

THE LIVELY ORACLES GIVEN TO US: OR THE CHRISTIANS BIRTH-RIGHT

by Richard Allestree

Richard Allestree's theological work addressing persecution and Christian living.

11 Chapters

Table of Contents

0. The Lively Oracles Given to Us: or the Christians Birth-right
1. THE
2. THE
3. SECT. II.
4. SECT. III.
5. SECT. TV.
6. SECT. V.
7. SECT. VI.
8. SECT. VII.
9. SECT. VIII.
10. THE CONTENTS.

Chapter 0

The Lively Oracles Given to Us: or the Christians Birth-right

THE

PREFACE.

IN the Treatise of the Government of the Tongue, publish'd by me heretofore, I had occasion to take notice among the exorbitances of that unruly part, which sets on fire the whole course of nature, and it self is set on fire from hell, Jam. 3. 6. of the impious vanity prevailing in this Age, whereby men play with sacred things, and exercise their wit upon the Scriptures by which they shall be judg'd at the last day, Joh. 12. 48.

But that Holy Book not only suffering by the petulancy of the Tongue, but the malice of the Heart, out of the abundance whereof the mouth speaks, Matt. 12. 34. and also from that irreligion, prepossession, and supiness, which the pursuit of sensual pleasures certainly produces; the mischief is too much diffus'd and deeply rooted, to be controul'd by a few casual reflections. I have therefore thought it necessary, both in regard of the dignity and importance of the subject, as also the prevalence of the opposition, to attempt a profess'd and particular vindication of the Holy Scriptures, by displaying their native excellence and beauty, and enforcing the veneration and obedience that is to be paid unto them.

This I design'd to do in my usual method, by an address to the affections of the Reader; soliciting the several passions of love, hope, fear, shame and sorrow, which either the Majesty of God in his Sublime Being, his goodness derived to us, or our ingratitude return'd to him, could actuate in persons not utterly obdurate.

But whereas men when they have learn'd to do amiss, quickly dispute and dictate; I found my self concern'd to pass sometimes within the verge

of controversy, and to discourse upon the principles of reason, and deductions from Testimony, which in the most important transactions of human life are justly taken for evidence. In which whole performance I have study'd to avoid the entanglements of Sophistry, and the ambition of unintelligible Quotations; and kept my self within the reach of the unlearned Christian Reader, to whose uses my labours have been ever dedicated.

All that I require is that men would bring as much readiness to entertain the Holy Scriptures, as they do to the reading profane Authors, I am asham'd to say, as they do to the incentives of vice and folly, nay, to the libels and invectives that are levell'd against the Scriptures.

If I obtain this, I will make no doubt that I shall gain a farther point; that from the perusal of my imperfect conceptions, the Reader will proceed to the study of the Scriptures themselves: there tast and see how gracious the Lord is, Psal. 34. 8. and, as the Angel commands Saint John, Revelat. 10. 9. eat the Book: where he will experimentally find the words of David verify'd, Ps. 19. 7. The Law of the Lord is an undefiled Law, converting the Soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, and giveth wisdom to the simple. The Statutes of the Lord are right, and rejoyce the heart; the Commandment of the Lord is pure, and giveth light to the eyes. The Fear of the Lord is clean and endureth for ever, the Judgements of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desir'd are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold, sweeter also than hony and the hony-comb. Moreover by them is thy servant taught, and in keeping of them there is great reward.

It is said of Moses, Exod. 34. 29. that having receiv'd the Law from God, and convers'd with him in Mount Sinai forty days together, his face shone, and had a brightness fix'd upon it that dazled the

beholders; a pledge and short essay not only of his appearance at Mount Tabor, Matt. 17. 1. where, at the Transfiguration he again was seen in glory: but of that greater, and yet future change when he shall see indeed his God face to face, and share his glory unto all eternity. The same Divine Goodness gives still his Law to every one of us. Let us receive it with due regard and veneration; converse with him therein, instead of forty days, during our whole lives, and so anticipate and certainly assure our interest in that great Transfiguration, when all the faithful shall put off their mortal flesh, be translated from glory to glory, eternally behold their God, see him as he is, and so enjoy him.

Conversation has every where an assimilating power; we are generally such as are the Men, and Books, and business that we deal with: but surely no familiarity has so great an influence on Life and Manners, as when Men hear God speaking to them in his Word. That Word which the Apostle Hebr. 4. 12. declares to be quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edg'd sword, piercing to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intent of the heart.

The time will come when all our Books however recommended for subtilty of discourse, exactness of method, variety of matter, eloquence of Language; when all our curious Arts, like those mention'd Acts 19. 19. shall be brought forth, and burnt before all men: When the great Book of nature, and heaven it self shall depart as a scroul roll'd together, Revel. 6. 14. At which important season 'twill be more to purpose to have study'd well, that is, transcrib'd in practice this one Book, than to have run thro' all besides, for then the dead, small and great, shall stand before God, and the Books shall be open'd, and another Book shall be open'd which is the Book of Life, and the dead shall be judg'd

out of those things which were written in the Books according to their works, Revel. 20. 21.

In vain shall men alledge the want of due conviction, that they did not know how penal it would be, to disregard the Sanctions of Gods Law, which they would have had enforc'd by immediate miracle; the apparition of one sent from the other world who might testify of the place of torment. This expectation the Scripture charges every where with the guilt of tempting God, and indeed it really involves this insolent proposal, that the Almighty should be oblig'd to break his own Laws, that men might be prevail'd with to keep his. But should he think fit to comply herein, the condescension would be as successless in the event, as 'tis unreasonable in the offer. Our Saviour assures, that they who hear not Moses and the Prophets, the instructions and commands laid down in holy Scripture, would not be wrought upon by any other method, would not be persuaded by that which they allow for irresistable conviction, tho' one rose again from the dead, Luke 16. 31.

THE

LIVELY ORACLES

GIVEN TO US,

Or the Christians Birth-right and Duty in the custody and use of the
HOLY SCRIPTURE.

SECT. I.

The several Methods of Gods communicating the knowledge of himself.

GOD, as he is invisible to human eyes, so he is unfathomable by human understandings; the perfection of his nature, and the impotency of ours, setting us at too great a distance to have any clear perception of him. Nay, so far are we from a full comprehension, that we can discern nothing at all of him, but by his own light; those discoveries he hath been pleas'd to make of himself.

2. THOSE have been of several sorts; The first was by infusion in mans creation, when God interwove into mans very constitution and being the notions and apprehensions of a Deity: and at the same instant when he breath'd into him a living soul, imprest on it that native religion, which taught him to know and reverence his Creator, which we may call the instinct of humanity. Nor were those principles dark and confus'd, but clear and evident, proportionable to the ends they were design'd to, which were not only to contemplate the nature, but to do the will of God; practice being even in the state of innocence preferable before an unactive speculation.

3. BUT this Light being soon eclips'd by Adams disobedience, there remain'd to his benighted posterity, only some faint glimmerings, which were utterly insufficient to guide them to their end, without fresh aids, and renew'd manifestations of God to them. It pleas'd God

therefore to repair this ruine, and by subsequent revelations to communicate himself to the Patriarchs in the first Ages of the World: afterwards to Prophets, and other holy men; till at last he revealed himself yet more illustriously in the face of Jesus Christ, 2 Cor. 4.

6.

4. THIS is the one great comprehensive Revelation wherein all the former were involv'd, and to which they pointed; the whole mystery of Godliness being compris'd in this of Gods being manifested in the flesh, and the consequents thereof, 1 Tim. 3. 16. whereby our Saviour as he effected our reconciliation with God by the sacrifice of his death; so he declar'd both that, and all things else that it concern'd man to know in order to bliss, in his doctrine and holy life. And this Teacher being not only sent from God, Jo. 3. but being himself God blessed for ever, it cannot be that his instructions can want any supplement. Yet that they might not want attestation neither to the incredulous world; he confirm'd them by the repeated miracles of his life, and by the testimony of those who saw the more irrefragable conviction of his Resurrection and Ascension. And they also might not want credit and enforcement, the holy Spirit set to his seal, and by his miraculous descent upon the Apostles, both asserted their commission, and enabled them for the discharge of it, by all gifts necessary for the propagating the Faith of Christ over the whole World.

5. THESE were the waies by which God was pleased to reveal himself to the Forefathers of our Faith, and that not only for their sakes, but ours also, to whom they were to derive those divine dictates they had receiv'd. St. Stephen tells us, those under the Law receiv'd the lively Oracles to deliver them down to their posterity, Acts 7. 38. And those under the Gospel, who receiv'd yet more lively Oracles from him who was both the Word and the Life, did it for the like purpose; to transmit it

to us upon whom the ends of the world are come. By this all need of repeated Revelations is superseded, the faithful deriving of the former, being sufficient to us for all things that appertain to life and godliness, 2 Pet. 1. 3.

6. AND for this, God (whose care is equal for all successions of men) hath graciously provided, by causing Holy Scriptures to be writ; by which he hath deriv'd on every succeeding Age the illuminations of the former. And for that purpose endowed the Writers not only with that moral fidelity requisite to the truth of History, but with a divine Spirit, proportionable to the great design of fixing an immutable rule for Faith and Manners. And to give us the fuller security herein, he has chosen no other penmen of the New Testament, than those who were the first oral Promulgers of our Christian Religion; so that they have left to us the very same doctrine they taught the Primitive Christians; and he that acknowledges them divinely inspir'd in what they preach'd, cannot doubt them to be so in what they writ. So that we all may enjoy virtually and effectively that with of the devout Father, who desir'd to be St. Paul's Auditor: for he that hears any of his Epistles read, is as really spoke to by Saint Paul, as those who were within the sound of his voice. Thus God, who in times past spak: at sundry times, and in diverse manners to our Fathers by the Prophets, and in the latter days by his Son, Heb. 1. 1, 2. continues to speak to us by these inspir'd Writers; and what Christ once said to his Disciples in relation to their preaching is no less true of their writings: He that despiseth you, despiseth me, Luk. 10. 16. All the contempt that is at any time flung on these sacred Writings, rebounds higher, and finally devolves on the first Author of those doctrines, whereof these are the Registers and Transcripts.

7. BUT this is a guilt which one would think peculiar to Infidels and

Pagans, and not incident to any who had in their Baptism lifted themselves under Christs banner: yet I fear I may say, of the two parties, the Scripture has met with the worst treatment from the latter. For if we measure by the frequency and variety of injuries, I fear Christians will appear to have out-vied Heathens: These bluntly disbelieve them, neglect, nay perhaps scornfully deride them. Alas, Christians do this and more; they not only put contempts, but tricks upon the Scripture, wrest and distort it to justify all their wild phancies, or secular designs; and suborn its Patronage to those things it forbids, and tells us that God abhors.

8. INDEED so many are the abuses we offer it, that he that considers them would scarce think we own'd it for the words of a sensible man, much less of the great omniscient God. And I believe 'twere hard to assign any one so comprehensive and efficacious cause of the universal depravation of manners, as the disvaluing of this divine Book, which was design'd to regulate them. It were therefore a work worthy another inspired writing, to attempt the rescue of this, and recover it to its just estimate. Yet alas, could we hope for that, we have scoffers who would as well despise the New as the Old; and like the Husbandmen in the Gospel, Mat. 21. 36. would answer such a succession of messages by repeating the same injuries.

9. To such as these 'tis I confess vain for man to address; nay 'twere insolence to expect that human Oratory should succeed where the divine fails yet the spreading infection of these renders it necessary to administer antidotes to others. And besides, tho' (God be blest) all are not of this form, yet there are many who, tho' not arriv'd to this contempt, yet want some degrees of that just reverence they owe the sacred Scriptures, who give a confus'd general assent to them as the Word of God, but afford them not a consideration and respect answerable

to such an acknowledgment. To such as these, I shall hope it may not be utterly vain to attempt the exciting of those drowsy notions that lie unactive in them; by presenting to them some considerations concerning the excellence and use of the Scripture: which being all but necessary consequences of that principle they are supposed to own, viz. that they are Gods word, I cannot much question their assent to the speculative part: I wish I could as probably assure my self of the practick.

10. INDEED were there nothing else to be said in behalf of holy Writ, but that it is Gods word, that were enough to command the most awful regard to it. And therefore it is but just we make that the first and principal consideration in our present discourse. But then 'tis impossible that that can want others to attend it; since whatsoever God saies, is in all respects compleatly good. I shall therefore to that of its divine original add secondly the consideration of its subject Matter; thirdly, of its excellent and no less diffusive end and design; and fourthly, of its exact propriety and fitness to that design: which are all such qualifications, that where they concur, nothing more can be requir'd to commend a writing to the esteem of rational men. And upon all these tests, notwithstanding the cavil of the Romanists and others, whose force we shall examin with the unhappy issue of contrary counsels, this Law of God will be found to answer the Psalmists character of it Ps. 19. 7. The Law of God is perfect: and 'twill appear that the custody and use thereof is the Birth-right and Duty of every Christian. All which severals being faithfully deduced, it will only remain that I add full cautions as will be necessary to the due performance of the aforesaid duty, and our being in some degree render'd perfect, as this Law of God, and the Author thereof himself is perfect, Matt. 5. 48.

SECT. II.

The Divine Original, Endearments and Authority of the Holy Scripture.

MENS judgments are so apt to be bias'd by their affections, that we often find them readier to consider who speaks, than what is spoken: a temper very unsafe, and the principle of great injustice in our inferior transactions with men; yet here there are very few of us that can wholly divest our selves of it, whereas, when we deal with God (in whom alone an implicit faith may securely be reposed) we are nice and wary, bring our scales and measures, will take nothing upon his word which holds not weight in our own balance. 'Tis true, he needs not our partiality to be justified in his sayings, Psal. 51. 4. His words are pure, even as the silver tried seven times in the fire, Psalm. 12. 6. able to pass the strictest test that right reason (truly so called) can put them to. Yet it shews a great perverseness in our nature that we who so easily resign our understandings to fallible men, stand thus upon our guard against God make him dispute for every inch he gains on us; nor will afford him what we daily grant to any credible man, to receive an affirmation upon trust of his veracity.

2. I am far from contradicting our Saviours Precept, of Search the Scriptures Jo. 7. or Saint Pauls, of proving all things, 1 Thes. 5. 21. we cannot be too industrious in our inquest after truth, provided we still reserve to God the decisive vote, and humbly acquiesce in his sense, how distant soever from our own; so that when we consult Scripture (I may add reason either) 'tis not to resolve us whether God be to be believed or no in what he has said, but whether he hath said such and such things: for if we are convinc'd he has, reason as well as Religion commands our assent.

3. WHATEVER therefore God has said, we are to pay it a reverence merely upon the account of its Author, over and above what the excellence of the matter exacts: and to this we have all inducements as well as obligation: there being no motives to render the words of men estimable to us, which are not eminently and transcendently applicable to those of God.

4. THOSE motives we may reduce to four: first, the Authority of the Speaker; secondly, his Kindness; thirdly, his Wisdom, and fourthly, his Truth. First, for that of Authority: that may be either native, or acquired; the native is that of a parent, which is such a charm of observance, that we see Solomon, when he would impress his counsels, assumes the person of a Father; Hear O my children the instructions of a Father, Prov. 4. 1. And generally thro' that whole Book he uses the compellation of my Son, as the greatest endearment to engage attention and reverence. Nay so indispensable was the obligation of children in this respect, that we see the contumacious child that would not hearken to the advice of his Parents; was by God himself adjudged to death, Deut. 21. 20.

