteemed a second nature, and its force so strong, that few can wholly shake off its prejudices, even in things unreasonable and unnatural; and must it not have the greatest efficacy in things agreeable to Reason, and suitable to humane Nature? Let those, therefore, who have the education of youth, recommend morality as the end of all religion; and let everything not tending to promote the honor of God and the Good of Man, be accounted superstition; let the youth be taught to join ideas of virtue with the ideas of beauty, pleasure, and happiness; and the ideas of vice with those of deformity, grief, and misery; there would then be little room for so odious a thing as vice to take possession of peoples minds, and jostle out virtue so firmly rooted. For these ideas thus early associated, would by degrees become inseparable; especially if men, as they grew up, were frequently shown the necessary connection between these ideas; and how essential virtue is to the felicity of nations, families, and private persons; and on the contrary, how miserable vice must render men in every station of life.

It was after this manner, that the heroes of old, those benefactors to mankind, were educated; and the discourses of the philosophers, who had the instructing of them, were full of the intrinsic loveliness of virtue, and deformity of vice; and taught them to direct all their actions to the common good, as to a common center; and that their future as well as present happiness depended on it. But afterwards the education of youth being committed to another stamp, devoted the interest of their own order; they, instead of infusing these noble sentiments into them, persuaded them that their separate interest, with the things on which it depended, which they called "The Good of the Church," was

to be their chief aim; and so little regard have some men to the common good, that they have industriously dressed up vice in such lovely, and virtue in such odious colors, as to maintain, that bating the consequences of a future state, they would act like fools, who did not indulge themselves in a vicious course. And I believe, men of such principles can't boast of much more virtue, than a late Prelate of uncommon parts and learning, who from the pulpit endeavored to prove, that "In this life the virtuous man is most miserable"; and who, by all his actions, especially by his late monstrous practices, showed how firmly he believed his own doctrine; and how resolved he was, that virtue should not make his present life miserable.

B. I grant you, it is of the utmost consequence to the commonwealth, that youth should be rightly introduced in all such principles as promote the common good; but can you imagine Pagan philosophers could infuse more generous sentiments into them than Christian clergymen?

A. I do not think so, when they are such clergymen as those who at present have the instructing of our youth; otherwise I can't help giving in to the sentiments of a noble author, who, speaking of the education of youth, when instructed by Philosophers, says, "It tended to make them as useful to the society they lived in as possible. There they were trained up to exercise and labor, to accustom themselves to an active life; no vice was more infamous than sloth, nor any man more contemptible than he who was too lazy to do all the good he could. The lectures of their Philosophers served to quicken them up to this; they recommended above all things the duty to their country, the preservation of the laws and public library; subservient to which they preached up moral virtues, such as fortitude, temperance, justice, a contempt of death, etc. They taught their youth how and when to speak pertinently; how to act like men, to subdue their passions, to be public-spirited; to despise death, torments and reproach, riches, and the smiles of Princes as well as their frowns, if they stood between them and their duty. This manner of education produced men of another stamp than appears now upon the theater of the the world, such as we are scarcely worthy to mention, and must never think to imitate, till the like manner of institution grows again into reputation. Which in enslaved countries it is never likely to do, as long as the Ecclesiastics, who have an opposite interest, keep not only the education of youth, but the consciences of old men in their hands."

B. This, I confess, is the right way to prevent immorality; but if everything, as you contend, ought to be looked on as superstitious which is not of a moral nature, superstition has spread itself over the face of the earth, and prevailed more or less in all times and places.

A. This is no more than what has been owned long ago by a very good judge, who says, "Superstitio fusa pergentes, oppressit omnium fere Animos, atque hominum occupavit Imbecillitatem." And the universality of superstition is in effect owned by every sect, in affirming that superstition is crept into all other sects; and that it is the chief business of their respective teachers to promote it. And is it possible to be otherwise, as long as men are taught to build their religion on a narrower foundation than that on which the universal Being has universally laid it?

It is the observation of Naturalists, that there is no species of creatures but what have some innate weakness, which makes them easy prey to other animals, that know how to make the advantage of it. Now the peculiar foible of mankind is superstition, which at all times has made them liable to be practiced on, not by creatures of different species, but by those of their own; who, by a confident pretense of knowing more than their neighbors, have first circumvented the many, the credulous and unwary; and afterwards forced the freethinking few into an outward compliance. And as far as we have an account of things, we shall find that most of the prevailing superstitions have been erected on this foundation, and to it owe their whole support. And whoever knows anything of France and Italy, not to mention other countries, can't but know that the better sort are sensible of the prevailing absurdities; but, overawed by the Priests and Mob, are forced to submit.

And the more Superstition the people have, the easier they may be imposed on by the designing Ecclesiastics; and the less religion the Clergy have, the more unanimous they will be in carrying on their common interest; and when the Clergy are without religion, and the people abound in superstition, the Church, you may be sure, is in a flourishing condition; but in great danger, when men place their religion in morality. For then all indifferent things are looked on as they are in their own nature, indifferent; then the people have no superstitious veneration for the persons of men, and the Clergy are esteemed only in proportion to the good they do; and every evil they commit is reckoned a breach of trust, they being maintained by the people chiefly to set them good examples. But this method of gaining all that reverence and authority they pretend to, has, it seems, been thought too laborious and servile. They have (I mean where Popery prevails) as matters of the religious ceremonies, most effectually gained their end, by introducing such things into religion, as have promoted a superstitious veneration to themselves; and made people believe, that the chief means to obtain their eternal happiness, were of a different nature from those which caused their temporal happiness; and only to be dispensed by them, in order to get the sole management of Spirituals to themselves; and consequently, (since there can't be at the same time two supreme powers) of Temporals also. And so well have they succeeded, that, in most places, the temporal interest of the Clergy passes for the spiritual of the Laity.

There are two ways which never fail to make superstition prevail; mysteries to amuse the Enthusiasts, especially the pretenders to deep learning, and all that admire what they do not understand; and gaudy shows and pompous ceremonies, to bewitch the vulgar. And the Popish Church, whose conduct shows how well they understand their interest, may vie with the old Egyptian Church for mysteries; and Pagan Rome must yield to Christian Rome in such shows, rites, ceremonies as dazzle the eyes of the people, and insensibly gain their hearts; and the more there are of these in any church, the more the clergy, the holy dispensers of them, are revered; not to say, adored by the unthinking multitude; as they are in the Church of Rome.

"That Church has (as Archbishop Tillotson observes) weakened the force of Christianity upon the hearts and lives of men, by amusing them with external rites, which they have multiplied to that excessive degree, as to make the "yoke of Christ" really heavier than

that of Moses; and the Christian religion a more external and carnal commandment than that of the Law; and have diverted the minds of men from the main design of Christianity. They have had no leisure to think of being good men, and to mind the great and substantial duties of the Christian life. The simplicity of the Christian worship they have encumbered with so many frivolous rites and observances, as not only render it more burdensome, but less apt to make men inwardly, and substantially good, than Judaism itself."

This great man observes that, "Those things which are agreeable to our nature, our Reason, and our interest, are the great things which our religion requires of us. And that mankind might have no pretense left to excuse them from these, the Christian religion has set us free from those many outward positive observances, that the Jewish religion was encumbered withal; that we might be wholly intent on these great duties, and mind nothing in comparison of the real, and substantial virtues of a good life."

If so, can we suppose the Christian religion has superadded any outward positive things of its own, to hinder us from being wholly intent on these duties?

The Popish priests are so far from giving the people any just idea of God, that they represent him as an arbitrary and tyrannical Being, imposing, on the highest pain, the practice of ridiculous ceremonies, and the belief of absurd doctrines; as a fanatical Being, angry without cause, and pleased without Reason; as a vain-glorious Being, fond of having his ministers and favorites, that is, themselves, live in pomp, splendor, and luxury, to the miserable oppressions of the people. But it is no wonder, that they are made to believe that God requires the observing indifferent things on the severest penalties; since their priests claim the same power, in making such things necessary to the communicating in their holy church; out of which, they affirm, salvation is not to be had. I wish I could say the Popish priests only were guilty of this horrid impiety; and that some others had not been as zealous for imposing such things, by making them necessary terms of communion, and damning those that durst not comply with them; and who seem to be of the spirit with the famous Bishop Gunning, who, when the Presbyterians urged that lights, holy water, and such like, might as well be imposed as the cross and surplice; replied, "The more the better." But if external rites, as Archbishop Tillotson observes, "have eat out the heart of religion in the Church of Rome"; by parity of Reason, religion should seem to have made the deepest impression on the Quakers, who are the most averse to things of this nature; and are therefore hated by the Formalists of all Churches.

B. Sensible things make a deeper impression on the minds of the common people than words; and therefore, the using symbolical representations being for the advantage of religion, why may not they be ordained of God?

A. If you must have recourse to words, to explain the signification of such symbols, are they not arbitrary marks, whose meaning cannot be known, but from words; and, not being capable of expressing things more fully than words, wholly needless as to that purpose? Nay, words themselves being but arbitrary signs, to multiply such signs needlessly would be very absurd.

As to sensible things making a deeper impression on the common people, that, I presume, is a just Reason against their use in religion; because the vulgar, who generally look no further than externals, do not use them barely, as they do words, to express their meaning; but conceive in them, I know not what internal holiness; and think such symbolical representations as necessary as the things represented by them; nay, by degrees, forgetting the reason for their institution, come to idolize them, as the Israelites did the brazen Serpent. And this the people have always done in all religions whatever, where these symbolical representations have been used.

The chief cause of the Egyptians falling into grosser idolatries than other lesser known nations, was, no doubt, owing to the use of hieroglyphics in their religious worship. An Ox, that laborious and useful animal, was at first only a symbolical representation; the meaning of which, the people in time forgetting, fell to down right adoring the beast; and, perhaps, it was for the same reason that leeks and onions, and other garden stuff came likewise to be worshipped. But without looking into the Pagan world, and showing by what degrees they came to worship those sensible representations, statues and images; whoever reflects on the use the Papists have made of such things, must see how fatal it is to bring them into religion. The images and pictures of Saints and Crosses were first introduced, on pretense that being sensible representations, they might serve to excite peoples devotion; but that end was soon forgotten, and the superstitious vulgar worshipped the very images, pictures, and crosses. I need not tell you what Transubstantiation, Consubstantiation, Real Presence, and other absurdities of that nature are owing to; and what mischiefs they have occasioned. But supposing such symbolical representations might occasionally be used; is it not, for the reasons already given, incumbent on the parties concerned, to appoint, alter, and vary them as occasion requires?