5. NOR have only Gods, but mens Laws exacted that filial reverence to the dictates of Parents. But certainly no Parent can pretend such a title to it as God, who is not only the immediate Father of our persons, but the original Father of our very nature; not only of our flesh, but of our spirits also, Heb. 12. 9. So that the Apostles Antithesis in that place is as properly applied to counsels as corrections; and we may as rightly infer, that if we give reverence to the advices of our earthly Parents; much more ought we to subject our selves to this Father of our spirits. And we have the very same reason wherewith to enforce it: for the Fathers of our flesh do as often dictate, as correct according to their own pleasures, prescribe to

their children not according to the exact measures of right and wrong, but after that humor which most predominates in themselves. But God always directs his his admonitions to our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness, Heb. 12. 10. So that we are as unkind to our selves, as irreverent towards him, whenever we let any of his words fall to the ground; whose claim to this part of our reverence is much more irrefragable than that of our natural Parents.

6. BUT besides this native Authority there is also an acquired; and that we may distinguish into two sorts: the one of dominion, the other of reputation. To the first kind belongs that of Princes, Magistrates, Masters, or any that have coercive power over us. And our own interest teaches us not to slight the words of any of these, who can so much to our cost second them with deeds. Now God has all these titles of jurisdiction; He is the great King, Psal. 48. 2. Nor was it only a complement of the Psalmists; for himself owns the stile, I am a great King, Mal. 1. He is the judge of all the World, Gen. 18. yea, that Ancient of days, before whom the Books were open'd, Dan. 7. 13. He is our Lord and Master by right both of Creation and Redemption; and this Christ owns even in his state of inanity; yea, when he was about the most servile employment, the washing his Disciples feet, when he was most literally in the form of a servant; yet he scruples not to assert his right to that opposite title; You call me Master, and Lord; and ye say well, for so I am; Jo. 13. 13. Nor are these empty names, but effectively attended with all the power they denote. Yet so stupid are we, that whilst we awfully receive the dictates of our earthly Superiors, we slight and neglect the Oracles of that God who is King of Kings, and Lord of Lords. When a Prince speaks, we are apt to cry out with Herods Flatterers, the voice of a God, and not of a man, Acts 12. Yet when it is indeed the voice of God, we choose to listen to any

thing else rather than it. But let us sadly remember, that notwithstanding our contempts, this word shall (as our Saviour tells us) judge us at the last day, Jo. 12. 48.

7. A second sort of acquir'd Authority is that of reputation. When a man is famed for some extraordinary excellencies, whether moral or intellectual, men come with appetite to his discourses, greedily suck them in, nor need such a one bespeak attention; his very name has done it for him, and prepossess'd him of his Auditors regard. Thus the Rabbies among the Jews, the Philosophers among the Greeks, were listened to as Oracles, and to cite them was (by their admiring Disciples) thought a concluding Argument. Nay, under Christianity, this admiration of mens persons has been so inordinate, that it has crumbled Religion away in little insignificant parties; whilst not only Paul, Apollo or Cephas, but names infinitely inferior, have become the distinctive characters of Sects and separate Communions. So easily alas are we charm'd by our prepossessions, and with itching ears run in quest of those doctrines which the fame of their Authors, rather than the evidence of truth, commends to us.

8. AND hath God done nothing to get him a repute among us? has he no excellencies to deserve our esteem? is he not worthy to prescribe to his own creatures? if we think yes, why is he the only person to be disregarded? or why do we so unseasonably depart from our own humour, as not to give his Word a reverence proportionable to that we pretend for him; nay, which we actually pay to men of like passions with our selves? A contempt so absurd as well as impious, that we have not the example of any the most barbarous people to countenance us. For tho' some of them have made very wild mistakes in the choice of their Deities, yet they have all agreed in this common principle, that whatever those Deities said, was to be receiv'd with all possible

eneration; yea, such a deference gave they to all significations of the divine will, that as they would undertake no great enterprize without consulting their Auguries; so upon any inauspicious signs they relinquish'd their attempts. And certainly if we had the same reverence for the true God which they had for the false, we should as frequently consult him. We may do it with much more ease and certainty: we need not trust to the entrails of Beasts, or motion of Birds we need not go to Delphos, or the Lybian Hammon for the resolving our doubts: but what Moses said to Israel is very applicable to us, the Word is nigh thee, Deut. 30. 14. That Word which David made his Counsellor, Psal. 119. 24, his Comforter, ver. 50. his Treasure, ver. 72. his Study, ver. 99. And had we those awful apprehensions of God which he had, we should pay the like reverence to his Word. Did we well ponder how many titles of Authority he has over us, we should surely be asham'd to deny that respect to him in whom they all conspire, which we dare not deny to them separately in humane Superiors.

9. A second motive to esteem mens words, is the kindness of the speaker. This has such a fascinating power, as nothing but extreme ill nature can resist. When a man is assur'd of the kindness of him that speaks, whatever is spoken is taken in good part. This is it that distinguishes the admonitions of a friend from the reproaches of an enemy; and we daily in common conversation receive those things with contentment and applause from an intimate and familiar, which spoken by a stranger or enemy would be despis'd or stomach'd. So insinuating a thing is kindness, that where it has once got it self believ'd, nothing it says after is disputed; it supple the mind, and makes it ductile and pliant to any impressions.

10. BUT what human kindness is there that can come in any competition with the Divine? it surpasses that of the nearest and dearest

relations; Mothers may forget, yet will I not forget thee, Isa. 49. 15.

And the Psalmist found it experimentally true, When my Father and my Mother forsake me, the Lord taketh me up, Ps. 27. 10. The tenderest bowels compared to his are adamant and flint: so that 'tis a most proper epithet the Wise man gives him, O Lord thou lover of souls, Wis. 11. 26. Nor is this affection merely mental: but it attests it self by innumerable effects. The effects of love are all reducible to two heads, doing and suffering; and by both there God has most eminently attested his love to us.

11. FOR the first, we cannot look either on our bodies or our souls, on the whole Universe about us, or that better World above us; but we shall in each see the Lord hath done great things for us, Psal. 126. Nay, not only our enjoyments, but even the capacity to enjoy, is his bounty. Had not he drawn mankind out of his original clay, what had we been concern'd in all the other works of his Creation? So that if we put any value either upon what we have or what we are, we cannot but account our selves so much indebted to this his active love. And tho' the passive was not practicable by the divine Nature simply and apart, yet that we might not want all imaginable evidences of his love, he who was God blessed for ever, linkt his impassible to, our passible nature; assum'd our humanity, that he might espouse our sorrows, and was born on purpose that he might die for us. So that sure we may say in his own words, greater love than this hath no man; Jo. 15. 13.

12. AND now 'tis very hard, if such an unparallel'd love in God, may not as much affect us, as the slight benefactions of every ordinary friend; if it cannot so much recommend him to our regard, as to rescue his word from contempt, and dispose us to receive impressions from it; (especially when his very speaking is a new act of his kindness, and design'd to our greatest advantage.)

13. BUT if all he has done and suffer'd for us cannot obtain him so much from us, we must surely confess, our disingenuity is as superlative as his love. For in this instance we have no plea for our selves. The discourses of men 'tis true may sometimes be so weak and irrational, that tho' kindness may suggest pity, it cannot reverence; But this can never happen in God, whose wisdom is as infinite as his love. He talks not at our vain rate who often talk only for talkings sake; but his words are directed to the most important ends and address'd in such a manner as befits him in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, Col. 2. And this is our third consideration, the wisdom of the Speaker.

14. HOW attractive a thing Wisdom is, we may observe in the instance of the Queen of Sheba, who came from the utmost parts of the earth, as Christ saies Mat. 12. 42. to hear the Wisdom of Solomon. And the like is noted of the Greek Sages, that they were address'd to from all parts, by persons of all ranks and qualities, to hear their Lectures. And indeed the rational nature of man does by a kind of sympathetick motion close with whatever hath the stamp of reason upon it. But alas, what is the profoundest wisdom of men, compar'd with that of God? He is the essential reason; and all that man can pretend to is but an emanation from him; a ray of his Sun, a drop of his Ocean: which as he gives, so he can also take away. He can infatuate the most subtil designers; And (as he saies of himself) makes the diviners mad: turns the wise men back, and makes their wisdom foolishness, Esay 44. 25.

15. HOW impious a folly is it then in us, to Idolize human Wisdom with all its imperfections, and despise the divine? yet this every man is guilty of, who is not attracted to the study of sacred Writ by the supereminent wisdom of it's Author. For such men must either affirm that God has not such a supereminency, or that, tho' he has in himself;

he hath not exerted it in this writing; The former is down-right blasphemy; and truly the latter is the same, a little varied. For that any thing, but what is exactly wise can proceed from infinite wisdom, is too absurd for any man to imagine. And therefore he that charges Gods Word with defect of wisdom must interpretatively charge God so too. For tho' 'tis true, a wise man may sometimes speak foolishly; yet that happens through that mixture of ignorance, or passion which is in the most knowing of mortals: but in God, who is a pure act, and essential wisdom, that is an impossible supposition.

16. NAY, indeed it were to tax him of folly beyond what is incident to any sensible man; who will still proportion his instruments to the work he designs. Should we not conclude him mad, that should attempt to fell a mighty Oak with a Pen-knife, or stop a Torrent with a whisp of Straw? And sure their conceptions are not much more reverend of God, who can suppose that a writing design'd by him for such important ends, as the making men wise unto salvation, 2 Tim. 3. 15. the casting down all that exalts it self against the obedience of Christ, 2 Cor. 10. 5. should it self be foolish and weak: or that he should give it those great attributes of being sharper than a two edged-sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, of the joints and marrow, Heb. 4. 14. if its discourses were so flat and insipid as some in this profane Age would represent them.

17. 'TIS true indeed, 'tis not, as the Apostle speaks the wisdom of this world, 1 Cor. 2. 6. The Scripture teaches us not the arts of undermining governments, defrauding and circumventing our Brethren; but it teaches us that which would tend much more even to our temporal felicity; and as reason prompts us to aspire to happiness, so it must acknowledge that is the higher wisdom which teaches us to attain it.

18. AND as the Holy Scripture is thus recommended to us by the wisdom

of its Author; so in the last place is it by his truth, without which the other might rather raise our jealousy than our reverence. For wisdom without sincerity degenerates into serpentine guile; and we rather fear to be ensnar'd than hope to be advantag'd by it. The most subtil addresses, and most cogent arguments prevail not upon us, where we suspect some insidious design. But where wisdom and fidelity meet in the same person, we do not only attend, but confide in his counsels. And this qualification is most eminently in God. The children of men are deceitful upon the weights, Psal. 62. 9. Much guile often lurks indiscernably under the fairest appearances: but Gods veracity is as essentially himself, as his wisdom, and he can no more deceive us, than he can be deceiv'd himself. He is not man that he should lie, Numb. 23. 19. He designs not (as men often do) to sport himself with our credulity; and raise hopes which he never means to satisfy: he saies not to the seed of Jacob, seek ye me in vain, Exod. 45. 19. but all his promises are yea and Amen, 2 Cor. 1. 20. He is perfectly sincere in all the proposals he makes in his word: which is a most rational motive for us to advert to it, not only with reverence but love.

19. AND now when all these motives are thus combined; the authority, the kindness, the wisdom, the veracity of the speaker, what can be requir'd more to render his words of weight with us? If this four-fold cord will not draw us, we have sure the strength, not of men, but of that Legion we read of in the Gospel, Mat. 5. 1. For these are so much the cords of man, so adapted to our natures, nay to our constant usage in other things, that we must put off much of our humanity, disclaim the common measures of mankind, if we be not attracted by them. For I dare appeal to the breast of any sober, industrious man, whether in case a person, who he were sure had all the fore-mention'd qualifications, should recommend to him some rules as infallible for

the certain doubling, or trebling his estate, he would not think them worth the pursuing; nay, whether he would not plod and study on them, till he comprehended the whole Art. And shall we then when God, in whom all those qualifications are united, and that in their utmost transcendencies, shall we, I say, think him below our regard, when he proposes the improving our interests, not by the scanty proportions of two or three; but in such as he intimated to, Abraham, when he shew'd him the Stars, as the representative of his numerous off-spring, Gen. 5. 15. when he teaches us that highest, and yet most certain Alchymy, of refining, and multiplying our enjoyments, and then perpetuating them?

20. ALL this God do's in Scripture; and we must be stupidly improvident, if we will take no advantage by it. It was once the complaint of Christ to the Jews, I am come in my Fathers name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive, Jo. 5. 43. And what was said by him the eternal essential Word, is no less applicable to the written; which coming in the name, and upon the message of God, is despis 'd and slighted, and every the lightest composure of men preferr'd before it. As if that signature of Dignity it carries, served rather as a Brand to stigmatize and defame, than adorn and recommend it. A contempt which strikes immediatly at God himself, whose resentments of it, tho' for the present supprest by his longsuffering, will at last break out upon all who persevere so to affront him, in a judgment worthy of God, Wisd. 12. 26.

21. BUT after all that has been said, I foresee some may say, that 1 have all this while but beaten the air, have built upon a principle which some flatly deny, others doubt of, and have run away with a supposition that the Bible is of divine Original, without any attempt of proof. To such as these I might justly enough object the extreme

hard measure they offer to Divinity above all other Sciences. For in those, they still allow some fundamental maxims, which are presupposed without proof; but in this they admit of no Postulata, granted principle on which to superstruct. If the same rigor should be extended to secular cases, what a damp would it strike upon commerce? For example, a man expects fair dealing from his Neighbour, upon the strength of those common notions of Justice he presumes writ in all mens hearts: but according to this measure, he must first prove to every man he deals with, that such notions there are, and that they are obligatory: that the wares expos'd to sale are his own; that dominion is not founded on grace, or that he is in that state, and so has a property to confer upon another that the person dealt with paies a just price; do's it in good money; and that it is his own, or that he is in the state of grace, or needs not be so, to justify his purchase: and at this rate the Market will be as full of nice questions as the Schools. But because complaints and retortions are the common refuge of causes that want better Arguments, I shall not insist here; but proceed to a defence of the question'd Assertion, that the Bible is the Word of God.

22. IN which I shall proceed by these degrees. First, I shall lay down the plain grounds upon which Christians believe it. Secondly, I shall compare those with those of less credibility which have generally satisfied mankind in other things of the like nature. And thirdly, I shall consider whether those who are dissatisfied with those grounds, would not be equally so with any other way of attestation.

23. BEFORE I enter upon the first of these, I desire it may be consider'd, that matters of fact are not capable of such rigorous demonstrative evidences, as mathematical propositions are. To render a thing fit for rational belief, there is no more requir'd, but that the motives for it do over poise those against it; and in that degree they

do so, so is the belief stronger or weaker.

24. NOW the motives of our belief in the present case, are such as are extrinsick, or intrinsick to the Scriptures; of which the extrinsick are first, and preparative to the other; and indeed all that, can reasonably be insisted on to a gain-saier, who must be suppos'd no competent judge of the latter. But as to the former, I shall adventure to say, that the Divine Original of the Scripture hath as great grounds of credibility as can be expected in any thing of this kind. For that God inspir'd the Pen-men of Holy Writ, is matter of fact, and being so, is capable of no other external evidence but that of testimony: and that matter of fact being also in point of time so remote from us, can be judg'd of only by a series of Testimonies deriv'd from that Age wherein the Scriptures were written, to this: and the more credible the testifiers, and the more universal the Testimony, so much the more convincing are they to all considering men.

25. AND this attestation the Scripture hath in the highest circumstances, it having been witnes'd to in all Ages, and in those Ages by all persons that could be presum'd to know any thing of it. Thus the Old Testament was own'd by the whole Nation of the Jews, as the writings of men inspir'd by God, and that with such evidence of their mission, as abundantly satisfied those of that Age, of their being so inspir'd; and they deriv'd those Writings with that attestation to their posterity. Now that those of the first Ages were not deceiv'd, is as morally certain as any thing can be suppos'd. For in the first part of the Bible is contain'd the history of those miracles wherewith God rescued that people out of Egypt, and instated them in Canaan, Now if they who liv'd at that time, knew that such miracles were never done, 'tis impossible they could receive an evident Fable as an inspir'd truth. No single person, much less a whole Nation

can be suppos'd so stupid. But if indeed they were eye-witnesses of those miracles, they might with very good reason conclude, that the same Moses who was by God empower'd to work them, was so also for the relating them; as also all those precedent events from the Creation down to that time, which are recorded by him.

26. SO also for the preceptive parts of those Books, those that saw those formidable solemnities, with which they were first publish'd, had sure little temptation to doubt that they were the dictates of God, when written. Now if they could not be deceiv'd themselves, 'tis yet less imaginable that they should conspire to impose a cheat upon their posterities; nor indeed were the Jews of so easy a credulity, that 'tis at all probable the succeeding Generations would have been so impos'd on: their humour was stubborn enough, and the precepts of their Law severe and burdensome enough to have tempted them to have cast off the yolk, had it not been bound upon them by irresistible convictions of its coming from God. But besides this Tradition of their Elders, they had the advantage of living under a Theocracy, the immediate guidance of God; Prophets daily were rais'd up among them, to fore-tell events, to admonish them of their duty, and reprove their back-slidings yet even these gave the deference to the written Word; nay, made it the test by which to try true inspirations from false: To the Law and to the Testimony; if they speak not according to it, there is no light in them, Esay 18. 20. So that the veneration which they had before acquir'd, was still anew excited by fresh inspirations, which both attested the old, and became new parts of their Canon.

27. NOR could it be esteem'd a small confirmation to the Scriptures, to find in succeeding Ages the signal accomplishments of those prophecies which were long before registred in those Books; for nothing less than divine Power and Wisdom could foretell, and also verify them. Upon

these grounds the Jews universally thro' all successions receiv'd the Books of the Old Testament as divine Oracles, and look'd upon them as the greatest trust that could be committed to them: and accordingly were so scrupulously vigilant in conserving them, that their Masorits numbred not only the sections, but the very Words, nay Letters, that no fraud or inadvertency might corrupt or defalk the least iota of what they esteem'd so sacred. A farther testimony and sepiment to which, were the Samaritan, Chaldee, and Greek Versions: which being made use of in the Synagogues of Jews, in their dispersions, and by the Samaritans at Sichem, could not at those distances receive an uniform alteration, and any other would be of no effect. Add to this, that the Original exemplar of the Law, was laid up in the Sanctuary, that the Prince was to have a Copy of it alwaies by him, and transcribe it with his own hand; that every Jew was to make it his constant discourse and meditation, teach it his Children, and wear part of it upon his hands and forehead. And now sure 'tis impossible to imagine any matter of fact to be more carefully deduced, or irrefragably testified, nor any thing believ'd upon stronger evidence.

28. THAT all this is true in reference to the Jews, that they did thus own these Writings as divine, appears not only by the Records of past Ages, but by the Jews of the present, who still own them, and cannot be suspected of combination with the Christians. And if these were reasonable grounds of conviction to the Jews, (as he must be most absurdly sceptical that shall deny) they must be so to Christians also, who derive them from them: and that with this farther advantage to our Faith, that we see the clear completion of those Evangelical prophecies which remain'd dark to them, and consequently have a farther Argument to confirm us, that the Scriptures of the Old Testament are certainly divine.

29. THE New has also the like means of probation: which as it is a collection of the doctrine taught by Christ and his Apostles, must if truly related be acknowledged no less divine than what they orally deliver'd. So that they who doubt its being divine, must either deny what Christ and his Apostles preach'd to be so; else distrust the fidelity of the relation The former strikes at the whole Christian faith; which if only of men, must not only be fallible but is actually a deceit, whilst it pretends to be of God, and is not. To such Objectors we have to oppose those stupendous miracles with which the Gospel was attested such as demonstrated a more than human efficacy. And that God should lend his omnipotence to abet the false pretensions of men, is a conceit too unworthy even for the worst of men to entertain.

30. 'TIS true, there have been by God permitted lying miracles, as well as true ones have been done by him; such as were those of the Magicians in Egypt, in opposition to the other of Moses; but then the difference between both was so conspicuous, that he must be more partial and disingenuous, than even those Magicians were, who would not acknowledge the disparity, and confess in those which were truly supernatural the finger of God, Exod. 8. 19. Therefore both in the Old and New Testament it is predicted, that false Prophets should arise, and do signs and wonders, Deut. 13. 1. Matt. 24. 11, 24. as a trial of their fidelity who made profession of Religion; whether they would prefer the few and trivial sleights which recommend a deceiver, before those great and numberless miracles which attested the sacred Oracles deliver'd to the sons of men by the God of truth. Whether the trick of a Barchochebas, to hold fire in his mouth; that of Marcus the Heretick, to make the Wine of the Holy Sacrament appear blood; or that of Mahomet, to bring a Pidgeon to his ear, ought to be put in balance against all the Miracles

wrought by Moses, our Saviour, or his Apostles. And in a word; whether the silly stories which Iamblichus solemnly relates of Pythagoras, or those Philostratus tells of Apollonius Tyaneus, deserve to rival those of the Evangelists. It is a most just judgment, and accordingly threatned by Almighty God that they who would not obey the truth should believe a lie, 2 Thes. 2. 11. But still the Almighty, where, any man or devil do's proudly, is evidently above him, Exod. 18. 11. will be justified in his sayings, and be clear when he is judged, Rom. 3. 4. 31. BUT if men will be Scepticks, and doubt every thing, they are to know that the matter call'd into question, is of a nature that admits but two waies of solution; probability, and testimony. First for probability, let it be consider'd, who were the first promulgers of Christs Miracles. In his life time they were either the patients on whom his Miracles were wrought, or the common people, that were spectators: the former, as they could not be deceiv'd themselves, but must needs know whether they were cur'd or no; so what Imaginable design could they have to deceive others? Many indeed have pretended impotency as a motive of compassion; but what could they gain by owning a cure they had not? As for the Spectators, as their multitude adds to their credibility; (it being morally impossible that so many should at once be deluded in a matter so obvious to their senses) so do's it also acquit them from fraud and combination. Cheats and forgeries are alwaies hatch'd in the dark, in close Cabals, and private Junctos. That five thousand men at one time, and four thousand at another, should conspire to say, that they were miraculously fed, when they were not; and all prove true to the fiction, and not betray it, is a thing as irrational to be suppos'd, as impossible to be paralle'l'd.

32. BESIDES, admit it possible that so many could have join'd in the deceit, yet what imaginable end could they have in it? Had their lie

been subservient to the designs of some potent Prince that might have rewarded it, there had been some temptation: but what could they expect from the reputed Son of a Carpenter, who had not himself where to lay his head? Nay, who disclaim'd all secular power; convey'd himself away from their importunities, when they would have forced him to be a King: And consequently, could not be look'd on as one that would head a Sedition, or attempt to raise himself to a capacity of rewarding his Abettors. Upon all these considerations, there appears not the least shadow of probability, that either those particular persons who publish'd the cures they had receiv'd, or those multitudes who were witnesses and divulgers of those, or his other miracles, could do it upon any sinister design, or indeed upon any other motive but gratitude and admiration.

33. IN the next place, if we come to those miracles which succeeded Christs death, those most important; and convincing of his Resurrection and Ascension, and observe who were the divulgers of those, we shall find them very unlikely to be men of design; a set of illiterate men, taken from the Fisher-Boats, and other mean occupations: and such as needed a miracle as great as any of those they were to assert (the descent of the Holy Ghost) to fit them for their office. What alas could they drive at, or how could they hope that their testimony could be received, so much against the humour and interest of the present Rulers; unless they were assur'd not only of the truth of the things, but also of some supernatural aids to back and fortify them?

Accordingly we find, that till they had receiv'd those; till by the descent of the Holy Ghost they were endued with power from on high, Luk. 24. 49. they never attempted the discovery of what they had seen: but rather hid themselves, kept all their assemblies in privacy and concealment, for fear of the Jews, Jo. 20. 10. and so were far enough

from projecting any thing besides their own safety. Afterwards, when they began to preach, they had early Essays, what their secular advantages would be by it; threatnings and revilings, scourgings and imprisonments, Act. 4. 20. 5. 18, 40. And can it be imagined, that men who a little before had shewed themselves so little in love with suffering, that none of them durst stick to their Master at his apprehension, but one forswore, and all forsook him; can it, I say, be imagin'd that these men should be so much in love with their own Fable, as to venture all sorts of persecution for the propagating it? Or if they could, let us in the next place consider what probability there could be of success.

34. THEIR preaching amounted to no less than the Deifying of one, whom both their Roman and Jewish Rulers, nay, the generality of the people had executed as a malefactor: so that they were all engag'd, in defence of their own Act, to lift their testimony with all the rigour that conscious jealousy could suggest. And where were so many concern'd inquisitors, there was very little hope for a forgery to pass. Besides the avow'd displeasure of their Governours made it a hazardous thing to own a belief of what they asserted. Those that adher'd to them could not but know, that at the same time they must espouse their dangers and sufferings. And men use not to incur certain mischiefs, upon doubtful and suspicious grounds.

35. YET farther, their doctrine was design'd to an end to which their Auditors could not but have the greatest reluctancy: they were to struggle with that rooted prepossession which the Jews had for the Mosaical Law, which their Gospel out-dated; and the Gentiles for the Rites and Religion of their Ancestors; and, which was harder than either, the corruptions and vices of both: to plant humility and internal sanctity, so contrary to that ceremonial holiness, upon which

the Jews so valued themselves, and despis'd others: and Temperance, Justice, and Purity, so contrary to the practice, nay, even the religion of the Heathen: and to attempt all this with no other allurements, no other promise of recompence but what they must attend in another world, and pass too through reproaches and afflictions, torments and death; These were all such invincible prejudices, as they could never hope to break thorough with a lie; nay, which they could not have encounter'd even with every common truth, but only with that, which being divine, brought its aids with it; without which 'twas utterly impossible for all the skill or oratory of men to overcome such disadvantages.

36. AND yet with all these did these rude inartificial men contest, and that with signal success: no less than three thousand Proselytes made by Saint Peter's first Sermon; and that in Jerusalem, the Scene where all was acted; and consequently where 'twas the most impossible to impose a forgery. And at the like miraculous rate they went on, till as the Pharisees themselves complain, they had filled Jerusalem with their doctrine, Acts 5. 28. nor did Judea set bounds to them; their sound went out into all Nations, Rom. 10. 18, and their doctrine spread it self through all the Gentile world.

37. AND sure so wonderful an event, so contrary to all humane measures, do's sufficiently evince there was more than man in it. Nothing but the same creative Power that produc'd light out of darkness, could bring forth effects so much above the proportion of the cause. Had these weak instruments acted only by their natural powers, nothing of this had been achiev'd. Alas could these poor rude men learn all Languages within the space of fifty days, which would take up almost as many years of the most industrious Student? and yet had they not been able to speak them, they could never have divulg'd the Gospel to the several

Nations, nor so effectually have convinc'd the by-standers, Acts 2. that they acted by a higher impulse. And to convince the world they did so, they repeated their Masters miracles as well as his doctrine; heal'd the sick cast out devils, rais'd the dead. And where God communicated so much of his power, we may reasonably conclude he did it to promote his own work, not the work of the devil, as it must have been if this whole Scene were a lie.

38. WHEN all this is weigh'd, I presume there will remain little ground to suspect that the first planters of Christian Faith had any other design than what they avowed, viz. the bringing men to holiness here, and salvation hereafter. The suspicion therefore, if any, must rest upon latter times; and accordingly some are willing to persuade themselves and others, that the whole Scheme of our Religion is but a lately devis'd Fable to keep the world in awe, whereof Princes have made some use, but Clergy-men more; and that Christ and his Apostles are only actors whom themselves have conjured up upon the Stage to pursue their plot.

39. IN answer to this bold, this blasphemous suggestion, I should first desire these Surmisers to point out the time when, and the persons who began this design; to tell us exactly whence they date this politick Religion, as they are pleas'd to suppose it. If they cannot, they are manifestly unjust to reject our account of it when they can give none themselves; and fail very much of that rigid demonstration they require from others. That there is such a profession as Christianity in the world, is yet (God be blest) undeniable; (though at the rate it has of late declin'd, God knows how long it will be so:) we say it came by Christ, and his Apostles, and that it is attested by an uninterrupted testimony of all the intervening Ages, the suffrage of all Christian Churches from that day to this. And sure they who embraced the

Doctrine, are the most competent witnesses from whence they receiv'd it.

40. YET lest they should be all thought parties to the design, and their witness excepted against, it has pleas'd God to give us collateral assurances, and make both Jewish and Gentile Writers give testimony to the Antiquity of Christianity. Josephus do's this, lib. 20. chap. 8. and lib. 18. chap. 4. where, after he has given an account of the crucifixion of Christ exactly agreeing with the Evangelists he concludes, And to this day the Christian people, who of him borrow their name, cease not to increase. I add not the personal elogium which he gives of our Saviour; because some are so hardy to controul it: also I pass by what Philo mentions of the religious in Egypt, because several Learned men refer it to the Essens, a Sect among the Jews, or some other. There is no doubt of what Tacitus and other Roman Historians speak of Christ as the Author of the Christian doctrine; which it had been impossible for him to have done, if there had then been no such doctrine, or if Christ had not been known as the Founder of it. .So afterward Pliny gives the Emperour Trajan an account both of the manners, and multitude of the Christians; and makes of the innocence of the one, and the greatness of the other, an Argument to slacken the persecution against them. Nay, the very bloody Edicts of the persecuting Emperors, and the scoffs and reproaches of Celsus, Porphyry, Lucian, and other profane opposers of this Doctrine, do undeniably assert its being. By all which it appears, that Christianity had in those Ages not only a being, but had also obtain'd mightily in the world, and drawn in vast numbers to its profession: and vast indeed they must needs be, to furnish out that whole Army of Martyrs, of which profane, as well as Ecclesiastick writers speak. And if all this be not sufficient to evince that Christianity stole not clancularly into the

world, but took its rise from those times and Persons it pretends, we must renounce all faith of Testimony, and not believe an inch farther than we see.