B. If God has delegated to the Clergy a power to consecrate persons and things; can any, whether Prince or people, dispense with this power, and substitute things unconsecrated?

A. As God alone is absolutely holy, so men may be said to be more or less holy, according as they imitate him; and as this holiness consists in a good and pious disposition of mind; so mens actions are no otherwise holy, but as they flow from, and are signs of this holy disposition. Inanimate things can only be said to have a relative holiness, and made use of in actions, by which men express that holy disposition of mind; and can last no longer than they are thus employed. What holiness, either real or relative, would the Ark now have? Though it once had such a legal holiness, that more than fifty thousand reapers were destroyed for peeping into it. Nay, persons who want all real holiness, may yet have a relative holiness, as ministers employed by the congregation about holy things; but this can be no more than a derivative holiness, and can last no longer than the holy action they are about; and belongs equally to those from whom it is derived. Thus all the relative holiness which concerns public worship, whether as to persons, places, or things, must be derived from the congregation; and nothing sure, can be more absurd, than to imagine the Clergy, by any form of words, can bestow any permanent holiness, whether real or relative, on timber, stone, etc. And therefore, the method used by Archbishop Laud, in consecrating of a Church, was generally cried out on as profane, and tending to justify those consecrations used in the Greek and Latin

Churches; whereby they cheat the people of immense sums. But it is no wonder, if they, who claim this power in relation to inanimate things, should pretend to convey to men, though ever so wicked, a real inherent, nay, indelible holy character; though wherein that consists, they themselves can't tell.

But what the priests aim at, by this Cant, is to make people believe their prayers are of greater efficacy than those of the unsanctified laity; very well knowing that if the people were so weak to believe it, they would be thought necessary on all occasions; especially to persons on their death-beds. What advantages they have made by being then thought thus necessary, none can be ignorant of. I do not wonder, that so loose an Haranguer as St. Chrysostom should say, "The prayers of the people, which are weak in themselves, laying hold on the more prevailing prayers of the priests, may, by them, be conveyed to Heaven."

But I admire that the judicious Bishop Potter, the King's Professor of Divinity at Oxford, should maintain the same position, and think to support it by this Father's authority. But this is modest in comparison of what Hicks, Brett, and others of that stamp, assign to priests; in supporting they have such transcendent privileges by virtue of their indelible character, that they can bless, or curse authoritatively; nay, that their very prayers to God himself are authoritative prayers.

B. Though some have had too little regard for Natural Religion, as being too stubborn to yield to any selfish views; yet that will not justify you for leveling your arguments against the divine Omnipotency. Are we not God's creatures; and may not our Creator give us what arbitrary commands he pleases?

A. Not to repeat what I have said already, I shall only ask you, why may not God deceive us? Tell us one thing, and act the contrary? Is not his power absolute? and "his will, who can resist"? Would you not reply, that God as his is infinitely good and happy, can have no motive to deceive us? And that he could do whatever he thought fit for the good of his creatures, without having to recourse to such mean shifts? And will not this reason equally hinder him from burdening us with arbitrary commands? Is not one as much as the other, inconsistent with his wisdom and goodness, by which his power is always directed? And of the two, it should seem less absurd, that God might deceive people for their good, than impose arbitrary things on them for their hurt; by annexing severe penalties on non-observance.

B. May not God give us arbitrary commands to try our obedience?

A. A man, who knows not the heart of others, nor foresees how they will act, may think it prudent to try people in things of little, or no moment, before he trusts them in greater; but God, who foreknows what men will do on all occasions, can need no such trial. If earthly Kings, who may be deceived, and for the most part are so, would be justly esteemed tyrants, if they require things of their subjects merely to try their obedience; how can we think this of the Omniscient, infinitely glorious King of Kings? Though a trial was necessary, moral and immoral things would be the most proper subjects for it;

because we can't practice one, or refrain from the other, without subduing our lusts and passions. But what speculative articles will not an ill man profess? Or what indifferent things will he not practice, to be indulged in any one darling vice?

And now don't you think we may justly conclude, that whatsoever God requires of us to believe, or practice, is purely for our good; and consequently, that no belief, or practice, which does not contribute to that good, can come from God; and therefore, as long as we adhere to what Reason reveals to us concerning the goodness of God, by admitting everything into religion which makes for the good of man, and nothing that does not, we can't mistake our duty either to God or man.

And therefore, I shall conclude this head with a quotation from a noble author,

"To believe that everything is governed, ordered, or regulated for the best, by a designing principle, or mind, necessarily good and permanent, is to be a perfect Theist.

To believe no one supreme designing principle, or mind, but rather two, three, or more, (though in their nature "good") is to be a Polytheist.

To believe the governing mind, or minds, not absolutely and necessarily good, nor confined to what is best, but capable of acting according to mere will or fancy, is to be a Demonist."

## CHAP. 12

That they who magnify Revelation, weaken the force of the Religion of Reason and Nature, strike at all religion; and that there can't be two independent rules for the government of human actions.

B. In my opinion, you lay too great stress on fallible Reason, and too little on infallible revelation. And therefore, I must needs say, your arguing wholly from Reason would make some of less candor than myself, take you for an arrant "Freethinker."

A. Whatever is true by Reason can never be false by revelation; and if God can't be deceived himself, or be willing to deceive men, the light he has given to distinguish between religious truth and falsehood, cannot, if duly attended to, deceive them in things of so great moment.

They who do not allow Reason to judge in matters of opinion, or speculation, are guilty of as great absurdity as the Papists; who will not allow the senses to be judges in the case of Transubstantiation, though a matter directly under their cognizance; nay, the absurdity, I think, is greater in the first case; because Reason is to judge, whether our senses are deceived. And if no texts ought to be admitted as a proof in a matter contrary to sense, they ought, certainly, as little to be admitted in any point contrary to Reason.

In a word, to suppose anything in revelation inconsistent with Reason, and, at the same time, pretend it to be the will of God, is not only to destroy that proof on which we conclude it to be the will of God, but even the proof of the Being of a God; since if our reasoning faculties duly attended to can deceive us, we can't be sure of the truth of any one proposition; but everything would be alike uncertain, and we should forever fluctuate in a state of universal skepticism. Which shows how absurdly they act, who, on pretense of magnifying tradition, endeavor to weaken the force of Reason; (though to be sure they always except their own;) and thereby foolishly sap the foundation to support the superstructure; but as long as Reason is against men, they will be against Reason. We must not, therefore, be surprised to see some endeavor to reason men out of their Reason; though the very attempt to destroy Reason by Reason, is a demonstration men have nothing but Reason to trust to.

And to suppose anything can be true by revelation, which is false by Reason, is not to support that thing, but to undermine revelation; because nothing unreasonable, nay, what is not highly reasonable, can come from a God of unlimited, universal, and eternal Reason. As evident as this truth is, yet that shall not hinder me from examining in a proper place, whatever you can urge from revelation. And give me leave to add, that I shall not be surprised, if for so laudable an attempt, as reconciling Reason and revelation, which have been so long set at variance, I should be censured as a "freethinker"; a title that, however insidious it may seem, I am far from being ashamed of; since one may as

well suppose, a man can reason without thinking at all, as reason well without thinking freely.

But the irreconcilable enemies of Reason seeing it too gross, in this reasoning age, to attack Reason openly, do it covertly under the name of Freethinking; not despairing, but that the time may come again, when the laity shall stifle every thought rising in their minds, though with ever so much appearance of truth, as a suggestion of Satan, if it clashes with the real or pretended opinions of their priests.

B. Though you talk so much about Reason, you have not defined what you mean by that word.

A. When we attribute any operation to it, as distinguishing between truth and falsehood, etc. we mean by it the rational faculties; but when we ascribe no such operation to it, as when we give a "reason for a thing", etc. we then understand by it, any medium, by which our rational faculties judge of the agreement, or disagreement, of the terms of any proposition; and if an author writes intelligibly, we may easily discern in which of these two senses he takes the word.

But to go to the bottom of this matter, it will be requisite to give a more distinct account of Reason in both these senses. By the rational faculties then, we mean the natural ability a man has to apprehend, judge, and infer. The immediate objects of which faculties are, not the things themselves, but the ideas the mind conceives of them. While our ideas remain single, they fall under the 'apprehension', and are expressed by simple terms; when joined, under the 'judgment', and expressed by propositions; when so joined as to need the intervention of some other idea to compare them with, in order to form a judgment, they become by that intervention, the subject of 'inference', or argumentation; and this is termed syllogism or argument. It must be observed too, that all the ideas we have, are either by sensation or reflection; by the first, we have our ideas of what passes, or exits without; by the second, of what passes, or exits within the mind. And in the view, or contemplation of these consists all our knowledge; that being nothing but the perception of the agreement, or disagreement of our idea; and any two of these; when joined together, so as to be affirmed or denied of each other, make what we call a proposition; when considered apart, what we call 'terms' of that proposition; the agreement, or disagreement of which 'terms' being expressed by the rightly affirming, or denying them of each other, is what we call 'truth'; the perception of their agreement or disagreement, is what we term 'knowledge'. This knowledge accrues either immediately on the bare intuition of these two ideas, or terms, so joined, and is therefore styled 'intuitive knowledge'; or, self-evident truth. Or by the intervention of some other idea, or ideas, as a common measure for the other two; and is therefore called the 'medium', by which Reason judges of their agreement, or disagreement; and this is called 'demonstrative knowledge', which is never to be had without the help of the other.

For if there were not some propositions which need not to be proved, it would be in vain for men to argue with one another; because they then could bring no proofs but what needed to be proved. Those propositions which need no proof, we call self-evident;

because by comparing the ideas, signified by the terms of such propositions, we immediately discern their agreement, or disagreement. This is, as I said before, what we call intuitive knowledge, and is the knowledge of God himself, who sees all things by intuition; and may, I think, be called 'divine inspiration', as being immediately from God; and not acquired by any human deduction, or drawing of consequences. This, certainly, is that divine, that uniform light, which shines in the minds of men, and enables them to discern whatever they do discern; since without it there could be no demonstration, no knowledge, but invincible obscurity, and universal uncertainty.