41. I suppose I need say no more to shew that the Gospel, and all those portentous miracles which attested it, were no forgeries, or stratagems of men. I come now to that doubt which more immediately concerns the Holy Scripture, viz. whether all those transactions be so faithfully related there, that we may believe them to have been dictated by the spirit of God. Now for this, the process need be but short, if we consider who were the Pen-men of the New Testament; even for the most part of the Apostles themselves: Matthew, and John who wrote two of the Gospels were certainly so: and Mark, as all the Ancients aver, was but the Amanuensis to Saint Peter, who dictated that Gospel. Saint Luke indeed comes not under this first rank of Apostles; yet is by some affirm'd to be one of the seventy Disciples: however an Apostolical person 'tis certain he was, and it was no wonder for such to be inspir'd. For in those first Ages of the Church men acted more by immediate inflation of the Spirit than since. And accordingly we find Stephen, tho' but a Deacon, had the power of Miracles and preach'd as divine as the prime Apostles, Acts 7. And the gift of the Holy Ghost was then a usual concomitant of conversion, as appears in the Story of Cornelius, Acts 10. 45, 46. Besides, Saint Luke was a constant attendant on Saint Paul (who deriv'd the Faith not from man, but by the immediate revelation of Jesus Christ, as himself professes, Galat. 1. 12.) and is by some said to have wrote by dictate from him, as Mark did from Saint Peter. Then as to the Epistles they all bear the names of Apostles, except that to the Hebrews, which yet is upon very good grounds presum'd to be Saint Paul's. Now these were the Persons commissioned by Christ to preach the Christian doctrine, and were

signally assisted in the discharge of that office; so that as he tells them, it was not they, who speak, but the spirit of the Father that spake in them, Matt. 13. 11. And if they spake by Divine Inspiration, there can be no question that they wrote so also. Nay, indeed of the two, it seems more necessary they should do the latter. For had they err'd in any thing they orally deliver'd, they might have retracted and cured the mischief: but these Books being design'd as a standing immutable rule of Faith and Manners to all successions, any error in them would have been irreparable, and have entail'd it self upon posterity: which agreed neither with the truth, nor goodness of God to permit.

42. NOW that these Books were indeed writ by them whose names they bear, we have as much assurance as 'tis possible to have of any thing of that nature, and that distance of time from us. For however some of them may have been controverted, yet the greatest part have admitted no dispute; whole Doctrines agreeing exactly with the others, give testimony to them. And to the bulk of those writings, it is notorious that the first Christians receiv'd them from the Apostles, and so transmitted them to the ensuing Ages, which receiv'd them with the like esteem and veneration. They cannot be corrupted, faies Saint Austin in the thirty second Book against Faustus the Manich. c. 16. because they are and have been in the hands of all Christians. And whosoever should first attempt an alteration, he would be confuted by the inspection of other ancients Copies. Besides, the Scriptures are not in some one Language, but translated into many: so that the faults of one Book would be corrected by others more ancient, or in a different Tongue.

43. AND how much the body of Christians were in earnest concern'd to take care in this matter, appears by very costly evidences; multitudes of them choosing rather to part with their lives than their Bibles. And

indeed 'tis a sufficient proof, that their reverence of that Book was very avowed and manifest; when their Heathen persecutors made that one part of their persecution. So that as wherever the Christian Faith was receiv'd, this Book was also, under the notion we now plead for, viz. as the writings of men inspir'd by God: so it was also contended for even unto death: and to part with the Bible was to renounce the Faith. And now, after such a cloud of testimonies, we may sure take up that (ill apply'd) saying of the High Priest, Matt. 26. 65. what farther need have we of witnesses.

44. YET besides these, another sort of witnesses there are, I mean those intrinsick evidences which arise out of the Scripture it self; but of these I think not proper here to insist, partly because the subject will be in a great degree coincident with that of the second general consideration; and partly because these can be argumentative to none who are not qualified to discern them. Let those who doubt the Divine Original of Scripture, well digest the former grounds which are within the verge of reason; and when by those they are brought to read it with due reverence, they will not want Arguments from the Scripture it self to confirm their veneration of it.

45. IN the mean time, to evince how proper the former discourse is to found a rational belief that the Scripture is the word of God, I shall compare it with those measures of credibility upon which all humane transactions move, and upon which men trust their greatest concerns without diffidence or dispute.

46. THAT we must in many things trust the report of others, is so necessary, that without it humane society cannot subsist. What a multitude of subjects are there in the world, who never saw their Prince, nor were at the making of any Law? if all these should deny their obedience, because they have it only by hear-say, that there is

such a man, and such Laws, what would become of Government? So also for property, if nothing of testimony may be admitted, how shall any man prove his right to any thing? All pleas must be decided by the sword, and we shall fall into that state (which some have fancied the primitive) of universal hostility. In like manner for traffick and commerce; how should any Merchant first attempt a trade to any foreign part of the world, if he did not believe that such a place there was? and how could he believe that, but upon the credit of those who have been there? Nay, indeed how could any man first attempt to go but to the next Market Town, if he did not from the report of others, conclude that such a one there was? so that if this universal diffidence should prevail, every man should be a kind of Plantagnus, fix'd to the soil he first sprung up in. The absurdities are indeed so infinite, and so obvious, that I need not dilate upon them.

47. BUT it will perhaps be said, that in things that are told us by our contemporaries, and that relate to our own time, men will be less apt to deceive us, because they know 'tis in our power to examine and discover the truth. To this I might say, that in many instances it would scarce quit cost to do so, and the inconveniences of tryal would exceed those of belief. But I shall willingly admit this probable argument, and only desire it may be applied to our main question, by considering whether the primitive Christians who receiv'd the Scripture as divine, had not the same security of not being deceiv'd, who had as great opportunities of examining, and the greatest concern of doing it thoroughly, since they were to engage, not only their future hopes in another world, but (that which to nature is much more sensible) all their present enjoyments, and even life it self upon the truth of it.

48. BUT because it must be confess'd that we who are so many Ages remov'd from them, have not their means of assurance; let us in the

next place consider, whether an assent to those testimonies they have left behind them, be not warranted by the common practice of mankind in other cases. Who is there that questions there was such a man as William the Conqueror in this Island? Or, to lay the Scene farther, who doubts there was an Alexander, a Julius Cæsar, an Augustus? Now what have we to found this confidence on besides the Faith of History? And I presume even those who exact the severest demonstrations for Ecclesiastick story, would think him a very impertinent Sceptick that should do the like in these. So also, as to the Authors of Books; who disputes whether Homer writ the Iliads, or Virgil the Æneids, or Cæsar the Commentaries, that pass under their names? yet none of these have been attested in any degree like the Scripture. 'Tis said indeed, that Cæsar ventured his own life to save his Commentaries, imploying one hand to hold those above the water, when it should have assisted him in swimming. But whoever laid down their lives in attestation of that, or any humane composure, as multitudes of men have done for the Bible?

49. BUT perhaps 'twill be said, that the small concern men have, who wrote these, or other the like Books, inclines them to acquiesce in the common opinion. To this I must say, that many things inconsiderable to mankind have oft been very laboriously discuss'd, as appears by many unedifying Volumes, both of Philosophers and School-men. But whatever may be said in this instance, 'tis manifest there are others, wherein mens real and greatest interests are intrusted to the testimonies of former Ages. For example, a man possesses an estate which was bought by his great Grandfather, or perhaps elder Progenitor: he charily preserves that deed of purchase, and never looks for farther security of his title: yet alas, at the rate that men object against the Bible, what numberless Cavils might be rais'd against such a deed? How shall it be known that there was such a man as either Seller or Purchaser? if

by the witnesses they are as lyable to doubt as the other; it being as easie to forge the attestation as the main writing: and yet notwithstanding all these possible deceits, nothing but a positive proof of forgery can invalidate this deed. Let but the Scripture have the same measure, be allowed to stand in force, to be what it pretends to be, till the contrary be (not by surmises and possible conjectures) but by evident proof evinc'd and its greatest Advocates will ask to more.

50. A like instance may be given in publick concerns; the immunities and rights of any Nation, particularly here of our Magna Charta, granted many Ages since, and deposited among the publick Records: to make this signify any thing, it must be taken for granted, that this was without falsification preserved to our times; yet how easy were it to suggest that in so long a succession of its keepers, some may have been prevail'd on by the influence of Princes to abridge and curtail its concessions; others by a prevailing faction of the people to amplify and extend it? Nay, if men were as great Scepticks in Law, as they are in Divinity, they might exact demonstrations that the whole thing were not a forgery. Yet, for all these possible surmises, we still build upon it, and should think he argued very fallaciously, that should go to evacuate it, upon the force of such remote suppositions.

51. NOW I desire it may be consider'd whether our security concerning the holy Scripture be not as great, nay, greater than it can be of this. For first, this is a concern only of a particular Nation, and so can expect no foreign attestation; and secondly, it has all along rested on the fidelity of its keepers; which has been either a single person, or at best some small number at a time; whereas the Scriptures have been witness'd to by persons of all Nations; and those not single, but collective Bodies and Societies, even as many as there have been

Christian Churches throughout the world. And the same that are its Attestors have been its Guardians also, and by their multitudes made it a very difficult, if not an impossible thing to falsify it in any considerable degree; it being not imaginable, as I shew'd before from St. Austin, all Churches should combine to do it: and if they did not, the fraud could not pass undetected: and if no eminent change could happen, much less could any new, any counterfeit Gospel be obruded, after innumerable Copies of the first had been translated into almost all Languages, and dispers'd throughout the world.

52. THE Imperial Law compil'd by Justinian, was soon after his death, by reason of the inroads of the Goths, and other barbarous Nations, utterly lost in the Western world; and scarce once heard of for the space of five hundred years, and then came casually to be retri'd upon the taking of Amalsis by the Pisans, one single copy being found there at the plundering of the City. And the whole credit of those Pandects, which have ever since govern'd the Western world, depends in a manner on that single Book, formerly call'd the Pisan; and now, after that Pisa was taken by the Florentines, the Florentine Copy. But notwithstanding this, the body of the Civil Law obtains; and no man thinks it reasonable to question its being really what it pretends to be, notwithstanding its single, and so long interrupted derivation. I might draw this parallel thro' many other instances, but these may suffice to shew, that if the Scripture might find but so much equity, as to be tried by the common measures of other things, it would very well pass the test.

53. BUT men seem in this case (like our late Legislators) to set up new extraregular Courts of Justice, to try those whom no ordinary rules will cast, yet their designs require should be condemn'd: And we may conclude, 'tis not the force of reason, but of prejudice, that makes

them so unequal to themselves as to reject the Scripture, when they receive every thing else upon far weaker grounds. The bottom of it is, they are resolv'd not to obey its precepts; and therefore think it the shortest cut to disavow its authority; for should they once own that, they would find themselves intangled in the most inextricable dilemma; that of the Pharisees about John Baptist: If we say from heaven, he will say, why then did you not believe him? Matt. 21. 25. If they confess the Scriptures divine, they must be self-condemn'd in not obeying them. And truly men that have such preengagements to their lusts, that they must admit nothing that will disturb them; do but prevaricate when they call for greater evidence and demonstrations: for those bosom Sophisters will delude the most manifest conviction; and like Juglers make men disbelieve even their own senses. So that any other waies of evidence will be as disputable with them, as those already offer'd: which is the third thing I proposed to consider.

54. IT has been sometimes seen in popular mutinies, that when blanks have been sent them they could not agree what to ask: and were it imaginable that God should so far court the infidelity of men, as to allow them to make their own demands, to set down what waies of proof would perswade them; I doubt not there are many have obstinacy enough to defeat their own methods, as well as they do now Gods. 'Tis sure there is no ordinary way of conviction left for them to ask. God having already (as hath also been shew'd) afforded that. They must therefore resort to immediate revelation, expect instant assurances from heaven, that this Book we call the Bible is the word of God.

55. MY first question then is, in what manner this revelation must be made to appear credible to them. The best account we have of the several waies of revelation is from the Jews, to whom God was pleas'd upon new emergencies signally to reveal himself. These were first

dreams; secondly, visions; by both which the Prophets receiv'd their inspirations. Thirdly, Urim and Thummim. Fourthly, the Bath-col (as they term it) Thunder and voice from Heaven. Let us consider them distinctly, and see whether our Sceptical men may not probably find somewhat to dispute in every one of these. And first for dreams, it is among us so hard to distinguish between those that arise from constitution, prepossession of phancy, diabolical, or divine infusion, that those that have the most critically consider'd them, do rather difference them by their matter, than any certain discriminating circumstances: and unless we had some infallible way of discerning, our dependence on them may more probably betray than direct us. 'Tis unquestionable that dually phancy has the greatest stroke in them. And if he that should commit himself to the guidance of his waking phancy, is not like to be over-wisely govern'd, what can we expect from his sleeping? All this and more may doubtless be soberly enough objected against the validity of our common dreams.

56. BUT admit there were now such divine dreams as brought their evidence along with them; yet sure 'tis possible for prejudic'd, men to resist even the clearest convictions. For do we not see some that have made a shift to extinguish that natural light, those notions which are interwoven into the very frame and constitution of their minds, that so they may sin more at ease, and without reluctancy? and sure 'tis as possible for them to close their eyes against all raies from without too, to resist revelation as well as instinct and more likely, by how much a transient cause is naturally less operative than a permanent. An instance of this we have in Balaam, who being in these nightly visitations prohibited by God to go to Balak; and tho' he knew then what he afterwards saies, Num. 23. 19. that God was not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent; yet he would not

take God at his firm word, but upon a fresh bait to his covetousness, tries again for an answer more indulgent to his interest. Besides, if God should thus reveal himself to some particular persons, yet 'tis beyond all present or imagination, that he should do it to every man; and then how shall those who have these dreams, be able to convince others that they are divine?

53. 'TIS easy to guess what reception a man that produces no other authority would have in this ludicrous Age: he would certainly be thought rather to want sleep, than to have had revelations in it. And if Jacob and the Patriarchs, who were themselves acquainted with divine dreams, yet did not believe Josephs; any man that should now pretend in that kind, would be sure to fall under the same irony that he did, to be entertain'd with a behold this dreamer cometh, Gen. 37. 19.

58. THE second way of revelation by vision was, where the man was wrapt into an extasy, his spirit for a while suspended from all sensible communication with the body, and entertain'd with supernatural light. In these the Prophets saw emblematical representations of future events, receiv'd knowledge of divine Mysteries, and commission and ability to discharge the whole prophetick office. Now suppose God should now raise us Prophets, and inspire them after this manner; what would the merry men of this time say to it? Can we think that they who rally upon all that the former Prophets have writ, would look with much reverence on what the new ones should say? Some perhaps would construe their raptures to be but like Mahomets Epilepsy others a fit of frenzy, others perhaps a being drunk with new wine Acts. 2. 13. but those that did the most soberly consider it, would still need a new revelation to attest the truth of this: there being far more convincing arguments to prove the Scriptures divine, than any man can alledge to prove his inspiration to be so. And 'tis sure a very irrational method, to

attempt the clearing of a doubt by somewhat which is it self more doubtful.

59. A third way, was by Urim and Thummin, which Writers tell us was an Oracle resulting from the Letters which were graven in the High Priests Pectoral, to which in all important doubts the Jews of those Ages resorted, and receiv'd responses; but whether it were by the suddain prominency, or resplendency of the letters, or by any other way, is not material in this place to enquire: one: one thing is certain, that the Ephod, and consequently the Pectoral was in the Priests custody, and that he had the administration of the whole affair. Now I refer it to consideration, whether this one circumstance would not (to those prejudic'd men I speak of) utterly evacuate the credit of the Oracle. They have taught themselves to look on Priest-hood, whether Legal or Evangelical, only as a better name for imposture and cosenage: and they that can accuse the Priests for having kept up a cheat for so many Ages, mud needs think them such omnipotent Juglers, that nothing can be fence against their Legerdemain: and by consequence, this way of revelation would rather foment their displeasure at the Ecclesiatticks, than satisfy their doubts of the Scripture.

60. LASTLY, for the fourth way, that of thunder and voice from Heaven, tho' that would be a signal way of conviction to unprejudiced men, yet it would probably have as little effect as the rest upon the others: men that pretend to such deep reasoning, would think it childish to be frighted out of their opinion by a clap of Thunder; some Philosophical reason shall be found out, to satisfy them that 'tis the effect only of some natural cause, and any the most improbable shall serve turn to supplant the fear of its being a divine testimony to that which they are so unwilling should be true. As for the voice from Heaven, it must either be heard by others, and related to them; or else immediatly by

themselves: if the former, 'twill lie under the same prejudice which the Bible already do's, that they have it but by hearsay: and reporters would fall under the reproach either of design or frenzy; that they meant to deceive, or were themselves deceiv'd by their own distemper'd phancy. But if themselves should be Auditors of it; 'tis odds but their bottomless jealousies in divine Matters would suggest a possibility of fraud, tho' they knew not how to trace it: nay 'tis more than possible that they will rather disbelieve their own senses, than in this instance take their testimony with all its consequences.

61. NOR is this a wild supposition for we see it possible for not only single men but, multitudes to disbelieve their senses through an excess of credulity witness the Doctrine of Transubstantiation. Why may it not then be as possible for others to do the like thro' a greater excess of incredulity? Besides mens prepossessions and affections have a strange influence on their Faith: men many times will not suffer themselves to believe the most credible things, if they cross their inclination. How often do we see irregular Patients that will not believe any thing that their appetite craves will do them hurt, tho' their Physicians, nay, their own even sensitive experience attest it to them? And can we think that a diseas'd mind, gasping with an Hydropick thirst after the pleasures of sin, will ever assent to those premises, whose conclusion will engage to the renouncing them? Will not a luxurious voluptuous person be willing rather to give his ears the lie, to disbelieve what he hears, than permit them more deeply to disoblige his other senses, by bringing in those restraints and mortifications which the Scripture would impose upon them?

62. THUS we see how little probability there is, that any of these waies of revelation would convince these incredulous men. And indeed, those that will not believe upon such inducements as may satisfy men of

sober reason, will hardly submit to any other method, according to that Assertion of Father Abraham, If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be perswaded, tho' one rose from the dead Luk. 16.

31. Now at this rate of infidelity, what way will they leave God to manifest any thing convincingly to the world? which is to put him under an impotency greater than adheres to humanity for we men have power to communicate our minds to others, tell whetherto we own such or such a thing to which we are intitled; and we can satisfy our Auditors that it is indeed we that speak of them: but if every method God uses, do's rather increase than satisfy mens doubts, all intercourse between God and man is intercepted; and he must do that of necessity, which Epicurus fancied he did of his choice; viz. keep himself unconcern'd in the affairs of mortals, as having no way of communicating with them. Nay (what is yet, if possible, more absurd) he must be suppos'd to have put the works of his Creation out of his own reach, to have given men discursive faculties, and left himself no way of address to them.

63. THESE inferences how horridly soever they sound, yet I see not how they can be disclaim'd by those, who are unsatisfied with all those waies by which God hath hitherto reveal'd himself to the world. For can it be imagin'd that God who created man a reasonable creature, that himself might be glorified in his free and rational obedience: (when all other creatures obey upon impulse and instinct) can it, I say, be imagin'd, that he should so remisly pursue his own design, as to let so many Ages pass since the Creation, and never to acquaint mankind with the particulars wherein that obedience was to be exercis'd. This sure were so disagreeable to his wisdom and goodness, that it cannot be charged upon his will: and consequently they who own not that he has made any such revelation, must tacitly tax him of impotence, that he could not do it. But if any man will say he has, and yet reject all

this which both Jews and Christians receive as such, let him produce his testimonies for the others, or rather (to retort his own measure) his demonstrations. And then let it appear whether his Scheme of Doctrine, or ours, will need the greater aid of that easy credulity he reproaches us with.

64. I have now gone thro' the method I proposed for evincing the Divine Original of the Scriptures, and shall not descend to examine those more minute and particular Cavils which profane men make against them; the proof of this, virtually superseding all those. For if it be reasonable to believe it the Word of God, it must be reasonable also to believe it of perfection proportionable to the Author; and then certainly it must be advanced beyond all our objections. For to those who except to the stile, the incoherence, the contradictions, or whatever else in Scripture; I shall only ask this one question, whether it be not much more possible that they (who can pretend to be nothing above fallible men) may misjudge, than that the infallible God should dictate any thing justly liable to those charges: I am sure they must depart as much from Reason as Religion, to affirm the contrary. But alas, instead of this implicit submission to Gods Word, men take up explicit prejudices against it; condemn it without ever examining the truth of the allegation. 'Tis certain, that in a writing of such Antiquity, whose original Language has Idioms and Phrases so peculiar, whose Country had customs so differing from the rest of the world; 'tis impossible to judge of it without reference to all those circumstances. Add to this, that the Hebrew has been a dead Language for well nigh two thousand years, no where in common use: nor is there any other ancient Book now extant in it, besides those (yet not all neither,) of the Old Testament.

65. NOW of those many who defame Holy Writ, how few are there that have

the industry to enquire into those particulars? And when for want of knowledge, some passages seem improper, or perhaps contradictory the Scripture must bear the blame of their ignorance, and be accus'd as absurd and unintelligible, because themselves are stupid and negligent. It were therefore methinks but a reasonable proposal, that no man should arraign it, till they have used all honest diligence, taken in all probable helps for the understanding it and if this might be obtain'd, I believe most of its Accusers would like those of the Woman in the Gospel Jo. 8. 9, drop away, as conscious of their own incompetency: the loudest out-cries that are made against it, being commonly of those who fall upon it only as a fashionable theme of discourse, and hope to acquire themselves the reputation of wits by thus charging God foolishly. But he that would candidly and uprightly endeavour to comprehend before he judges, and to that end industriously use those means which the providence of God by the labours of pious men hath afforded him, will certainly find cause to acquit the Scripture of those imputations which our bold Criticks have cast upon it. I do not say that he shall have all the obscurities of it perfectly clear'd to him; but he shall have so many of them as are for his real advantage, and shall discern such reasons why the rest remain unfathomable, as may make him not only justify, but celebrate the wisdom of the Author.

66. YET this is to be expected only upon the fore-mention'd condition, viz. that he come with sincere and honest intentions; for as for him that comes to the Scripture with design, and wishes to find matter of cavil and accusations; there is little doubt but that spirit of impiety and profaneness which sent him thither, will meet him there as a spirit of delusion, and occecation. That Prince of the Air will cast such mists, raise such black vapours; that as the Apostle speaks, the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ shall not shine unto him, 2 Cor. 4. 5.

Indeed were such a man left only to the natural efficacy of prejudice, that is of it self so blinding, so infatuating a thing, as commonly fortifies against all conviction. We see it in all the common instances of life; mens very senses are often enslav'd by it: the prepossession of a strong fancy will make the objects of sight or hearing appear quite different from what they are. But in the present case, when this shall be added to Satanical illusions, and both left to their operations by Gods withdrawing his illuminating grace, the case of such a man answers that description of the Scripture, They have eyes and see not, ears have they and hear not, Rom. 11. 8. And that God will so withdraw his grace, we have all reason to believe, he having promis'd it only to the meek, to those who come with malleable ductile spirits, to learn, not to deride or cavil. Saint Peter tells us, that the unlearned and unstable wrest the Scripture to their own destruction 2 Pet. 3. 16. And if God permit such to do so, much more will he be proud and malicious.

67. I say not this, to deter any from the sturdy of Holy Scripture, but only to caution them to bring a due preparation of mind along with them; Gods Word being like a generous sovereign medicament, which if simply and regularly taken, is of the greatest benefit; but if mix'd with poison, serves only to make that more fatally operative. To conclude, he that would have his doubts solv'd concerning Scripture, let him follow the method our blessed Lord has prescrib'd: Let him do the will of God, and then he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, Jo. 7. 17. Let him bring with him a probity of mind, a willingness to assent to all convictions he shall there meet with; and then he will find grounds sufficient to assure him that it is Gods Word, and consequently to be receiv'd with all the submission and reverence, that its being so exacts.

SECT. III.

Subject matter treated of in the Holy Scripture, is excellent, as is also its end and deign.

WE have hitherto consider'd the holy Scripture only under one notion, as it is the Word of God; we come now to view it in the subject matter of it, the several parts whereof it consists; which are so various and comprehensive, that they shew the whole is deriv'd from him who is all in all. 1 Cor. 15. 28. But that we may not speak only loosely, and at rovers we will take this excellent frame in pieces, and consider its most eminent parts distinctly. Now the parts of Holy Writ seem to branch themselves into these severals: First, the Historical; secondly, the Prophetick; thirdly, the Doctrinal; fourthly, the Preceptive; fifthly, the Minatory; sixthly, the Promissory. These are the several veins in this rich Mine, in which he who industriously labours, will find the Psalmist was not out in his estimate, when he pronounces them more to be desir'd than gold, yea, than much fine gold, Psal. 19. 10.

2. To speak first of the Historical part; the things which chiefly recommend a History, are the dignity of the subject, the truth of the relation, and those pleasant or profitable observations which are interwoven with it. And first, for the dignity of the subject, the History of the Bible must be acknowledged to excell all others: those shew the rise and progress of some one people or Empire; this shews us the original of the whole Universe; and particularly of man, for whose use and benefit the whole Creation was design'd. By this mankind is brought into acquaintance with it self; made to know the elements of its constitution, and taught to put a differing value upon that Spirit which was breath'd into it by God, Gen. 2. 7. and the flesh whose

foundation is in the dust, Job 4. 19. And when this Historical part of Scripture contracts and draws into a narrow channel, when it records the concerns but of one Nation, yet it was that which God had dignified above all the rest of the world, mark'd out for his own peculiar; made it the repository of his truth, and the visible stock from whence the Messiah should come, in whom all the Nations of the earth were to be blessed, Gen. 18. 18. so that in this one people of the Jews, was virtually infolded the highest and most important interests of the whole world; and it must be acknowledg'd, no Story could have a nobler subject to treat of.

3. SECONDLY, as to the truth of the relation, tho' to those who own it Gods Word there needs no other proof; yet it wants not human Arguments to confirm it. The most undoubted symptom of sincerity in an Historian is impartiality. Now this is very eminent in Scripture writers: they do not record others faults, and baulk their own; but indifferently accuse themselves as well as others. Moses mentions his own diffidence and unwillingness to go on Gods message, Ex. 4. 14. his provocation of God at the waters of Meribah, Numb. 20. Jonah records his own sullen behaviour towards God, with as great aggravations as any of his enemies could have done. Peter in his dictating Saint Marks Gospel, neither omits nor extenuates his sin; all he seems to speak short in, is his repentance, Saint Paul registers himself as the greatest of sinners.

4. AND as they were not indulgent to their own personal faults, so neither did any nearness of relation, any respect of quality bribe them to a concealment: Moses relates the offence of his Sister Miriam in mutining. Numb. 12. 1. of his Brother Aaron in the matter of the Calf, Exod. 32. 4, with as little disguise as that of Korah and his Company. David, tho' a King, hath his adultery and murder display'd in the blackest Characters: and King Hezekiahs little vanity of shewing his

treasures do's not escape a remark. Nay, even the reputation of their Nation could not bias the Sacred Writers; but they freely tax their crimes: the Israelites murmurings in the wilderness, their Idolatries in Canaan, are set down without any palliation or excuse. And they are as frequently branded for their stubbornness and ingratitude, as the Canaanites are for their abominations. So that certainly no History in the world do's better attest it's truth by this evidence of impartiality.

5. IN the last place it commends it self both by the pleasure and profit it yields. The rarity of those events it records, surprizes the mind with a delightful admiration; and that mixture of sage Discourses, and well-couch'd Parables wherewith it abounds, do's at once please and instruct. How ingeniously apt was Nathans Apologue to David, whereby with Holy artifice he ensnar'd him into repentance? And it remains still matter of instruction to us, to shew us with what unequal scales we are apt to weigh the same crime in others and our selves. So also that long train of smart calamities which succeeded his sin, is set out with such particularity, that it seems to be exactly the crime reverst. His own lust with Bathsheba was answer'd with Amnons towards Thamar; his murder of Uriah with that of Amnon; his treacherous contrivance of that murder, with Absoloms traitorous conspiracy against him. So that every circumstance of his punishment was the very Echo and reverberation of his guilt. A multitude of the like instances might be produc'd out of Holy Writ; all concurring to admonish us, that God exactly marks, and will repay our crimes; and that commonly with such propriety, that we need no other clue to guide us to the cause of our sufferings, than the very sufferings themselves. Indeed innumerable are the profitable observations arising from the Historical part of Scripture, that flow so easily and unconstrain'd, that nothing but a

stupid inadvertence in the reader can make him baulk them: therefore 'twould be impertinent here multiply instances.

6. LET us next consider the Prophetick part of Scripture, and we shall find it no less excellent in its kind. The Prophetick Books are for the most part made up (as the Prophetick Office was) of two parts: prediction and instruction. When God rais'd up Prophets, 'twas not only to acquaint men with future events, but to reform their present manners: and therefore as they are called Seers in one respect, so they are Watch-men and Shepherds in another. Nay, indeed the former was often subservient to the other as to the nobler end; their gift of fore-telling was to gain them authority, to be as it were the seal of their commission, to convince men that they were sent from God: and so to render them the more pliant to their reproofs and admonitions. And the very matter of their prophecies was usually adapted to this end: the denouncing of judgements being the most frequent Theme, and that design'd to bring men to repentance; as appears experimentally in the case of Nineveh. And in this latter part of their office, the Prophets acted with the greatest incitation and vehemence.

7. WITH what liberty and zeal do's Elijah arraign Ahab of Naboth's murder, and foretell the fatal event of it, without any fear of his power, or reverence of his greatness? And Samuel, when he delivers Saul the fatal message of his rejection, do's passionately and convincingly expostulate with him concerning his sin, 1 Sam. 15. 17. Now the very same Spirit still breaths in all the prophetick Writings, the same truth of prediction, and the same zeal against vice.