Where a proposition can't be made evident, by comparing two ideas, or terms of it with each other, it is rendered so by intermediate ideas or terms; whereby the agreement, or disagreement of the ideas under examination, or the truth of that proposition is perceived; and when there is an intuitive perception of the agreement, or disagreement of the intermediate ideas in each step of the progression, then, and not until then, it becomes demonstrative knowledge; otherwise it can rise no higher than probability, which consists not in a certain, but a likely connection between the terms of a proposition, and the intermediate proofs of it; so that every proposition that's only probable, must have a proportionable degree of uncertainty, otherwise it would amount to demonstration; and consequently, probability, as well as certainty, is founded on the relation it has to self-evident truths; because where no relation to them of any sort can be discovered, there is no room for certainty, or probability.

Hence we see that all wrong reasoning is the effect of rashness, and consists either in taking propositions to have a certain connection with self-evident truths, when they have but a probable one; or imagining there's a probable connection, when there's no connection at all; or else mistaking the degrees of probability.

B. The Quakers are very positive that there is, in all mankind, a principle of action distinct from Reason, (and which is not inspiration) by which all are to be governed in matters of religion, as they are by Reason in other matters; and which they commonly call "The Light Within."

A. Was there any such principle, men destitute of all Reason were as capable of knowing all matters of religion, as if they had been ever so rational. It is strange that all mankind should have a principle of acting, of which they were never sensible; nor can these modern discoverers tell them what it is, or how it operates; nor do they themselves ever use it in any of their debates about religion; but argue like other men from principles that are in common to all mankind, and prove propositions that are not self-evident by those that are so; and confuse false and bad reasons (of which they can only judge by Reason) by true and good reasons; which supposes that Reason, however fallible it may be, is all rational creatures have to trust to; and that it is the highest commendation of religion, that it is a reasonable service. And since this is an age, where words without meaning, or distinctions without difference, will not pass current; why should they, who otherwise appear to have good sense, thus impose on themselves, and be exposed by others, for such senseless notions, as can only serve to prejudice people against their other rational principles? But it is the fate of most sects to be fondest of their ugliest brats.

But not to deviate.... Were it not for those self-evident notions, which are the foundation of all our reasonings, there could be no intellectual communication between God and man; nor, as we are framed, can God ascertain us of any truth, but by showing its agreement with those self-evident notions, which are the tests by which we are to judge of everything, even the Being of a God and Natural Religion; which, though not knowable by intuition, are to be demonstrated by such proofs, which have, mediately or immediately, a necessary connection with our self-evident notions. And therefore, to weaken the force of demonstration, is to strike at all religion, and even the Being of a God; and not to give probability its due weight, is to strike at the authority of that revelation you contend for; because, that God revealed his will by "visions, dreams, trances," or any other way besides the Light of Nature, can only come under the head of Probability.

And if it be probable that God made any external revelation at all, it can be but probable, though perhaps not in the same degree of probability, that he made this or that revelation. And this evidence all pretend to, since perhaps there never was a time or place where some external revelation was not believed, and its Votaries equally confident that theirs was a true revelation. And indeed, the prodigious numbers of revelations, which from time to time have been in the world, show how easily mankind may in this point be imposed on. And as there can be no demonstration of the revelation itself, so neither can there be any of its conveyance to posterity; much less that this, or that, has been conveyed entire to distant times and places; especially if a revelation be of any bulk; and which may have gone through the hands of men, who not only in the dark ages of the Church, but even in the beginning, if we judge by the number of corrupted passages, and even forged books, were capable of any pious fraud. Nay, the very nature of probability is such, that were it only left to time itself, even that would quite wear it out; at least if it be true what mathematicians pretend to demonstrate, viz. That the probability of facts depending on human testimony, must gradually lessen in proportion to the distance of time when they were done. And we have a Reverend Divine, who has published, as he thinks, a demonstration of this, with relation to facts recorded in the scripture; and has gone so far as to fix the precise time when all probability of the truth of the history of Christ will be entirely spent and exhausted.

Archbishop Laud says that, "The assent we yield to this main point of divinity, that the scripture is the Word of God, is grounded on no compelling or demonstrative ratiocination, but relies on the strength of faith more than any one principle whatever." And by the confession of the best Protestant writers, the internal excellency of the Christian doctrines is the main proof of their coming from God; and therefore, Mr. Chillingworth says, "For my part, I profess, if the doctrine of the scripture was not as good, and as fit to come from God, the Fountain of Goodness, as the miracles, by which it was confirmed, were great, I should want one main pillar of my faith; and for want of it, I fear, should be much staggered in it."

This, I think, may be sufficient to show what a folly they are guilty of, who, in order to advance the credit of revelation, endeavor to weaken the force of Reason.

B. I don't think we ought to have the same regard for Reason, as men had formerly; when that was the sole rule God had given them for the government of their actions; since now we Christians have two supreme, independent rules, Reason and Revelation, and both require an absolute obedience.

A. I can't see how that is possible; for if you are to be governed by the latter, that supposes you must take everything on trust; or merely because it's said by those, for whose dictates you are to have an implicit faith. For to examine into the truth of what they say, is renouncing their authority; as on the contrary, if men are to be governed by their Reason, they are not to admit anything further than as they see reasonable. To suppose both consistent, is to suppose it consistent to take, and not take, things on trust.

To receive religion on the account of authority supposes that if the same authority promulgated a different religion, we should be obliged to receive it; and indeed, it's an odd jumble to prove the truth of a book by the truth of the doctrines it contains, and at the same time conclude those doctrines to be true, because contained in that book; and yet this is a jumble everyone makes, who contends for men being absolutely governed both by Reason and Authority.

What can be a fuller evidence of the sovereignty of Reason, than that all men, when there is anything in their traditional religion, which in its literal sense can't be defended by Reason, have recourse to any method of interpretation, though ever so forced, in order to make it appear reasonable. And do not all parties, when pressed, as they are all in their turns, say with Tertullian, "We ought to interpret scripture, not by the sound of words, but by the Nature of Things." *Malo te ad sensum rei, quam ad sonum vocabuli exerceas.* But sometimes the letter of scripture is such an authority, as can't be parted with without sacrilege; and sometimes it is a "Letter which killeth."

In a word, when men, in defending their own, or attacking other traditional religions, have recourse to the Nature of Things; does not that show they believe the truth of all traditional religions is to be tried by it; as being that which must tell them what is true or false in religion? And were there not some truths relating to religion of themselves so evident, as that all must agree in them, nothing relating to religion could be proved, everything would want a further proof; and if there are such evident truths, must not all others be tried by their agreement with them? And are not these the tests by which we are to distinguish the only true religion from the many false ones? And do not all parties alike own, there are such tests drawn from the Nature of Things, each crying their religion contains everything worthy, and nothing unworthy of having God for its author; thereby confessing, that Reason enables them to tell what is worthy of having God for its author. And if Reason tells them this, does it not tell them everything that God can be supposed to require?

In short, nothing can be more certain than that there are some things in their own nature good, some evil; and others neither good nor evil; and for the same reason God commands the good, and forbids the evil, he leaves men at liberty in things indifferent; it being inconsistent with his wisdom to reward the observance of such things; and with his

goodness to punish for not observing them. And as he could have no end in creating mankind, but their common good; so they answer the end of their creation, who do all the good they can; and to enable men to do this, God has given them Reason to distinguish good from evil, useful from useless things. Or in other words, has made them moral agents, capable of discerning the relations they stand in to God and one another; and the duties resulting from these relations, so necessary to their common good. And consequently, religion, thus founded on these immutable relations, must at all times and all places, be alike immutable; since external revelation, not being able to make any change in these relations, and the duties that necessarily result from them, can only recommend, and inculcate these duties; except we suppose, that God at last acted the tyrant, and imposed such commands, as the relations we stand in to him, and to one another, no ways require.

To imagine any external revelation not to depend on the Reason of Things, is to make things give place to words; and implies that from the time this rule commenced, we were forbid to act as moral agents in judging what is good or evil; fit, or unfit; and that we are to make no other use of our Reason, than to see what is the literal meaning of texts; and to admit that only to be the will of God, though ever so inconsistent with the Light of Nature, and the eternal Reason of Things. Is not this to infer there's nothing good or evil in itself, but that all depends on the will of an arbitrary Being; which, though it may change every moment, is to be unalterably found in such a book?

And all divines, I think, now agrees in owning that there is a Law of Reason, antecedent to any external revelation, that God can't dispense, either with his creatures or himself, for not observing; and that no external revelation can be true, that in the least circumstance, or minutest point, is inconsistent with it. If so, how can we affirm any one thing in revelation to be true, till we perceive, by that understanding which God has given us to discern the truth of things; whether it agrees with this immutable law, or not?

If we can't believe otherwise than as things appear to our understandings, to suppose God requires us to give up our understandings (a matter we can't know but by using our understanding) to any authority whatever, is to suppose he requires impossibilities. And our self-evident notions being the foundation of all certainty, we can only judge of things as they are found to be more or less agreeable to them; to deny this on any pretense whatever, can serve only to introduce a universal skepticism. And therefore Bishop Taylor very justly observes, "It is Reason that is the judge; and Fathers, Councils, Tradition, and Scripture the evidence." And if Reason be the judge, can it form a right judgment without examining into everything which offers itself for evidence? And would it not examine in vain, if it had not certain tests by which it could try all evidences relating to religious matters?

B. Though Reason may be the judge; yet the Scripture, we say, is the Rule by which Reason must judge of the truth of things.

A. If it be such a rule, must it not have all the qualifications necessary to make it so? But if Reason must tell us what those qualifications are, and whether they are to be found in

scripture; and if one of those qualifications is that the Scripture must be agreeable to the Nature of Things; does not that suppose the Nature of Things to be the standing rule by which we must judge of the truth of all those doctrines contained in the Scriptures? So that the Scripture can only be the secondary rule, as far as it is found agreeable to the Nature of Things; or to those self-evident notions, which are the foundation of all knowledge and certainty.

In short, no man can any more discern the objects of his own understanding and their relations, by the faculties of another, than he can see with another man's eyes; or than one ship can be guided by the helm of another. And therefore, he who demands a man's assent to anything, without conveying into his mind such reasons as may produce a sense of truth of it; erects a tyranny over his understanding, and demands an impossible tribute. No opinion, though ever so certain to one man, can be infused into another as certain, by any method but by opening his understanding, so that he may find the reasonableness of it in his own mind; and consequently, the only criterion, by which he tries his own reasonings, must be the internal evidence he has already of certain truths, and the agreeableness of his inferences to them.