8. FIRST for the predictions, what signal completions do we find? How exactly are all the denunciations of judgments fulfill'd, where repentance has not interven'd? He that reads the 28. chap. of Deut. and compares it with the Jews calamities, both under the Assyrians and

Babylonians, and especially under the Romans, would think their oppressors had consulted it, and transcrib'd their severities thence. And even these Nations, who were the instruments of accomplishing those dismal presages, had their own ruins foretold, and as punctually executed. And as in Kingdoms and Nations, so to private persons none of the prophetick threatnings ever return'd empty. The sentence pronounc'd against Ahab, Jezebel, and their posterity, was fulfill'd even to the most minute circumstances of place and manner; as is evident by comparing the denunciation of Elijah, 1 Kings 21. 19. 23. with their tragical ends recorded in the following chapters. And as for Jehu, whose service God was pleased to use in that execution, tho' he rewarded it with entailing the Crown of Israel on him for four descents, yet he fore-told those should be the limits: and accordingly we find Zachariah, the fourth descendent of his line, was the last of it that fate on that throne, 2 Kings 15. 10. So also the destruction of Achitophel and Judas, the one immediate, the other many hundred years remote, are foretold by David, Psal. 109. and we find exactly answer'd in the event.

9. NOR was this exactness confin'd only to the severe predictions, but as eminent in the more gracious. All the blessings which God by himself, or the Ministry of his Prophets promis'd, were still infallibly made good. At the time of life God return'd and visited Sarah with conception, notwithstanding those natural improbabilities which made her not only distrust, but even deride and laugh at the promise, Gen. 18. The posterity of that Son of Promise, the whole race of Abraham was deliver'd from the Egyptian bondage, and possess'd of Canaan, at the precise time which God had long before signified to Abrabam, Gen. 15. So likewise the return of the Jews from the Babylonish captivity was fore-told many years before their deportation,

and Cyrus named for their restorer, before he had either name or being save only in Gods prescience, Is. 44. 28. But I need not multiply instances of national or personal promises. The earliest and most comprehensive promise of all was that of the Messiah, in whom all persons and Nations of the world were to be blest, Gen. 22. 11. that seed of the woman that should bruise the Serpents head, Gen. 3. 15. To him give all the Prophets witness, as Saint Peter observes, Acts 10. And he who was the subject, made himself also the expounder of those prophecies in his walk to Emmaus with the two Disciples, Luk. 24. 13. beginning at Moses, and all the Prophets, he expounded to them in all the Scriptures, the things concerning himself.

10. THIS as it was infinitely the greatest blessing afforded mankind, so was it the most frequently and eminently predicted; and that with the most exact particularity as to all the circumstances. His immaculate conception, the union of his two natures implied in his name Immanuel; Behold a Virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel; is most plainly fore-told by Isaiah chap. 7. 14. Nay, the very place of his birth so punctually fore-told, that the Priests and Scribes could readily resolve Herods Question upon the strength of the Prophecy, and assure him Christ must be born in Bethlehem, Mat. 2. 5. As for the whole business and design of his life, we find it so describ'd by Isaiah, chap. 61. as Christ himself owns it, Luke 4. 18. The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath appointed me to preach good tidings to the meek; hath sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

11. IF we look farther to his death, the greatest part of the Old Testament has a direct aspect on it. All the Levitical oeconomy of

Sacrifices and Ablutions were but prophetick Rites, and ocular Predictions of that one expiatory Oblation. Nay most of Gods providential dispensations to the Jews, carried in them types and prefigurations of this. Their rescue from Egypt, the sprinkling of blood to secure them from the destroying Angel; the Manna with which they were fed, the Rock which supplied them water: these and many more referr'd to Christ, as their final and highest signification.

12. BUT besides these darker adumbrations, we have (as the Apostle speaks) a more sure word of prophecy. Saint Peter in his calculation begins with Moses, takes in Samuel, and the whole succession of Prophets after him, as bearing witness to this great event of Christs passion, Acts 4. 22. 24. And indeed he that reads the Prophets consideringly, shall find it so punctually describ'd, that the Evangelists do not much more fully instruct him in the circumstances of it. Daniel tells us his death, as to the kind of it, was to be violent: The Messiah shall be cut off; and as to the design of it 'twas not for himself; Dan. 9. 26. But the Prophet Isaiah gives us more than a bare negative account of it; and expressly saies, he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was on him, and by his stripes we were healed, chap. 53. 5. And again, ver. 10. Thou shalt make his Soul an offering for sin; and ver. 11. my righteous Servant shall justify many, for he shall bear their iniquities. Nor is Job, an Idumean, much short of even this Evangelical Prophet; in that short Creed of his, wherein he owns him as his Redeemer, I know that my Redeemer liveth, &c. Job. 19. 25.

13. AND as the end, so the circumstances of his sufferings are most of them under prediction: His extention upon the Cross is mention'd by the Psalmist: They pierced my hands, and my feet; I may tell all my bones, Psal. 22. 16, 17. As for his inward dolours, they are in that Psalm so

pathetically describ'd that Christ chose that very form to breath them out in: My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? ver. 1. So his revilers did also transcribe part of their reproaches from ver. 8. He trusted in God, let him deliver him now if he will have him, Matt. 27. 43. That Vinegar which was offered him on the Cross, was a completion of a Prophecy; In my thirst they gave me Vinegar to drink, Psal. 69. 21. the piercing of his side was expressly fore-told by Zachary: they shall look on him whom they have pierced, Zach. 10. 12. The company in which he suffer'd, and the interment he had, are also intimated by Isaiah, He made his Grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, Isai. 53. 9. Nay even the disposal of his Garments was not without a Prophecy: they parted my Garments among them, and upon my Vesture did they cast Lots Psalm 22. 18. Here are a cloud of witnesses which as they serve eminently to attest the truth of the Christian Religion; so do they to evince the excellency of the Sacred Scripture, as to the verity of the Prophetick part.

14. AS to the admonitory part of the Prophetick Writings, they are in their kind no way inferiour to the other. The reproofs are authoritative and convincing. What piercing exprobrations do we find of Israels ingratitude? How often are they upbraided with the better examples of the brute Creatures? with the Ox and the Ass by Isaiah Chap. 1. 3. with the Stork, and the Crane and the Swallow, by Jeremiah, Chap. 8. 7. Nay the constancy of the Heathen to their false Gods is instanc'd to reproach their revolt from the true. Hath a Nation chang'd their Gods which yet are no Gods? but my People have chang'd their Glory for that which doth not profit, Jer. 2. 11. What awful, what Majestick representations do we find of Gods power, to awake their dread! Fear ye not me saith the Lord? will ye not tremble at my presence who have plac'd the Sands for the bounds of the Sea by a

perpetual decree, that it cannot pass over? and tho' the Waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; tho' they roar, yet can they not pass over it, Jer. 22. And again; Thus saith the High and lofty one that inhabiteth Eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the High and Holy Place, Is. 57. 15. So we find him describ'd as a God Glorious in Holiness, fearful in Praises, doing Wonders, Exod. 15. 11. These and many other the like heights of Divine eloquence we meet with in the Prophetick Writings: which cannot but strike us with an awful reverence of the Divine Power.

15. NOR are they less Pathetick in the gentler strains. What instance is there of the greatest tenderness and love, which God has not adopted to express his by? He personates all the nearest and most endearing relations: that of a Husband; I will Marry thee to my self, Hos. 2. 19. of a Father; I am a Father to Israel, and Ephraim is my first Born: nay, he vies Bowels with the tender Sex, and makes it more possible for a Mother to renounce her compassions towards the Son of her Womb, than for him to with-draw his, Isa. 49. 15. By all these endearments, these cords of a man, these bands of love, as himself stiles them, Hos. 11. 4. endeavouring to draw his people to their duty, and their happiness. And when their perversness frustrates all this his Holy Artifice; how passionately do's he expostulate with them? how solemnly protest his aversness to their ruin? Why will ye die O House of Israel? for I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God, Ezek. 18. 31, 32. with what regrets and relenting do's he think of abandoning them? How shall I give thee up Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim? my Heart is turn'd within me, my repentings are kindled together; Hos. 11. 8. In short, 'twere endless to cite the places in these Prophetick Books, wherein God do's thus condescend to solicit even the sensitive

part of man; and that with such moving Rhetorick, that I cannot but wonder at the exception some of our late Criticks make against the Bible, for its defect in that particular; for Oratory is nothing but a dextrous application to the affections and passions of men. And certainly we find not that done with greater advantage any where than in Sacred Writ.

16. YET it was not the design of the Prophets (no more than of the Apostle) to take men with guile; 2 Cor. 12. 16. to inveigle their affections unawares to their understandings; but they address as well to their reasons, make solemn appeals to their judicative faculties. And now judge I pray between me and my Vineyard, says Isa. 5. 3. Nay, God by the Prophet Ezekiel solemnly pleads his own cause before them, vindicates the equity of his proceedings from the aspersions they had cast on them; and by most irrefragable Arguments refutes that injurious Proverb which went current among them; and in the close appeals to themselves, O House of Israel are not my ways equal? are not your ways unequal? Ezek. 18. the evidences were so clear that he remits the matter to their own determination. And generally we shall find that among all the Topicks of dissuasion from sin, there is none more closely prest, than that of the folly of it. Idolatry was a sin to which Israel had a great propension, and against which most of the Prophets admonitions were directed. And certainly it can never be more expos'd, and the sottish unreasonableness of it better display'd, than we find it in the 44. Chap. of Isaiah. In like manner we may read the Prophet Jeremy dissuading from the same sin by Arguments of the most irrefragable conviction, Jer. 10.

17. AND as the Prophets omitted nothing as to the manner of their address, to render their exhortations effectual, the matter of them was likewise so considerable as to command attention. It was commonly

either the recalling them from their revolts and Apostacies from God by Idolatry, or else to convince them of the insignificancy of all those legal Ceremonial performances they so much confided in, when taken up as a supersedens to moral duties. Upon this account it is, that they often depreciate, and in a manner prohibit the solemnest of their Worships. To what purpose are the multitude of your Sacrifices unto me? bring no more vain Oblations: incense is an abomination to me; the new Moons and sabbaths, the calling of Assemblies I cannot away with: if Iniquity even your solemn meetings, &c. Is. 1. 11. 13. Not that these things were in themselves reprovably; for they were all commanded by God; but because the Jews depended so much on these external observances that they thought by them to commute for the weightier matters of the Law (as our Saviour after stiles them) Judgement, Mercy and Faith, Mat. 23. 23. look'd on these rites which discriminated them from other Nations, as dispensations from the universal obligations of nature and common justice.

18. THIS deceit of theirs is sharply upbraided to them by the Prophet Jeremy; where he calls their boasts of the Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord, lying words; and on the contrary, lays the whole stress of their obedience, and expectation of their happiness on the justice and innocence of their conversation, Ch. 7. 4. And after do's smartly reproach their insolence in boldly resorting to that house, which by bringing their sins along with them, they made but an Asylum, and Sanctuary for those crimes. Will ye steal, murder and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense to Baal, and walk after other Gods whom ye know not, and come and stand before me in this house? Is this house which is called by my name become a Den of robbers in your eyes? Chap. 7. 9, 10, 11. Indeed all the Prophets seem to conspire in this one design, of making them look thro' shadows and

ceremonies, to that inward purity, Justice and Honesty, which they were design'd to inculcate, not to supplant. And this design as it is in itself most excellent, most worthy the command of God, and the nature of man; so we have seen that it has been pursued by all the most apt, and most powerful mediums, that the thing or persons address to were capable of; and so that the Prophets are no less eminent for the discharge of this exhortatory part of their office, than they were in the former, of the predicting.

19. THE next part of Scripture we are to consider, is the Doctrinal; by which I shall not in this place understand the whole complex of Faith and Manners together; but restrain it only to those Revelations which are the object of our Belief; and these are so sublime, as shews flesh and blood never reveal'd them. Those great mysteries of our Faith, The Trinity, the Incarnation, the Hypostatical union, the Redemption of the world by making the offended party the Sacrifice for the offence, are things of so high and abstruse speculation, as no finite understanding can fully fathom. I know their being so is by some made an Argument for disbelief; but doubtless very unjustly for (not to insist upon the different natures of Faith and Science, by which that becomes a proper object of the one which is not of the other) our noncomprehension is rather an indication that they have a higher rise, and renders it infinitely improbable that they could spring from mans invention. For 'twere to suppose too great a disproportion between human faculties to think men could invent what themselves could not understand. Indeed these things lye so much out of the road of human imagination, that I dare appeal to the breasts of the most perverse gain-sayers, whether ever they could have fallen into their thoughts without suggestion from without. And therefore 'tis a malicious contradiction to reject these truths because of their dissonancy from human reason, and yet at the

same time to ascribe their original to man. But certainly there can be nothing more inconsistent with mere natural reason, than to think God can be, or do no more than man can comprehend. Never any Nation or person that own'd a Deity, did ever attempt so to circumscribe him: and it is proportionable only to the licentious profaneness of these latter days, thus to measure immensity and omnipotence by our narrow scantling.

20. THE more genuine and proper effect of these supernatural truths is, to raise our admiration of that Divine Wisdom, whose ways are so past finding out; and to give us a just sense of that infinite distance which is between it, and the highest of that reason wherein we so pride our selves. And the great propriety these Doctrines have to that end may well be reckon'd as one part of their excellency.

21. INDEED there is no part of our holy Faith, but is naturally productive of some peculiar virtue; as the whole Scheme together engages us to be universally Holy in all manner of conversation. 1 Pet. 1. 15. And it is the supereminent advantage true Religion hath over all false ones, that it tends to so laudable an end.

22. THE Theology of the Heathens was in many instances an extract and quintessence of vice. Their most solemn Rites, and Sacred'st Mysteries were of such a nature, that instead of refining and elevating, they corrupted and debased their Votaries; immers'd them in all those abominable pollutions which sober nature abhorr'd. Whereas the principles of our Faith serve to spiritualize and rectifie us, to raise us as much above mere manhood as theirs cast them below it.

23. AND as they are of this vast advantage to us, so also are they just to God, in giving us right notions of him. What vile unworthy apprehensions had the Heathen of their Deities, intitling them not only to the passions but even to the crimes of men, making Jupiter an

adulterer, Mercury a thief, Bacchus a drunkard, &c, proportionably of the rest? Whereas our God is represented to us as an essence, so spiritual, and incorporeal, that we must be unbodied our selves before we can perfectly conceive what he is: so far from the impotent affections and inclinations of men, that he has neither parts, nor passions; and is fain to veil himself under that disguise, to speak sometimes as if he had, merely in condescension to our grosser faculties. And again, so far from being an example, a patron of vice, that his eyes are too pure to behold iniquity, Hab. 1. 13. Holiness is an essential part of his nature, and he must deny himself to put it off.

24. THE greatest descent that ever he made to humanity was in the incarnation of the second person: yet even in that, tho' he was linked with a sinful nature, yet he preserv'd the person immaculate; and while he had all the sins of the world upon him by imputation, suffer'd not any one to be inherent in him.

To conclude, the Scripture describes our God to us by all those glorious Attributes of infinity, Power and Justice, which may render him the proper object of our Adorations and Reverence and it describes him also in those gentler Attributes of Goodness, Mercy and Truth, which may excite our love of, and dependence on him. These are representations something worthy of God, and such as impress upon our mind great thoughts of him.

26. BUT never did the Divine Attributes so concur to exert themselves, as in the mystery of our Redemption: where his Justice was satisfied without diminution to his Mercy; and his Mercy without entrenching on his Justice: his Holiness most eminent in his indignation against sin, and yet his Love no less so in sparing sinners: these contradictions being reconcil'd, this discord compos'd into harmony by his infinite

Wisdom. This is that stupendous Mystery into which the Angels desir'd to look, 1 Pet. 1. 12. And this is it which by the Gospel is preach'd unto us; as it follows, vers. 25.

27. AND as the Scripture gives us this knowledge of God, so it do's also of our selves; in which two, all profitable knowledge is comprised. It teaches us how vile we were in our original dust; and how much viler yet in our fall, which would have sunk us below our first principles, sent us not only to earth, but hell. It shews the impotence of our lapsed estate; that we are not able of our selves so much as to think a good thought: and it shews us also the dignity of our renovated estate, that we are heirs of God, and fellow heirs with Christ, Rom. 8.

17. yet lest this might puff us up with mistaken hopes, it plainly acquaints us with the condition on which this depends; that it must be our obedience both alive and passive, which is to intitle us to it: that we must be faithful to death, if we mean to inherit a crown of Life, Rev. 2. 10. and that we must suffer with Christ, if we will be glorified with him, Rom. 8. 17. And upon supposition that we perform our parts of the condition, it gives us the most certain assurance, engages Gods veracity that he will not fail on his. By this it gives us support against all the adversities of life assuring us the sufferings of it are not worthy to be compared with the glory we expect, Rom. 8. 18. yea, and against the terrors of death too; by assuring us that what we look on as a dissolution, is but a temporary parting and we only put off our bodies, that they may put off corruption, and be cloathed with immortality.

28. THESE and the like are the Doctrines the Holy Scripture offers to us: and we may certainly say, they are faithful sayings, and worthy of all acceptance, 1 Tim. 4. 9. The notions it gives us of God are so sublime and great, that they cannot but affect us with reverence, and

admiration; and yet withal, so amiable and endearing that they cannot but raise love and gratitude, affiance and delight.

29. AND, which is yet more, the milder Attributes are apt to inspire us with a generous ambition of assimilation; excite us to transcribe all his imitable excellencies in which the very Heathens could discern consisted the accomplishment of human felicity.

30. AND then the knowledge it gives us of our selves do's us the kindest office imaginable; keeps us from those swelling thoughts we are too apt to entertain, and shews us the necessity of bottoming our hopes upon a firmer foundation: and then again keeps us from being lazy or secure, by shewing us the necessity of our own endeavours. In a word, it teaches us to be humble and industrious, and whoever is so ballasted can hardly be shipwrack'd.

31. THESE are the excellencies of the Doctrinal part of the Scriptures, which also renders them most aptly preparative for the preceptive. And indeed, so they were design'd: the Credenda and the Agenda being such inseparable relations, that whoever parts them, forfeits the advantage of both. The most solemn profession of Christ, the most importunate invocations, Lord, Lord, will signifie nothing to them which do not the things which he says, Mat. 7. And how excellent, how rational those precepts are which the Scripture proposes to us from him is our next point of consideration.

32. THE first Law which God gave to mankind was that of nature. And tho' the impressions of it upon the mind be by Adams fall exceedingly dimm'd and defac'd; yet that derogates nothing from the dignity and worth of that Law, which God has been so far from cancelling, that he seems to have made it the rule and square of his subsequent Laws so that nothing is injoin'd in those, but what is consonant and agreeable to that. The Moral Law given in the Decalogue to the Jews, the

Evangelical Law given in the Gospel to Christians, have this natural Law for their basis and foundation. They licence nothing which that prohibits, and very rarely prohibit any thing which it licences.

33. 'TIS true, Christ in his Sermon on the Mount, raises Christians to a greater strictness than the Jews thought themselves oblig'd to; but that was not by contradicting either the natural, or moral Law, but by rescuing the latter from those corruptions which the false glosses of the Scribes and Pharisees had mix'd with it; and reducing it to its primitive integrity, and extent. In a word, as the Decalogue was given to repair the Defacings, and renew the impressions of the natural Law: so the precepts of the Gospel were design'd to revive and illustrate both. And accordingly we find Christ, in the matter of Divorce, calls them back to this natural Law; In the beginning it was not so Mat. 19. 8; I say not but that even these natural notions are in some instances refin'd and elevated by Christ; the second Adam being to repair the fall of the first with advantage but yet he still builds upon that ground-work, introduces nothing that is inconsistent with it.

34. AND this accordance between there several Laws is a circumstance that highly recommends Scripture precepts to us. We cannot imagine but that God who made man for no other end but to be an instrument of his glory, and a recipient of all communicable parts of his happiness, would assign him such rules and measures as were most conducive to those ends. And therefore since the Scripture injunctions are of the same mould, we must conclude them to be such as tend to the perfection of our being; the making us what God originally intended us; and he that would not be that, will certainly chuse much worse for himself.

31. I know there have been prejudices taken up against the precepts of Christ, as if they impos'd unreasonable, unsupportable strictnesses upon men: and some have assum'd liberty to argue mutinously against

them; nay, against God too for putting such natural appetites into men, and then forbidding them to satisfy them.

36. BUT the ground of this cavil is the not rightly distinguishing of natural appetites, which are to be differenc'd according to the two states of rectitude and depravation: those of the first rank are the appetites God put into man; and those were all regular and innocent, such as tended to the preservation of his being: nature in its first integrity measuring its desires by its needs. Now Christs prohibitions are not directed against these, he forbids no one kind of these desires. And tho' the precept of self-denial may sometimes restrain us in some particular acts; yet that is but proportionable to that restraint Adam was under in relation to the forbidden Tree, a particular instance of his obedience, and fence of his safety. So that if men would consider nature under this its first and best notion, they cannot accuse Christ of being severe to it.

37. BUT 'tis manifest they take it in another acceptance, and mean that corruption of nature which inordinately inclines to sensitive things; and on this account they call their riots, their luxuries, appetites put into them by God: whereas 'tis manifest these were superinduced from another coast: The wise man gives us its true pedigree in what he says of death, which is its twin-sister: By the envy of the devil came death into the world, Wisd. 2. 24. And can they expect that Christ who came to destroy the works of the devil, 1 Joh.

3. 8. should frame Laws in their favour, make Acts of toleration and indulgence for them? This were to annul the whole design of his coming into the world, which was to restore us from our laps'd estate, and elevate us to those higher degrees of purity which he came not only to prescribe, but to exemplifie to us.

38. BUT in this affair men often take nature in a yet wider and worse

notion; and under natural desires comprehend whatever upon any sort of motive they have a mind to do. The awe of a Superior, the importunity of a companion, custom, and example, make men do many ill things, to which their nature would never prompt them; nay, many times such as their nature relucts to, and abhors. 'Tis certainly thus in all debauchery and excess. 'Tis evident, it gratifies no mans nature to be drunk, or to lie under undigested loads of meats: these are out-rages and violences upon nature, take it only in the most sensitive notion, such as the struggles to avert: and yet men make her bear, not only the oppression, but the blame too.

39. BUT besides to be consider'd, that the nature of a man includes reason as well as sense; and to this all sorts of luxury are yet more repugnant, as that which clouds the mind, and degrades the man (who in his constitution is a rational being) and sets him in the rank of mere Animals: and certainly these can be no appetites of nature, which thus subvert it.

40. THE like may be said concerning revenge, particularly that absurdest sort of it, Duels; which certainly are as great contradictions to nature as can be imagin'd, the unravelling and cancelling its very first principle of self-preservation (which in other instances men bring in bar against duty.) And yet men will say the generosity of their natures compels them to it so making their nature a kind of felo de se to prompt the destroying it self: when alas 'tis only the false notion they have got of honour that so gages them. And if men would but soberly consider, they must be convinc'd that there is nothing more agreeable to reason than that precept of Christ of not retaliating injuries; which is in effect but to bid us to chuse a single inconvenience before a long train of mischiefs. And certainly if nature even in its depriv'd estate were left to determine, it would

resolve it a better bargain to go off with a reproachful word, than to lose a limb, perhaps a life in the revenge of it. There being no maxim more indisputable than that of evils the least is to be chosen. And the innate principle of self-love do's more strongly bias nature to preserve, than any external thing can to destroy it self.

41. I know, 'twill be said to this, that revenge is a natural appetite: but I say still, self-preservation is more so; and would prevail against as much of revenge as is natural, were it not heightned and fortified by fancy, and that Chimera of point of honour, which, as it is now stated, is certainly one of the most empty nothings that ever was brought in balance with solid interests. And indeed 'tis to belie nature, and suppose it to have forfeited all degrees of reason, as well as vertue, to fasten so absurd a choice upon her. But admit revenge to be never so much the dictate of corrupt nature; 'tis certain 'tis not of primitive regular nature. Revenge is but a relative to injury: and he that will say God put the appetite of revenge into man, must say he put the appetite of injury into him also: which is such an account of the sixth days creation, as is hardly consistent with Gods own testimony of its being very good, Gen. 1.

42. BESIDES, 'tis certain all the desires God infus'd into human nature were such as tended to its preservation; but this of revenge is of all other the most destructive, as is too sadly attested by the daily tragical effects of it. In short, the wise-man gives us a good luminary of the whole matter God made man upright, but he sought out many inventions, Eccl. 7. 29.

43. NOW if man has by his own voluntary act deprav'd himself, it would be neither just nor kind in God to warp his Laws to mans now distorted frame; but it is both, to keep up the perfect rectitude of those, and call upon man to reduce himself to a conformity with them: and when to

this is added such a supply of grace as may silence the plea of disability, there can nothing be imagin'd more worthy of God, or more indulgent to man.

44. AND all this Christ do's in the Gospel, in those precepts which the blind world makes the subject of their cavil or scorn. It were an easie task to evince this in every particular precept of the Gospel; but I shall content my self with the instances already given, and not swell this Tract by insisting upon what has already been the subject of so many pious and excellent discourses, as must already have convinc'd all but the obstinate.

45. WE proceed therefore to a view of the promissory parts of Scripture; in which we are first in general to observe the great goodness of God, in making any promises at all to us; and next to examine of what nature and excellence these promises are. And first if we consider how many titles God has to our obedience, we must acknowledge he may challenge it as his undoubted right. We are the work of his hands; and if the Potter has power over the clay (the materials whereof are not of his making) much more has God over his creatures, whose matter as well as form is wholly owing to him. We are the price of his blood; and if men account purchase an indefeisible title, God must have absolute dominion over what he has bought, and at so dear a price too as his own blood. Lastly we depend upon him for the support of that being he has given us: we live merely upon his bounty, spend upon his stock. And what Patron will not expect observance from one who thus subsists by him?

46. YET as if God had none of these claims, these preingagements upon us, he descends to treat with us as free-men by way of Article and compact; buy's his own of us, and engages to reward that obedience, which he might upon the utmost penalties exact: which is such an

astonishing indulgence as our highest gratitude cannot reach: and of this the Sacred Scriptures are the evidences and records; and therefore upon that account deserve at once our reverence, and our joy.

47. BUT this will yet farther appear, if we look in the second place into the promises themselves; which are so extensive as to take in both our present and future state: according to that of the Apostle Godliness hath the promise of this Life, and of that which is to come, 1 Tim. 4. 8. For the present, they are proportion'd to the several parts of our composition; the body, and the mind, the outward and the inward man; so stretching themselves to all we can really be concern'd for in this world.

48. AND first for the body, the Old Testament abounds in promises of this sort. The first part of the 28. of Deut. contains a full catalogue of all temporal blessings; and those irreversibly entail'd upon the Israelites obedience, ver. 1. The Psalmist tells us, they that fear the Lord shall lack nothing, Ps. 34. 9. that they shall not be confounded in the perillous time, and in the days of dearth they shall have enough, Ps. 37. 19. And Solomon, that the Lord will not suffer the righteous to famish, Pro. 10. 3. And tho' under the Gospel, the promises of temporal affluence seem not so large; (its design being to spiritualize us, and raise our minds to higher enjoyments;) yet it gives us ample security of so much as is really good for us. It supersedes our care for our selves by alluring us all these things shall be added to us, Mat. 6. 33. that is, all those things which our heavenly Father know we have need of, ver. 32. which is all the limitation the context gives. And certainly we have little temptation to fear want, who have him for our provider; whose are all the beasts of the Forrest, and the cattel upon a thousand hills, Ps. 50. 10.

49. AND when we are thus secur'd of all things necessary, it may

perhaps be an equal mercy to secure us from great abundance; which at the best, is but a lading ones self with thick clay, in the Prophets phrase, Hab. 2. 6. but is often a snare as well as a burden.

50. BESIDES, the Gospel by its precepts of temperance and self-denial, do's so contract our appetites, that a competence is a more adequate promise to them, than that of superfluity would have been; and 'tis also the measure wherein all the true satisfaction of the senses consists; which are gratified with moderate pleasures, but suffocated and overwhelm'd with, excessive. The temperate man tastes and relishes his portion, whilst the voluptuous may rather be said to wallow in his plenty than enjoy it.

51. AND as the necessaries of life, so life it self; and the continuance of that, is a Scripture promise. The fifth Commandment affixes it to one particular duty but it is in a multitude of places in the Old Testament annex'd to general obedience. Thus it is, Deut. 11. 9. and again, vers. 21. And Solomon proposes this practical wisdom as the multiplier of days By me thy days shall be multiplied, and the years of thy life shall be increased, Pro. 9. 11. and chap. 3. Length of days is in her right hand, vers. 16. And tho' we find not this promise repeated in the New Testament, yet neither is it retracted: 'tis true; the Gospel bids us be ready to lay down our lives for Christs sake, but tells us withal, that he that will lose his life, shall save it: which tho' it be universally true only in the spiritual sense, yet it often proves so in a literal. It did so eminently in the destruction of Jerusalem, where the most resolute Christians escap'd, while the base compliers perish'd together with those they sought to endear. This is certain, that if the New Testament do's not expressly promise long life, yet it do's by its rules of temperance and sobriety, contentedness and chearfulness, very much promote it: and so do's

virtually and efficaciously ratifie those the Old Testament made.

52. THE next outward blessing is reputation: and this also is a Scripture promise. The wise shall inherit glory, Prov. 3. 35. And the vertuous woman Solomon describes is not only blessed by her children and husband, but she is prais'd in the gate, Prov. 31. ult. Nay, this blessing is extended even beyond life: The memory of the just shall be blessed, Prov. 10. 7. Nor do's the Gospel evacuate this promise; but rather prompts us to the ways of having it made good to us, by advising us to abstain from all appearance of evil, 1 Thes. 5. 22. to provide for honest things, not only in the sight of God, but also in the sight of men, 2 Cor. 8. 21.