And to suppose a creature to have Reason to direct him, and that he is not to be directed by it, is a contradiction; and if we are religious as we are rational, can religion oblige us not to be governed by Reason, though but for a moment? Nay, what is the religion of all rational beings, but what scripture terms it, "a reasonable service"? Or, their Reason employed on such subjects as conduce to the dignity of the rational nature? So that religion and Reason were not only given for the same end, the good of mankind; but they are, as far as such subjects extend, the same, and commence together. And if God can no otherwise apply to men, but by applying to their Reason, (which he is continually doing by the Light of Nature) does he not by that, bid them use their Reason? And can God at the same time forbid it, by requiring an implicit faith in any person whatever?

If you allow that men, by their reasoning faculties, are made like unto God, and framed after his image; and that Reason is the most excellent gift God can bestow; do they not destroy this likeness, deface this image, and give up the dignity of human nature, when they give up their Reason to any person whatever?

Can we lay too great a stress on Reason, when we consider that it is only by virtue of it God can hold communication with man? Nor can otherwise, if I may so speak, witness for himself, or assert the wisdom and goodness of his conduct; than by submitting his ways to mens cool deliberation, and strict examination? Since it is from the marks we discern in the laws of the universe, and its government, that we can demonstrate it to be governed by a God of infinite wisdom and goodness. He, whose Reason does not enable him to do this, can neither discern the wisdom, goodness, or even the Being of a God.

They only answer the end for which their Reason was given them, who judge of the will of God by the reasonableness and goodness of doctrines; and think his laws, like his works, carry in them the marks of divinity; and they likewise do the greatest honor to the scripture, who suppose it deals with men as with rational creatures; and therefore admit

not of any of its doctrines without a strict examination; and those who take a contrary method, would, if they lived in Turkey, embrace Mahometism, and believe in the Alcoran.

And indeed, a blind submission is so far from doing credit to true religion, that it puts all religions on the same foot; for without judging of a religion by its internal marks, there's nothing but miracles to plead; and miracles, true or false, if they are believed (and where are they not?) will have the same effect. Nay, if miracles can be performed by evil, as well as by good beings, the worst religion may have the most miracles, as needing them the most. And it was a proverbial saying among the philosophers of Greece, "Miracles for Fools, and Reasons for wise men." The Boetians were remarkable for their stupidity, and the number of their Oracles; and if you look no further than the Christian world, you will find that ignorance and the belief of daily miracles go hand in hand; and that there's nothing too absurd for the Peoples Belief. And if the most learned Huetius gives us a true account of things, there are no miracles recorded in the Bible, but many of the like nature are to be found in Pagan histories.

Would not Christians themselves think it a sufficient proof of a religion's not coming from God, if it wanted any of those internal marks by which the truth of all religion is to be tried, without inquiring into its miracles, or any other external proofs? And consequently, wherever these internal marks are found, are not external marks needless?

But how can we maintain that the Scripture carries with it all those internal marks of truth, which are inseparable from God's laws; and at the same time affirm it requires an implicit faith and blind obedience to all its dictates? If it does so, how could we have examined whether it had those internal marks? Or how can we say, we can't know without Scripture what are the internal marks of truth; and at the same time suppose we must, by our Reason, know what are those marks, before we can tell whether they are to be found in the Scripture?

If our nature is a rational nature, and our religion a "reasonable service," there must be such a necessary and close connection between them as to leave no room for anything that is arbitrary to intervene. And consequently, the religion of all rational beings must consist in using such a conduct to God and their fellow creatures, as Reason, whatever circumstances they are in, does direct.

We find St. Paul himself saying that, "Though we (the Apostles) or an angel from heaven, preach any other Gospel, let him be accursed." And is not this laying the whole stress on its internal marks? Since there's nothing in the nature of such things as have not those marks, to hinder them from being changed every moment.

And as to those who depress Reason, in order to exalt Revelation, I would ask them; what greater proof the Scripture can give us of the rectitude of human understanding in religious matters, than calling it the "inspiration of the Almighty" (Job 32:8); or than God's so frequently appealing to it, for the justification of his own conduct?

In the prophet Isaiah, God representing his own conduct towards his people, under the parable of the vineyard, expressly says, "O ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, between me and my vineyard" (Isa 5:3). And in Ezekiel, God, after a long vindication of his carriage towards his people, appeals to them, saying, "Hear now, O house of Israel, is not my way equal? Are not your ways unequal?" (Ezk 18:25). And in the prophet Micah he says, "He will plead with them; asks what he has done; and bids them testify against him" (Mic 6:2). And in the prophet Isaiah, after the Lord had said, "Wash ye, make ye clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; Cease to do evil, learn to do well; seek judgement, relieve the oppressed; judge the fatherless, plead for the widow;" he adds, "Come near, let us reason together, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow." (Isa 1:16) Does not God here appeal to their Reason for the sufficiency of moral things, to wash away their sins, though of the deepest dye? And could God and man reason together, except there were some notions in common to both; some foundation for such reasoning? Otherwise how could Job say, "I desire to reason with God" (Job 13:3)? And certainly, the next thing to reasoning with God is reasoning with one another about God and religion; that being the chief end for which our reasoning was given us. "Thus Paul reasoned in the Synagogue every Sabbath." (Acts 18:4) And again, "He reasoned with them out of the Scriptures. And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled" (Acts 24:15). Which certainly he had never done, had Paul talked about types, allegories, rites, ceremonies, etc.

B. You argue as if we had no certain way of knowing the will of God, except from the Light of Nature, and that eternal Rule of Reason, by which you suppose God governs all his own actions, and expects men should govern all theirs; but may not God take what method he pleases, to communicate his mind?

A. This all traditional religions with equal confidence assert; and they would have equal right to plead it, if Reason did not afford men certain criteria to know God's will by, which way soever revealed.

If God created mankind to make them happy here, or hereafter, the rules he gave them must be sufficient to answer that benevolent purpose of infinite wisdom; and consequently, had mankind observed them, there could have been no occasion for an external revelation; and its great use now is to make men observe those neglected rules, which God, of his infinite wisdom and goodness, designed for their present and future happiness.

B. Do not our divines say, mankind were for many ages in a deplorable state, for want of an external revelation?

A. If God does everything that's fit for him to do, could men be in such a state, because God did not do a thing which was not fit for him to do? viz. make a revelation before it was fit for him to make it? Or can the greatest part of mankind be now in that deplorable condition for want of a revelation, which God, out of his infinite wisdom, has not as yet

thought fit to communicate to them; at least with that evidence, as is necessary to make them believe it?

Must not these gentlemen suppose that either God, in creating mankind, did not design their future happiness, though he gave them immortal souls capable of it; or else, that though he designed it, he prescribed such means, or gave them such rules, as either were not sufficient at first; or in process of time became insufficient for that end? But that after men had been, for many ages, in this miserable condition, God thought fit to mend the eternal, universal Law of Nature, by adding certain observances to it, not founded on the Reason of Things; and that those, out of his partial goodness, he communicated only to some; leaving the greatest part in their former dark and deplorable state?

But is it not incumbent on those, who make any external revelation so necessary to the happiness of all mankind, to show how it is consistent with the notion of God's being universally benevolent, not to have revealed it to all his children, when all had equal need of it? Was it not as easy for him to have communicated it to all nations, as to any one nation, or person? Or in all languages, as in any one? Nay, was it not as easy for him to have made all men, for the sake of this noble end, speak in one and the same language; as it was at first to multiply languages, to prevent their building a tower up to heaven? Nay, I see not how God can have any need at all of language to let mankind know his will; since he has at all time communicated his mind to them without it.

B. These, I confess, are considerable difficulties; but as to the last difficulty, did not God give laws to the Jews, of which other nations knew nothing?

A. Nor were they concerned to know, or when known, obliged to observe them; nor did they bind the Jews themselves, but for a time; and even then, they were for the most part impracticable out of the land of Canaan; where God, as I shall fully show hereafter, acted, not as Governor of the Universe, but as King of the Jews, by virtue of the Horeb Covenant; which he obtained at his own request. But when God acts as Governor of the Universe, his laws are alike designed for all under his Government; that is, all mankind. And consequently, what equally concerns all, must be equally knowable by all. And if the universality of a law be the only certain mark of its coming from the Governor of mankind; how can we be certain, that, which wants this mark, comes from him? And if all mankind are creatures of the same creator, and fellow-creatures with one another, must not all their religious duties, as they are creatures of the same God, and fellow-creatures with one another, be the same?

And let me add, that if men are religious, as they are rational; must they not be capable, when they come to the use of their Reason, of knowing a religion founded on Reason? Or must they be obliged to leave their country, and endlessly rove up and down, in search of such opinions as have no foundation in Reason? Or, if they are forced to stay at home, be ever examining into all the arbitrary precepts, which are to be met with in any of the traditional religions they can come at? And should they do so, must they not, since Reason could not direct them in things not depending on Reason, perpetually remain in a state of uncertainty?

I might go further, and ask you, whether it is consistent with that impartiality, which is essential to the Deity, not to make those he designs should know his will by revelation, capable of knowing that revelation; and consequently, his will, contained in it, at one time as well as another? Which could not be, if that which was plain at first, became obscure by reason of the change of languages, customs, the distance of time and place, the errors of transcribers and translators, and a hundred other things too long to mention. Can these difficulties be avoided without supposing that religion, which was soever revealed, carries such internal marks of truth, as, at all times and places, plainly shows itself, even to the meanest capacity, to be the will of a Being of universal and impartial benevolence.

B. The greater stress you lay on Reason, the more you extol revelation; which being designed to exalt and perfect our rational nature, must be itself highly reasonable.

A. I grant you this is the design of religion; but have not the Ecclesiastics in most places entirely defeated this design; and so far debased human nature, as to render it unsociable, fierce and cruel? Have they not made external revelation the pretense of filling the Christian world with animosity, hatred, persecution, ruin and destruction; in order to get an absolute dominion over the consciences, properties and persons of the laity? But passing this over, if the perfection of any nature, whether human, angelic, or divine, consists in being governed by the Law of Nature; and ours, in acting that part, for which we were created; by observing all those duties which are founded on the relation we stand in to God and one another; can revelation any otherwise help to perfect human nature, but as it induces men to live up to this law of their nature? And if this law is the test of perfection of any written law; must not that be the most perfect law, by which the perfection of all others is to be tried?

And if nothing but reasoning can improve Reason, and no book can improve my Reason in any point, but as it gives me convincing proofs of its reasonableness; a revelation, that will not suffer us to judge of its dictates by our Reason, is so far from improving Reason, that it forbids the use of it; and reasoning faculties unexercised, will have as little force as unexercised limbs; He that is always carried, will at length become unable to go. And if the "Holy Ghost," as Bishop Taylor says, "works by heightening, and improving our natural faculties;" it can only be by using such means as will improve them, in proposing reasons and arguments to convince our understanding; which can only be improved by studying the Nature and Reason of Things. "I applied my heart (says the wisest of men) to know, and to search, and to seek out wisdom, and the Reason of Things."

So that the Holy Ghost can't deal with men as rational creatures, but by proposing arguments to convince their understandings, and influence their wills, in the same manner as if proposed by other agents; for to go beyond this, would be making impressions on men, as a seal does on wax; to the confounding of their Reason and their liberty in choosing; and the man would then be merely passive, and the action would be the action of another Being acting upon him; for which he could be no way accountable. But if the Holy Ghost does not act thus, and revelation itself be not arbitrary; must it not be founded on the Reason of Things? And consequently, be a "Republication, or Restoration of the

Religion of Nature?" And since that takes in everything thus founded, all the help of any authority whatever can afford a reasonable Being, is the offering him arguments, of which his own Reason must judge. And when he perceives their agreement with his self-evident notions, it is then and only then, he can be sure of their truth. And though men could not mistake, as we see they daily do, a natural for a supernatural suggestion; yet whether that suggestion comes from a good or evil Being (continually tempting people), can only be judged by the nature of the things suggested. For it is in vain to have recourse to miracles, if evil as well as good Beings had the power of doing them? And some are so heterodox as to imagine one reason why evil Beings are permitted to do miracles is, at least from the report of miracles (which is alike spread everywhere, and for every religion), that men might be tempted not to rely on the Reason and Nature of Things; and so run into endless superstitions.

And God, in the Old Testament, is said to suffer miracles to be done by false prophets, in order to prove his people; and in the New, such miracles, as would, "if it were possible, deceive the very elect."

In short, revelation either bids, or forbids men to use their Reason in judging of all religious matters; if the former, then it only declares That to be our duty, which was so independent of, and antecedent to, revelation; if the latter, then it does not deal with men as with rational creatures; but deprives them of that inestimable blessing.

B. Who, I pray, maintains that revelation forbids us the use of our Reason in judging of the truth of any religious matter?

A. Is not every one of this opinion, that says we are not to read the Scripture with freedom of assenting, or dissenting, just as we judge it agrees, or disagrees with the Light of Nature, and the Reason of Things? And this, one would think, none could deny was absolutely necessary, in reading a book where it is owned that the "Letter killeth." Nay, do not all in effect own as much, who will not allow the Scripture any meaning, how plain soever, but what is agreeable to their Reason? Which shows, that in their opinion, Reason was rather given to supply the defects of revelation, than revelation the defects of Reason. Is there a Divine, who, though he pretends ever so high a veneration for the Scripture, but will own there are many places where it is necessary to recede from the Letter, and find out a sense agreeable to his Reason; which supposes it is That, and not the authority of the book, for that's the same in both cases; which makes him approve the literal sense in one case, and condemn it in another. And were men not governed by their Reason, but by some external revelation, they had nothing more to do, but to take the words of that revelation in its literal, obvious, and plain meeting, how absurd soever it might appear to their carnal Reason.

B. We may take the words of fallible men in the plain, literal sense; but if anything is said by infallible men, which in the obvious meaning of the words is inconsistent with Reason, we must have recourse to an allegorical sense; or if that will not do, we must put no meaning at all on the words; thus we support the dignity of both revelation and Reason.

A. Is not this owning you take not your religion from those fallible men, but you endeavor to impose that religion your Reason tells you is true, upon their words; by allowing them no other meaning, how plain soever, but what you antecedently know by the Light of Nature to be the will of God.

And there's no book, but you may own its infallibility, and yet be entirely governed by your Reason, if you, as often as you find anything not agreeable to your Reason, torture it, to make it speak what is so. Would you think a Mahometan was governed by his Alchoran, who, upon all occasions should thus depart from the literal sense; nay, would you not tell him that his inspired book fell infinitely short of Cicero's uninspired writings; where there is no such occasion to recede from the Letter?

The Moammarites, a famous sect among the Mahometans, and the Mystics, very numerous in Turkey, sensible of the difficulties and uncertainties that attend all traditional facts, maintain, "That God can never discover himself with certainty any other way, than by speaking to the Reason and understanding of men. For if we depend" say they, "on oral tradition, we lay ourselves open to the greatest falsities and impositions; there being nothing so liable to infinite changes and alterations, numberless mistakes, additions and subtractions, according as mens opinions vary by the change of times and circumstances. Nor are books more exempt from such doubtfulness and uncertainty; since we find so much disagreement among books written by different men, in different parts and different ages; and even among the different books of the same men. But suppose we should resolve all our faith into the sole text of the Alchoran, the difficulty and uncertainty will still remain; if we consider how many metaphors, allegories, and other figures of speech; how many obscure, ambiguous, intricate and mysterious passages are to be met with in this infallible book; and how different are the opinions, expositions and interpretations of the most subtle doctors, and learned commentators on every one of them. The only sure way, then," add they, "to come to the certain knowledge of the truth, is to consult God himself, wait his inspirations, live just and honest lives, be kind and beneficent to all our fellow creatures, and pity such as differ from us in their opinions about the authority, integrity, and meaning of the Alchoran."

The Mahometans, though they own the law of Christ, yet they make it of no use, because they suppose the law of Mahomet is more perfect; and it is That they must stick to. And do not some men, by arguing much after the same manner in relation to the Gospel, render the Law of Nature useless? But if we are still moral agents, and as such are capable of judging between religion and superstition; can we think otherwise of the Gospel, than that it is designed, not to free us from the eternal Law of Nature, but from those absurdities which the folly or knavery of men have introduced in opposition to it? Hence it is, that the Scripture speaks in general terms, without defining those things which it commands, or forbids; because it supposes men moral agents, capable by their Reason to discern good from evil, virtue from vice, religion from superstition.

If Mr. Lock reasons justly, "No mission can be looked on to be divine, that delivers anything derogating from the honor of the one, only, true, invisible God; or inconsistent with Natural Religion and the Rules of Morality. Because God having discovered to men

the unity and majesty of his eternal Godhead, and the truths of Natural Religion and Morality by the Light of Reason, he cannot be supposed to back the contrary by revelation; for that would be to destroy the evidence and use of Reason, without which, men cannot be able to distinguish divine revelation from diabolical imposture."

Does not this suppose, first, that no mission can be divine, or its revelation true, that admits of more than one, only, true, invisible God? Secondly, that men, by their Reason, must know wherein the honor of this one, only, true, invisible God consists; otherwise, they might (for ought they know) be obliged by revelation to admit what is derogatory to his honor? Thirdly, they must know by the Light of Reason, what are the truths of Natural Religion and Rules of Morality; because otherwise they might be obliged to admit things inconsistent with them. And to suppose to the contrary, would be to destroy the use and evidence of Reason, without which, men would not be able to distinguish divine revelation from diabolical imposture; which implies that in things tending to the honor of God, and the good of mankind, the 'dernier' resort is to Reason; whose dictates, as they need no miracles for their support, so all doctrines inconsistent with them, though they plead endless miracles, must be looked upon as diabolical impostures.

And when the Apostle says, "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things (Phil 4:9);" is not this referring to us in the Light of Nature, to know what these things are, which show themselves to be the will of God by their internal excellency?

B. Our Divines, though they own Reason may do tolerably well in things between man and man, yet in matters relating to God, Reason, they say, must submit to faith; and that the chief end of revelation is to give men, especially the common people, just conceptions, and right notions of the nature and perfections of God; which they could never have from the dim Light of Nature, without the help of revelation.

A. Though they argue thus, yet at the same time they find themselves obliged to own that the Scripture, when taken literally, gives the Vulgar false and unworthy notions of the divine nature; by imputing, almost everywhere, to God, not only human parts, but human weakness and imperfections, and even the worst of human passions. To this, indeed, they have two answers, which seem inconsistent. First, that it is necessary to accommodate things in some measure to the gross conceptions of the Vulgar. The other is, that Reason has given all men such just conceptions of the divine nature, that there's no danger that even the common people should take these expressions literally.

B. Though Reason, on which you lay such stress, may demonstrate that there are not more Gods than one; yet Reason can never tell us that there is more than one that is God; though Reason tells us that there are not three Gods, yet Reason could never tell us that, though in the idea of a divine person, the idea of God be included, each person being by himself God; yet that the multiplying of divine persons, was not the multiplying of Gods? And though Reason declares that there is a difference between three and one; yet Reason

will never discover that there's no more in three persons, than in one; all three together being the same numerical God, as each is by himself. Reason will never be able to find out a middle between a numerical, and a specific unity; between one in number, and one in kind; and yet without it, how can we suppose the same God to be self-existent, and not self-existent, etc. Reason can as little discover a medium between a nominal, and a real difference; and yet without it how can we avoid Sabellianism on the one hand, or Polytheism on the other? There's nothing Reason can tell us more plainly, than that God and a man are two distinct, intelligent persons; but can Reason tell us they may become one intelligent person, even while their personal natures and properties remain infinitely distinct and different? Thus you see, how Reason must submit to faith.

A. I, for my part, not understanding these orthodox paradoxes, can only at present say, I do not disbelieve them; but must add, that as I am a rational creature, and God requires of me a "reasonable service," I ought not, nay, I cannot have any faith which will not bear the test of Reason; and therefore, notwithstanding your maxim of Reason's submitting to faith, I will venture to affirm, if a book assert (supposing the words of it are taken in their plain, literal sense) immoral, or impious doctrines; and there are not in that book certain marks to tell us where they are to be taken literally, and where figuratively; or, what is the figurative sense; that men in these points are as much to be determined by their Reason, as if there was no such book.

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

A. I shall only tell you what the most celebrated Fathers say on this head. Athanasius says, "Should we understand a great part of this sacred writ literally, we should fall into most enormous blasphemies." St. Cyril says much the same. St. Gregory the first says, "The Scripture is not only dead, but deadly; for it is written, "The Letter kills, but the Spirit quickeneth;" and this is what the whole divine Letter does." And in another place he compares them to beasts who regard the Letter. And St. Jerome says, "If we adhere to the flesh of the Letter, it will be the occasion of many evils." And Gregory Nyssen makes the like reflection.

B. I durst not have made so bold with the Scriptures, as these Fathers; but content myself with saying with the excellent Bishop of Litchfield, that, "God, was he to speak with men, must not only speak their very language, but according to the conception of those, he speaks to. To rectify their sentiments in Natural, Historical, or Chronological matters; to mend their logic or rhetoric when it is defective; but has no ill influence on piety, is not in the business of revelation. Needlessly to contradict innocent vulgar notions, is the sure way to lose the peoples affections, and to forego a prudential way of gaining them."

A. With submission to this learned author, is there no difference between God's not rectifying mens sentiments in those matters, and using himself such sentiments as need to be rectified; or between God's not mending mens logic, or rhetoric, where it is defective, and using such himself; or between God's not contradicting vulgar notions, and confirming them; by speaking according to them? Or can the God of truth, stand in need of error to support his truth; his eternal truth? Or can infinite wisdom despair of gaining,

or keeping peoples affections, without having recourse to such mean arts? No wonder, if men use pious frauds, when they think God himself has recourse to them. In this case, must not men, by their Reason, judge when God makes use of defective logic, or rhetoric; and speaks in natural, historical, and chronological matters, not according to the Truth of Things, but according to the conceptions of those of the vulgar, to whom he directs his speech? Nor can I think of any falsehood, supposed to be authorized by the God of truth, but may be made use of to some ill purpose; in Divinity as well as Mathematics it's a certain maxim, "Uno absurdo dato mille sequentur."

St. Austin argues after another manner, in saying, "Should unbelievers know us to be mistaken in such things as concern the natural world, and allege our books for such vain opinions; how shall they believe the same books, when they speak of the resurrection of the dead, and the world to come?"

Dr. Prideaux, speaking of the marks of imposture, says, "If there be but one known truth in the whole scheme of nature with which it interferes, this must make the discovery; and there's no man, that forgeth an Imposture, but makes himself liable to be this way convicted of it."

The Doctor, sure, would not have asserted this so roundly, had he not compared the philosophical, and scriptural scheme of nature, and perceived their exact agreement.

But not only Dr. Burnet, in defense of his 'Archaeologia', but all who maintain that the Sun is immovable, and that it is the Earth that moves; sufficiently show that the Scriptural and Philosophical account of natural things seldom agree. However, to give one instance, there is scarce a countryman so ignorant, as not to know that if the seed thrown into the earth is killed by drought, or dies by any other accident, it never rises; but St. Paul (without regard to the judgment, which our Saviour denounces against a man who calls his brother 'Fool') says, "Thou Fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die." And our Saviour himself says, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." And the Greek Church, at this day, make use of boiled corn at their commemoration of their dead, to signify "the resurrection of the body."

To convince you how entirely we are to depend on Reason in matters of religion, I will only ask you, Why you suppose it so absurd in the Papists to say that men bred up in their church are obliged entirely to depend on its infallibility; and that they, who have not had the happiness to be thus educated, ought, indeed, to use their Reason to bring them into their church; but that then they are no longer to be governed by it, but with the rest of the members, equally to rely on the church's infallibility decisions.

B. Because this supposed infallibility puts it in the power of that church to make their votaries believe virtue to be vice; and vice, virtue; or any other absurdity whatever; since they have no way to know whether it does not require such things, but by examining, by their Reason, all her doctrines; and if Reason be sufficient to to discover the Being and Will of God, and that their church holds no doctrines disagreeable with his will (for this

they must own Reason capable of discovering, before they could bring men into their church), they, in spite of their pretenses to infallibility, put the whole stress on Reason. And if afterwards, they teach men to renounce that Reason, by which before they would have them wholly governed; it can be for no other cause, but to prevent their discovering in that church such errors, as they could not well know before; and which, if known, would have hindered them from coming into it.

A. The Papists, you know, reply that if this reasoning is good, it strikes at all implicit faith in St. Peter, as well as his successors; and equally concludes against mens giving up their Reason to any persons in former ages, as well as the present; since it is by that alone they are able to judge, whether their doctrines are consistent with the Light of Nature, and free from superstition; and contain nothing in them unworthy of a divine original. Before examining what men teach, there's no reason to have an implicit faith in one set of men more than another; and examination destroys all implicit faith, and all authority whatever; since if they then embrace the opinions of others, whether Apostles or not, it is because they appear agreeable to their Reason. If you say the Apostles would by Reason bring men into their religion, and after that, have them wholly governed by their authority; may not the Papists retort on you your own answer, and cry, "That if Reason is sufficient to discover the Being and Will of God, and that the Apostles taught no doctrines, but what are agreeable to his will; (for this," say they, "you must allow Reason capable of discovering, otherwise it could never lead men to believe what the Apostles taught;) You alike put the whole stress on Reason. And you must own, either that men are entirely to be governed by Reason, and then you destroy all authority whatever; or else not to be governed by it, and then you can't, by Reason, show the Absurdity of that implicit faith, the Catholic church requires."

B. You know, that in answer to all objections of this nature, we say as Bishop Burnet does, in his exposition of the Articles of our church, "That if we observe the style and method of the Scriptures, we shall find in them all over a constant appeal to mens Reason, and to their intellectual faculties. If the mere dictates of the church, or of infallible men, had been the resolution and foundation of faith, there had been no need of such a long thread of reasoning and discourse, as both our Saviour used when on earth, and the Apostles used in their writings. We see the way of authority is not taken, but explanations are offered, proofs and illustrations are brought, to convince the mind; which shows that God, in the clearest manifestation of his will, would deal with us as with rational creatures, who are not to believe, but on persuasion; and to use our Reason, in order to the attaining of that perfection."

A. This is all I contend for, and had not what the Bishop says, (though it amounts to giving up all implicit faith) been agreeable to the whole tenor of the Scriptures, and the doctrines of the church; some of those, who have so nicely examined into all parts of his exposition of the Articles, would never have let this passage escape without remarks. And, therefore, since it is in defense of the Protestant Religion, and the whole current of Scripture, I shall add to what this excellent Father of the Church has said; that when any person has recourse to arguments and reasonings, he does, in those instances, disclaim all authority, and appeals to the Reason of those he means to persuade; and, in order to it,

would have them judge of the force of his arguments by those common and self-evident notions, upon which the validity of all proofs depend; and men, in examining what he says by that Reason to which he appeals, wholly answer the end for which he argues with them; though, upon examination, they are not convinced by his reasons. To require more, would be to require impossibilities; since it is not in mens power, after they have considered all things as well as they are able, to believe otherwise than they do. And had the Apostles said to those they designed to convert; "It will be an affront to our infallibility, not to have an implicit faith in us; not to take on content whatever we say. You are, therefore, no longer to act as moral agents, or to have recourse to the essential difference of good and evil; to the Light and Law of Nature, or to the eternal Reason of Things, to judge of the truth of what we declare. No, this is the faith, and thus you must believe, or perish everlastingly." Had the Apostles, I say, talked after this manner, do you think they could have gained one reasonable convert? No, they knew full well, that this was not the way to deal with rational creatures; they, on the contrary, as I shall show hereafter, everywhere speak to this effect; "We desire you would, with the utmost freedom, examine our doctrines; since if they are, as we affirm, true, they will not only bear the test of Reason, but the more they are tried, the brighter they will appear. This will be ennobling yourselves, and doing justice to your own understandings, as well as to our doctrines."

If men have any authority, it is then only, when they renounce any peremptory authority; and instead of claiming "dominion over mens faith", desire they would prove everything by those tests God had given them, in order to discern good from evil, truth from falsehood, religion from superstition; thus the Apostle seeks to maintain his credit and authority with the Thessalonians; "Prove all things," says he, "hold fast that which is good."

B. Do not you, by laying such a stress on Reason, in effect, set aside revelation?

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

B. But not on the foot of its own authority, but only as you judge it agreeable to Reason; and therefore I question, whether any of our eminent Divines talk thus in commendation of Reason, to the disparagement of authority.

A. If Reason is all we rational creatures have to trust to, being That alone which distinguishes us from beasts, incapable of religion; Divines, even those of the most narrow principles, however they may shuffle for a while, must make Reason their "dernier" resort; but however, since Reason alone will not satisfy you, but you must have authority even against authority, I shall mention what some of our most eminent Divines say, when they are defending Revelation against the attacks of Infidels; or writing against the Papists, or men popishly affected.

Dr. F. Clarke, Dean of Sarum, in defending Christianity against the attacks of infidels, who charge it with requiring an implicit faith, thinks this such a scandal to Christianity,

that a good part of his Boylean Lectures are to clear it from that charge; he says, "We find no command in Scripture to lay aside our Reason or understanding, but directly contrary is there affirmed of the Christian religion; viz. that it is our "reasonable service". And therefore the method in which Christ and his Apostles taught this service, was agreeable to Reason; viz. by exhorting men to "attend seriously," to "weigh diligently," their doctrines and precepts, etc." And then asks, "Are these, and such like expressions calculated to enslave mens understandings, and to induce a blind and implicit obedience? Such methods may serve the purpose of superstition, but true religion can gain nothing by them."

Dr. Whitchcot does this justice to external revelation, as to say, "The Scripture's way of dealing with men in matters of religion, is always by evidence of Reason and argument;" And very judiciously adds, "I reckon, that which has not Reason in it, or for it, is man's superstition, and not religion of God's making." What an infinity of disputes would this rule have cut off? What I pray, was the grand occasion of so many monstrous heresies, even in the primitive times, but their believing the Scripture's way of dealing with men, was not by evidence or Reason. And if any now think otherwise, are they not in danger of making no better distinction between religion and superstition, than a modern philosopher, who thus concisely distinguishes them; "Tales publicly allowed, religion; not allowed, superstition."

Bishop Hoadly, the strenuous assertor of our religious, as well as civil rights, says, "Authority is the greatest and most irreconcilable enemy to truth and argument, that this world ever furnished out; all the sophistry; all the color of plausibility; all the artifice and cunning of the subtlest Disputer in the world, may be laid open, and turned to the advantage of that very truth, which they designed to hide, or to depress. But against authority there is no defense."

And after having shown that it was authority that crushed the noble sentiments of Socrates and others; and that it was by authority, that the Jews and Heathens combated the truth of the Gospel; he says, "When Christians were increased to a majority, and came to think the same method to be the only proper one, for the advantage of their cause, which had been the enemy and destroyer of it; then, it was the "authority of Christians," which, by degrees, not only laid waste the honor of Christianity, but well neigh extinguished it among men. It was authority, which would have prevented all reformation, where it is; and which has put a barrier against it, wherever it is not. How indeed, can it be expected, that the same thing, which has in all ages, and in all countries, been hurtful to truth, and true religion among men, should in any age, or any country, become a friend and guardian of them."

And to obviate an objection easily foreseen, he says, "It was authority, which hindered the voice of the Son of God himself from being heard; and which alone stood in opposition to his powerful arguments, and his divine doctrine." Which supposes there's no Christian doctrine, but what has powerful arguments to support it; or in other words, has divinity stamped on it, showing itself by its innate excellency to be the will of God; since to put its credit on mere authority, is to put its credit on that, which has been, and

always will be, an enemy to truth. Nay, he supposes, that were it possible, that authority and truth could consist together, and the latter be received for the sake of the former, it could not avail. His words are, "Where truth happens to be received for the sake of authority; there is just so much diminished from the love of truth, and the glory of Reason, and the acceptableness of men to God; as there is attributed to authority."

And Archbishop Tillotson says, "All our Reasonings about divine revelation are necessarily gathered by our natural notions about religion; and therefore, he, who sincerely desires to do the will of God, is not apt to be imposed on by vain, and confident pretenses of divine revelation; but if any doctrine be proposed to him, which is pretended to come from God, he measure it by those sure and steady notions, which he has of the divine nature and perfections; and by these he will easily discern whether it be worthy of God or not, and likely to proceed from him. He will consider the nature and tendency of it, or whether it be a doctrine according to Godliness, such as is agreeable to the divine nature and perfections, and tends to make us like unto God; if it be not, though an angel should bring it, he would not receive it. And if no miracles, no, not the preaching of an angel, ought to make us receive any doctrine that does not carry those internal marks; no miracles, certainly, ought to make us reject any doctrine that has these internal marks."

And much to the same purpose, our judicious Doctor Claget says, "When men pretend to work miracles, and talk of immediate revelations, of knowing the truth by inspiration, and of more than ordinary illumination, we ought not to be frightened by those big words, from looking what is under them; nor to be afraid of calling these things into question, which are set off with high-flown pretenses. From hence it has come to pass, that superstition and idolatry, enthusiasms and impostures have so much prevailed in the world. It is somewhat strange, that we should believe men the more, for that very reason upon which we should believe them the less."

I shall give you the sentiments of one judicious Divine more, since they contain a summary of what I have been saying; his words are, "It could not be avoidable, but that this natural reverence for divine revelations, and proneness of believing them, would produce some ill effects, prejudicial to the Reason and interest of mankind; a fatal credulity would creep into the world, and possess the minds of the more ignorant persons; and induce them blindly to believe every bold pretender to revelation. After a laborious and fruitless search of future happiness, men were apt to embrace any system of religion presented to them; if it flattered their hopes of future felicity, they were loath to discover the error and illusion of any pleasing revelation; they wished it might be true, and at first, what they wished, they at last believed to be true. Many feared they should be injurious to the divine majesty, and incur the guilt of Atheism, if they should scrupulously examine what pretended to carry the stamp of his authority, and to have been revealed by him. To entertain scruples in this case, was thought no less than sacrilege, and every doubt was esteemed an affront to God; to which may be added, that they should contract no small merit, and ever lay an obligation on God, if they immediately resigned up their judgment to his supposed revelation, and blindly received it without any doubt or hesitation.

This in all ages, opened a wide gap, and prepared a way for error and superstition; while the whimsies of every foolish Enthusiast, and the follies of every bold Impostor were proposed under the venerable name of "divine oracles." Hence all the absurdities of the Pagan religion found belief and entertainment in the world; and the most extravagant Impostors never wanted for Proselytes. Hence the most pernicious errors of Heretics found admission into the church; and the pretense of new revelations seduced some part of the Christian world.

To this fatal Credulity, and danger of illusion arising from it, God and Nature have prescribed an excellent remedy; the use of our Reason, which may examine the grounds and testimonies of all pretended revelations; enquire into their truth, and after a scrupulous trial, pass sentence on them. This, the interest of truth, and the honor of our nature requires us to perform, that we may neither prostitute the former, nor depreciate the latter. Without this precedent enquiry, our belief would become unlawful; for to obviate the rules of conduct, prescribed to our understanding, were to overthrow all the laws of nature, to debase the dignity of mankind, and to efface the image of God implanted in us. These rules assure us, that God can't command anything foolish or ridiculous. No greater injury can be offered to the Deity, than to believe him the author of any religion which prescribes, or encourages foolishness or superstitious practices. Justly doe Plutarch wonder, why Atheism should rather be accused of impiety, than superstition; since few are moved by any defect in the order of government, to call in question the existence of God; but the tricks and cheats of superstitious persons, their Enthusiastic motions, ridiculous actions, exorcisms, and lustrations, and such like; give them occasion to believe it better there should be no God, than such a God as the author of such a superstitious religion must necessarily be."

If this author reasons justly, as all Protestants will allow, at least, when they write against the Enthusiasm of the church of Rome; does it not follow, that it is our duty, before we embrace any instituted religion, to examine by the light which God has given us, into every part of it; and after a scrupulous trial, pass sentence on it? If the interest of truth, and the honor of man's nature require them to perform this grand duty, must not their Reason, antecedently to all external revelation, afford certain tests to distinguish between truth and falsehood in all religious matters? It would be ridiculous to tell men, that it is a crime worse than Atheism, to admit a religion which prescribes, or encourages foolish of superstitious practices; unless upon a supposition, that their Reason can tell them what are such practices; and thereby hinder them from embracing a religion which requires things of this nature. And if men are apt to embrace any religion (the Mahometan for instance) which flatters their hopes of future felicity, and makes them loath to discover the pleasing illusion; does it not follow that the more any religion does so, the more cause men have critically to examine into its Reasonableness? Because without such a precedent enquiry, their belief would be irrational and unlawful, debasing the dignity of mankind, and effacing the image of God implanted in them.

And if absurdities, not only of the Pagan religion, but even the most pernicious errors among Christians, have been occasioned through want of previous examination; nothing can be requisite to discover True Christianity, and to preserve it in its native purity, free

from all superstition, but, after a strict scrutiny, to admit nothing to belong to it except what our Reason tells us is worthy of having God for its author. And if be evident, that we can't discern whether any instituted religion contains everything worthy, and nothing unworthy of a divine original, except we can antecedently by our Reason discern what is, or is not worthy of having God for its author; it necessarily follows that natural and revealed religion can't differ. Because whatever Reason shows to be worthy of having God for its author, must belong to Natural Religion; and whatever Reason tells us is unworthy of having God for its author, can never belong to the True Revealed Religion. It is upon this very plan, that I have endeavored to show you wherein true and genuine Christianity consists.

B. By the Reasoning of these Divines, religion is the plainest thing in the world. We, it seems, have nothing to do, but to examine what notions are worthy of God, in order to know his will; but do they tell us how we may certainly know what those notions are?

A. All Divines of what denomination soever agree, at least in words, that God can't act arbitrarily in the government of the world, or command things for commandings-sake; but that all his laws, being calculated for the good of mankind, carry with them the marks of consummate wisdom and goodness. However, I shall mention two.

The incomparable Archbishop Tillotson says, "It would be little less than an horrid and dreadful blasphemy, to say that God, out of his sovereign will and pleasure, can do anything which contradicts the nature of God, or the essential perfections of the Deity; or to imagine that the pleasure and will of the holy, just and good God, is not always regulated, and determined by the essential and indispensable laws of goodness, holiness and righteousness."

The judicious Dr. Scot affirms, "That to suppose the will and power of God is not perfectly subject to his moral perfections, is to suppose him a very defective and imperfect Being; a lawless will and power being the greatest defect in nature; wherefore to secure our minds against all injurious apprehensions of God, this is a most necessary rule; that we conceive him to be such a Being as can never will, nor act anything but what his own essential wisdom, goodness and justice do approve. To affirm he is not obliged to regulate himself by wisdom, justice and goodness; or that he can do otherwise; is to attribute to him a power to will, or act foolishly, etc."

B. I should readily approve what the authors you quote have said, to show the reasonableness of the divine law in every instance; were there not religion, propositions to be believed, which are above Reason.

A. If I do not understand the terms of a proposition; or if they are inconsistent with one another; or so uncertain, that I know not what meaning to fix on them; here is nothing told me, and consequently, no room for belief. But in all cases where I am capable of understanding a proposition, it is Reason that must inform me whether it is certain, probable, or uncertain; and even in propositions relating to such facts as we learn from

report, it is by our Reason alone, in comparing circumstances, etc. that we must judge of their probability.

But, although designing men very well know that it's impossible to believe, when we know not what it is we are to believe; or to believe an absurd or contradictory proposition; yet they, because without examination, people may be brought to fancy they believe such things; and it being their interest to confound men's understandings, and prevent all inquiry, craftily invented the notion of believing things above Reason. Here the ravings of an enthusiast are on a level with the dictates of infinite wisdom, and nonsense rendered most sacred; here a contradiction is of great use to maintain a doctrine, that, when fairly stated, is not defensible; because by talking backward and forward, by using obscure terms, and taking words in different senses, they may easily amuse and puzzle the people. On this foundation 'Transubstantiation' is built, and most of those mysterious propositions, about which in former days Christians so frequently murdered each other.

But if the Scripture was designed to be understood, it must be within the reach of human understanding; and consequently, it can't contain propositions that are either above, or below human understanding; and if there are no propositions in the Bible, but what have certain ideas, by common usage, annexed to the words; how can we suppose some are designed to be understood, and some not? Or know which are, and which are not? And indeed, if the end of God's giving a revelations was to direct men's thoughts and actions, it must (as necessary to that end) be delivered in such a way as is plain and easy to be understood, even by mean capacities; and consequently, to suppose it dark and mysterious in any part, is to represent it as unworthy of having God for it's author.

And one would think that men, when they knew they had truth on their side, would speak after the plainest manner, and not study to disguise it by unnatural ways of expressing themselves; especially when they reflect on others for so doing.

The Christians said, The Heathens were conscious their religion was absurd, by their having recourse to allegorical, enigmatical, and mysterious explications; and consequently, that it could not be designed for the common people, incapable of such explications; and that their priests, instead of defending it, rendered it uncertain; since where the literal sense is quitted, there may be many allegorical, or spiritual senses, opposite to one another; and indeed, the wise men among them, as Tully, etc, owned as much.

Nor did the Heathens fail to retort the like objection upon Christians; and in truth, they equaled, if not out-did them in allegorizing away, not only the plainest texts, but even matter of fact; which proved the occasion of innumerable heresies.

Dupin, speaking of the extravagant opinions, which obtained among silly people in the primitive times; says, "They sprang from the principles of the Pagan philosophers; and from the mysteries, which crack-brained men put on the history of the Old and New Testament, according to their imaginations; the more extraordinary these opinions were,

the more did they relish, and the better did they like them; and those who invented them, published them gravely as great mysteries to the simple, who were all disposed to receive them."

But could any crack-brained writers have found out more mysteries in the Old and New Testament, than the primitive fathers; (who interpreted them according to their imaginations, and jumbled them together with that Pagan philosophy they were educated in?) Or have published their mysterious reveries with greater gravity to simple people, always disposed to receive what they do not understand?

The same author, speaking of St. Barnabas's Catholic Epistle in answer to this question, "That it was incredible so great an Apostle, full of the Holy Ghost, and Colleague of St. Paul, should be the author of such forced allegories, and extravagant explications of scripture; of those various fables concerning animals, with diverse other conceits of the like nature;" says "They have but little knowledge of the Jewish nation, and of the primitive Christians educated in the Synagogues, who obstinately believe that such sort of notions could not proceed from them; that on the contrary, it was their very character to turn the whole scripture into allegory."

And, I think, none of our celebrated writers reject this Epistle as spurious, because of the allegories it abounds with. Our excellent Archbishop says, "Even St. Paul himself in his Epistles, received by us as Canonical, affords us not a few instances of this, which is so much found fault with in St. Barnabas. As I might easily make appear from a multitude of passages out of them, were it needful for me to enlarge myself on the point, which everyone who has read the scriptures with any care, cannot choose but have observed."

And those Christians St. Paul mentions, for 'believing the resurrection was past', were no doubt, great Allegorists.

The primitive Fathers exactly followed the precedent set them by the Apostle Barnabas, and other Apostolic men.

Clemens of Alexandria says, "The Oeconomy of the Law is typical and prophetic; and that Moses and the Prophets wrote all in parables."

So Tertullian, "The Law is spiritual and prophetic, and almost in all points figurative." And Le Clerc observes that, "The Fathers did not content themselves with interpreting the Old Testament allegorically, but they did the same with the New."

But because Origen was famous for this allegorical method, and by virtue of it esteemed the greatest champion of Christianity, next to the Apostles; and since what he says, was not only his own, but the sense of the then Church, it will not be improper to cite him. "If we adhere" says he "to the letter; or understand what is written in the Law of God, as the Jews do, in the common acceptation of the words, I blush to own, that God ever gave such laws; for mere human constitutions, as those of the Romans, Athenians, or

Lacedemonians, will seem more reasonable and proper; but if the Law of God is to be understood in the sense the Church teaches, then truly it exceeds all human ordinances."

For which Reason he makes the allegorical way of interpreting scripture to be the key of knowledge; and following the letter of the law, the direct way to infidelity and vain superstition. 'Literam sequentes in infidelitatem, & varias superstitiones incurrunt.' And he objects to Marcion the Heretic, that he was against the allegorical way of interpreting scripture.

B. Do not these Fathers suppose God either a weak being, who could not frame as wise laws as men; or else an ill-natured being, who, in order to puzzle mankind, speaks in riddles and mysteries? What should we think of a lawyer, who said, he should be ashamed of the laws of his own country, if taken in a literal sense; but that there was an allegorical sense which could one but hit, would discover profound wisdom?

A. Thus the Fathers sufficiently acknowledged the sovereignty of Reason, in allegorizing away matters of fact, that were in truth, incapable of being allegorized; though that is but running into one unreasonable thing, to get rid of another. And how can we depend on anything said in scripture, if we can't on its facts? One would think nothing was a plainer fact, than that of Lot's lying with his two daughters, yet St. Irenaeus allegorizes that away; and is so fond of allegorizing, that for the sake of it, he contradicts the scripture, and says, "The harlot Raab entertained three spies;" and had he not made them three, he would have been at a loss how to say as he does, that "this harlot hid in her house, Father, Son and Holy Ghost".

"How can we be edified," says Origen, "in reading that so great a patriarch as Abraham, not only lied to King Abimelech, but also betrayed to him the chastity of his wife? What instructions can we reap from the wife of so great a patriarch, if we think she was exposed to be debauched by her husband's contrivance. Let the Jews believe such things, and those with them, who are greater friends to the letter than to the spirit."

He asserts, "That there are even in the Gospel things said, which, according to the letter, or taken in their literal sense, are mere falsities, or lies; as where the Saviour says, "He that believeth in me, the works that I do, shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do. John xiv, xii, etc" which, he shows, was not verified literally, but spiritually.

And, "That it was want of knowledge in the scriptures, to think that God spent six real days in the work of the creation."

He desires anyone to show, "how the truth of the Gospels can be maintained, or their seeming contrarieties cleared by any other than the anagogical method; which he affirms necessary for that purpose."

He says, "The pair of Turtle-doves, or two young pigeons, offered for Jesus, were not such as we see with our carnal eyes; not "birds", such as fly in the air; but something divine and august, beyond human contemplation, etc."

If you desire to be more plentifully furnished with instances of the like nature with those above mentioned, consult the Philocalia or Origen.

St. Austin, a man of the greatest authority of all the Fathers, says, "We must not take the story of Jacob's cheating his father, by impersonating his brother Esau, literally, lest the scripture should seem to encourage lying;" and speaking of Jesus cursing the fig tree, says, "Hoc factum, nisi figuratum stultum invenitur." And he, with the rest of the Fathers, not only most unnaturally allegorizes away the history of the fall, but even of the whole creation; and says, "The whole world was created in an instant;" and though there is not one word about angels in the text, yet this angelical Doctor make part of the six days labor relate to the creation of angels.

B. But how could he account for God's instituting the Sabbath, upon his resting from his six days labor, if all things were created in an instant?

A. How happy he was in allegorizing, you may judge from his explaining that passage in Genesis, iii, xiv where in the Latin version which he followed, runs thus, "Upon thy breast, and upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life." By the "breast," says he, is to be understood "Pride"; By the "belly," the "lusts of the flesh"; and by that which was added, "dust shalt thou eat," is meant "Curiosity," which extends only to things temporal and earthly; and by "Curiosity," he means "Avarice."

And St. Ambrose will not allow the rainbow to be the "Bow" which God placed in the clouds; and saith, "Far be it from us to call this "God's Bow"; for this "Bow," which is called "Iris," is seen indeed, in the day, but never appears at night." For which weighty reason, he substitutes in its room, a strange, allegorical Bow out of his own imagination.

If the Fathers could allegorize away the most stubborn matters of fact, they could have no difficulty in allegorizing away any other matter, where the words are capable of various senses. One would think it was difficult to find out an allegorical meaning to this text, "O daughter of Babylon, happy is he, who taketh, and dashes thy little ones against the stones;" yet nothing is too hard for Origen, who assures us that the text intends, "The man who dashes his vicious thoughts against the solid rock of Reason."

And indeed, the Fathers have so turned and twisted the scripture, with a pious intention to make it speak nothing but what they thought agreeable to Reason; that they have rendered it like Aristotle's *Materia prima*; *nec quid, nec quale, nec quantum, nec aliquid eorum de quibus ens denominatur*. For by making the scripture, in so many places, say one thing and mean another, they have destroyed its certainty; since as Le Clerc observes, "If, according to this method, the sacred writers had said quite another thing than what they said, or, if you will, the quite contrary, yet one might find as good sense in them; as those that will try it will presently observe. Therefore the Christians and the Jews would have done much better to keep close to the letter, than to use so uncertain a method to defend the holy scriptures against the Pagans."

B. All the Fathers do not allegorize like Origen; Justin Martyr, for instance, asserts, that the threatening, that "In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," was literally fulfilled, in that Adam did not live out a thousand years; which, with God, is but one day. But to go no further than the story of Abraham's prostituting wife; St. Ambrose, to justify Abraham's conduct, roundly asserts adultery to be no crime before the giving of the Law by Moses. And St. Austin makes adultery still lawful, if husband and wife consent. St. Jerome, indeed, runs into the other extreme, and approves the conduct of those, who killed themselves to preserve their chastity. But the most eloquent St. Chrysostom enlarges very much in commendation of Abraham and Sarah, and says, "Though nothing gives a husband more uneasiness, than to imagine his wife has to do with another; yet this just man did what he could, even to accomplish the act of adultery." And adds that Sarah too, (whom he sets as a pattern for all married women) accepted the proposal very courageously; and then cries out, "Who can sufficiently celebrate the praises of Sarah, who, after so long a continence, and at her age, readily consented to this act of adultery, and to let the barbarian have the use of her body, to save her husband?"

A. Might not those Fathers as well have allegorized, as talked thus absurdly? It is chiefly owing to the Papists taking some words in a literal sense, relating to the "eating of flesh, and drinking the blood of the Son of Man," that makes them to be of a different Religion from the Protestants; and though two parties may agree, in taking the same words in an allegorical sense; yet by allegorizing them differently, they may be of different Religions. By allegorizing some texts, the Jews have made the Messiah a temporal prince; the Christians a spiritual one. Mr. Whiston must think there are no words so plain, but are capable of being allegorized; since, he supposes the Catholic Church has all along allegorized plain love-songs, between Solomon and one of his mistresses, into spiritual hymns between Christ and his spouse, the Church. And what Dr. South must have thought of the Revelations, I leave you to judge, when he does not scruple to call it "a mysterious, extraordinary book; which, perhaps, the more it is studied, the less it is understood; as generally finding a man cracked, or making him so." And had not the Mahometan Divines had the knack of allegorizing nonsense, fools and frantic persons would not have been had in such honor and reverence among the Musselmen, only "because their revelations and enthusiasms transported them out of the ordinary temper of humanity." Therefore, upon the whole, I must needs say, Happy is the man, who is so far, at least, directed by the Law of Reason, and the Religion of Nature, as to suffer no mysteries, or unintelligible propositions, no allegories, no hyperboles, no metaphors, types, parables, or phrases of an uncertain signification, to confound his understandings. And certainly, the common parent of mankind is too good and gracious, to put the happiness of all his children on any other doctrines, than such as plainly show themselves to be the will of God, even to the ignorant and illiterate; if they have but courage and honesty to make use of their Reason. Otherwise the scripture would not be plain in all necessary things; even to "babes and sucklings."

B. You suppose then, that the bulk of mankind are taught by God himself, to know what religion comes from him; even though they want letters, to make them capable of understanding those external proofs, on which all traditional religions do, and must depend.

## **CHAP. 13**

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