53. 'TIS true indeed, Christ fore-warns his Disciples that they shall be revil'd, and have all manner of evil spoken against them falsly, for his names sake: but then the cause transform'd the sufferings, and made it so honourable, that they were to count it matter of joy, Matt. 5. 11, 12. Neither was this any paradox even in relation to their reputation; which tho' sullied by a few ill men of that age, yet has been most illustrious among all Ages since. Their sufferings and indignities gave them a new title of honour, and added the Martyr to the Apostle. And the event has been proportionable in all successions since: Those Holy men that fill'd up the Pagan prisons, fill'd up the Churches Diptycks also, and have been had as the Psalmist speaks, in everlasting remembrance, Ps. 1. 2. 6.

54. AND as Scripture-promises thus take in all the concerns of the outward man, so do they also of the inward. The fundamental promise of this kind is that of sending Christ into the world, and in him establishing the new Covenant, which we find, Jer. 31. 31. and is referr'd to by the Author to the Hebrews, I will put my Laws in their hearts, and write them in their minds; and their sins and iniquities

will I remember no more, Heb. 10. 16.

55. AND this is so comprehensive a promise as includes all the concerns of the inward man. The evils incident to the mind of man may be reduc'd to two; impurity, and inquietude: and here is a cure to both. The divine Law written in the heart drives thence all those swarms of noysom lusts, which like the Egyptian Frogs over-run and putrifie the soul. Where that is feared and enshrin'd, those can no more stand before it, than Dagon before the Ark. This repairs the divine Image in us (in which consists the perfection of our nature) renews us in the spirits of our minds, Ephes. 4. 23. and purges our consciences from dead works, Heb. 9. 14. which all the Catharticks and Lustrations among the Heathen, all the Sacrifices and Ceremonies of the Law, were not able to do.

56. SECONDLY, this promise secures the mind from that restlessness and unquietness, which attends both the dominion and guilt of sin. To be subject to a mans lusts and corrupt appetites is of all others the vilest vassalage: they are the cruellest task-masters, and allow their slaves no rest, no intermission of their drudgery. And then again, the guilt that tortures and racks the mind with dreadful expectations keeps it in perpetual agitation and tumult which is excellently describ'd by the Prophet Isaiah, The wicked is like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest; whose waters cast out mire and dirt: there is no peace saith my God to the wicked, Is. 48. 22. How prosperous soever vice may seem to be in the world, yet there are such secret pangs and horrors that dog it, that as Solomon says, even in laughter the heart is sorrowful, Prov. 14. 13.

57. BUT this Evangelical promise of being merciful to our iniquities, and remembering our sins no more, calms this tempest, introduces peace and serenity into the mind, and reconciles us at once to God and our

selves. And sure we may well say with the Apostle, these are great and precious promises 2 Pet. 1. 4.

58. THERE are besides many other which spring from these principles, as suckers from the root: such are the promises of fresh supplies of grace upon a good imployment of the former. To him that hath shall be given, Mat. 25. 29. Nay even of the source and fountain of all grace. He shall give the Holy spirit to them that ask him, Mat. 7. 11. Such is that of supporting us in all difficulties and assaults: the not suffering us to be tempted above that we are able, 1 Cor. 10. 13. which like Gods bow set in the clouds, Gen. 9, is our security, that we shall not be over-whelm'd by any deluge of temptation: and (to instance no more) such is that comprehensive promise of hearing our prayers, Ask and it shall be given you, Mat. 7. 7. This puts all good things within reach, gives us the key of Gods Storehouse, from whence we may furnish our selves with all that is really good for us. And if a few full Barns could tempt the rich man in the Gospel to pronounce a Requiem to his soul; what notes of acquiescence may they sing, who have the command of an inexhaustible store; that are supplied by him whose is the earth, and the fulness thereof?

59. AND certainly, all the promises together must be (to use the Apostles phrase) strong consolation; such as may quiet and calm all the fears and griefs, all the tumults and perturbations of the mind, in relation to its present mate. But then there are others relating to the future of a much higher elevation: those glories and felicities of another world, which are so far beyond our narrow conceptions, that the comprehension and enjoyment must begin together. The Scripture shadows it out to us by all the notions we have of happiness: by glory, Rom. 8. 18. by a kingdom, Mat. 25. 14. by joy, Mat. 25. 21. and which comprehends all, by being with the Lord, 1 Thes. 4. 17. seeing him face

to face, 1 Cor. 13. 12. being like to him, 1 Jo. 3. 2. In a word 'tis bliss in the utmost extent: immense for quantity, and eternal for duration.

60. AND Purely this promise is so excellent in its kind, so liberal in its degree, so transcendently great in all respects, that did it stand single, strip'd of all those that relate to this life, it alone would justify the name of Gospel, and be the best tidings that ever came to mankind. For alas, if we compare the hopes that other Religions propose to their Votaries with these, how base, how ignoble are they! The Heathens Elysium, the Mahumetan Paradise, were but higher gratifications of the sensual part and consequently were depressions and debasements of the rational. So that in effect they provided a heaven for the beast, and a hell for the man. We may therefore confidently resume our conclusion, and pronounce the Scripture promises to be so divine and excellent, that they could as little have been made, as they can be perform'd by any but an Holy and Almighty Author.

61. NOR is their being conditional any impeachment to their worth, but an enhancement. Should God have made them (as some fancy he has his decrees) absolute and irrelative; he had set his promises at war with his precepts, and there should have superseded what those injoin. We are all very niggardly towards God, and should have been apt to have ask'd Judas's question to what purpose is this waste Mat. 26. 8. What needs the labour of the course if the prize be certain? And it must have been infinitely below the wisdom and majesty of the supreme Legislator, to make Laws, and then evacuate them by dispensing rewards without any respect to their observance. 'Tis the Sanction which inspirits the Law, without which the divine, as well as the human, would to most men be a dead letter.

62. BUT against this God has abundantly provided, not only by the

conditionality of the promises, but by the terrour of his threats too; which is the last part of Scripture which falls under consideration. And these are of the most direful kinds; and cannot better be illustrated than by the opposition they stand in to the promises: for as those included all things that might make men happy either as to this life or the next; so these do all that may make them miserable. If we make our reflection on all the particulars of the promises we shall find the threats answering them as their reverse or dark shadow.

63. AND first as concerning the outward state, if we look but into the 28. of Deut. we shall find, that after all the gracious promises which begun the chapter, it finally ends in thunder, in the most dreadful denunciations imaginable; and those adapted by a most peculiar opposition to the former promises: as the Reader may see at large in that Chapter. And the whole tenour of the Scripture go's in the like stile. Thus, Psal. 140. 11. A wicked person shall not prosper in the earth, evil shall hunt the wicked man to overthrow him. The Lord will not suffer the righteous to famish, but he casteth out the substance of the wicked; Pro. 10. 3. And again, the righteous eateth to the satisfying of his soul, but the belly of the wicked shall want, Prov.

13. 25. Multitudes of like general threatnings of temporal improsperity there are every where scatter'd throughout the Scripture; and many more applied to particular vices, as sloth, unmercifulness, luxury, and the like; which would be here too long to enumerate.

64. AND although these threatnings may seem sometimes to be litterally confuted by the wealth and opulency of wicked men, yet they never miss of being really and vertyually verified. For either their prosperities are very short and only preparative to a more eminent ruin, which was the Psalmists resolution of this doubt, Psalm 73. or else if God leave them the matter of temporal happiness, yet he subtracts the vertue and

spirit of them, renders them empty and unsatisfying. This is well express'd by the Psalmist in the case of the Israelites: He gave them their desire, and sent leanness withal into their soul, Ps. 106. 15. and by Zophar, Job 20. 22. where speaking of the wicked, he saith; In the fulness of his sufficiency shall he be in straits. And to this Solomon seems to refer, when he saith, the blessing of the Lord maketh rich and he addeth no sorrow with it, Prov. 10. 22.

65. NEITHER is it only the comfort of life, but life it self that is threatned to be taken from wicked men: untimely death is throughout the Old Testament frequently mention'd as the guerdon of impiety: 'tis often assign'd judicially in particular cases: He shall be cut off from his people, being the usual sentence upon most offenders under the Levitical Law. But 'tis also menaced more generally as an immediate judgment from God The blood-thirsty and deceitful men shall not live out half their days, Psal. 55. 23. Farther yet, their names shall putrifie as soon as their Carcasses: the name of the wicked shall rot; Prov. 10. 7. Nay both their infamy and their ruin are intail'd upon their posterity. The seed of the evil doers shall never be renown'd. Prepare slaughter for his children, for the iniquity of their fathers; Isa. 14. 20, 21.

66. IF now we look on Scripture threatnings in relation to the mind of man, we shall find them yet more severe: wilful impenitent sinners being cut off from the benefits of the new Covenant; nor barely so, but look'd upon as despisers of it, and that blood of Christ in which it was seal'd; Heb. 10. 29. nay as those murtherous Wretches that shed it: They Crucifie to themselves the Son of God afresh; Heb. 6. 6. And this is the fatallest sentence that can fall on any man in this life; to be thus disfranchised of all the privileges of the Gospel, and rank'd as well in punishment as guilt, with the most criminous of mankind.

67. FROM hence 'tis consequent, that the mind remains not only in its native impurity, but in a greater and more incurable one; whilst that blood which alone could cleanse it, serves but to embrue and pollute it; and as it were flush, and excite it to all immanities and vilenesses: and he that is thus filthy, 'tis the doom pronounc'd against him, that he shall be filthy still, Rev. 22. 11.

68. AND then in the second place, what calm can there be to such a mind? what remains to such a person, but that fearful expectation of wrath and fiery indignation, which the Apostle mentions, Hebrews 10. 27? Indeed, were there none but temporal mischiefs to fear, yet it were very unpleasant to think ones self, like Cain, out-law'd from the presence and protection of God; to be afraid that every man that meets us shall slay us, Gen. 4. 14. Nay, those confus'd indistinct fears of indefinite evils which attend guilt are very unquiet, uneasie inmates in the mind. This is excellently describ'd by Moses; The Lord shall give thee a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind, and thy life shall hang in doubt before thee, and thou shalt fear day and night; in the morning thou shalt say, would God it were evening, and in the evening, would God it were morning, Deut. 28. 65, 66. 67.

69. AND what can be more wretched than to have a mind thus agitated and tost, rack'd and tortur'd; especially when thro' all these clouds it sees a glimpse of the eternal Tophet; and knows, that from the billows of this uneasie state, it must be tost into that Lake of fire. And this is indeed the dregs of the cup of Gods wrath, the dreadfulest and most astonishing of all Scripture denunciations. This comprehends all that the nature of man is capable of suffering. Divines distinguish it into the pain of sense, and of loss: that of sense is represented to us in Scripture by fire; and that accended, and render'd noisom as well as painful by brimstone, that afflicts the smell as well as the touch;

sometimes by outer darkness, wailing and gnashing of teeth, to grate the ears, and consume the eyes; by intolerable thirst to torment the palate. Not that we are to think the sensitive pains of Hell do not infinitely exceed all these; but because these are the higher measures our present capacities can make, and are adequate to those senses for whose carnal satisfactions we incur them.

70. THE pain of loss is yet more dismal; as being seated in the Soul, whose spiritual, nature will then serve it only to render its torments more refin'd, and acute. With what anguish will it then see it self banish'd from the presence of God, and consequently from all that may give satisfaction and bliss to the creature? But yet with how much deeper anguish will it reflect on it self as the Author of that deprivation? How will it recollect the many despis'd tenders of grace, the easie terms on which salvation might have been had? And how sadly will conscience then revenge all its stifled admonitions by an unsilenceable clamor, that worm which never dies, Mar. 9. 48. How wounding will it then be to see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and all the Saints in the Kingdom of God, Luk. 13. 28. (nay, that poor Lazarus whom here men turn'd over to the charity of their dogs) and it self in the company of the devil and his angels, who will then upbraid what they once entic'd to?

71. NATURE abhors nothing more than to have our misery insulted over by those who drew us into it: yet that no circumstance may be lacking to their torment, this must be the perpetual entertainment of damn'd souls. And to all this, Eternity is the dismal adjunct; which is of all other circumstances the most disconsolate, as leaving not so much as a glimpse of hopes; which here uses still to be the reserve, and last resort of the miserable.

72. THIS Eternity is that which gives an edge, infuses a new acrimony

into the torments: and is the highest strain, the vertical point of misery. These are those terrors of the Lord, with which the Scripture acquaints us: and sure we cannot say that these are flat contemptible menaces; but such as suit the dreadful Majesty of that God who is a consuming fire, Heb. 12. 29. So that these are as aptly accommodated for the exciting our dread, as the promises were of our love: both jointly concur to awaken our industry.

73. FOR God has been so good to mankind, as to make the threats conditional as well as the promises so that we as well know the way to avoid the one, as we do to attain the other. Nor has he any other intendment or end in proposing them, but that we may do so. See to this purpose, with what solemnity he protests it by Moses; I call heaven and earth to record against you this day that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore chuse life, that both thou and thy seed may live, Deut. 30. 19.

74. I have now run thro' the several parts of Scripture I proposed to speak of. And tho' I have in each given rather short instances and essays than an exact description, yet even in these contracted lineaments the exquisite proportions may be discern'd. And if the Reader shall hence be encourag'd to extend his contemplations, and as he reads Holy Scripture, observe it in all its graces, and full dimensions; I doubt not he will pronounce from his experience, that the matter of the Divine Book is very correspondent to the Author: which is the highest Eulogy imaginable.

75. IN the next place we are to consider the Holy Scripture in relation to its end and design; in proportion to which every thing is more or less valuable. The most exquisite frame, and curious contrivance, that has no determinate end or use, is but a piece of industrious folly, a Spiders web, as the Prophet speaks, Is. 59. 5. Now those designs have

always been esteem'd the most excellent that have had the most worthy subjects, and been of the greatest extent. Accordingly, those who have projected the obliging and benefiting of other men (tho' but within a private Sphere) have always been look'd on as men of generous and noble designs. Those who have taken their level higher, and directed their aim to a more publick good, tho' but of a City or Nation; have proportionably acquired a greater esteem. But those who have aspired to be universal benefactors; to do something for the common benefit of the world, their fame has commonly reach'd as far as their influence; men have reverenc'd, nay sometimes (according to the common excesses of mans nature) ador'd them. Many of the Heathen deities (especially their Demigods) having been only those persons, who by introducing some useful Art, or other part of knowledge, had oblig'd mankind. So we see what a natural gratitude men are apt to pay to worthy and generous designs. And if we will be content but to stand to this common award of our nature, the Scripture will have the fairer claim imaginable to our reverence and thankfulness, upon this very account of the excellency of its designs.

76. NOR need we borrow the balance of the Sanctuary to weigh them in, we may do it in our own scales; for they exactly answer the two properties above mention'd, of profit and diffusiveness, which in secular concerns are the standard rules of good designs. For first, it is the sole scope and aim of Scripture, the very end for which 'twas writ, to benefit and advantage men; and that secondly, not only some small select number, some little angle or corner of the world, but the whole race of mankind, the entire Universe; and he that can imagine a more diffusive design, must imagine more worlds also.

77. NOW for the first of these, that it is the design of the Scripture to benefit men, we need appeal but to Scripture it self; which surely

can give the best account to what ends 'tis directed; and that tells us, it is to make us wise unto Salvation, 2 Tim. 3. 15. In which is comprehended the greatest benefit that mans nature is capable of: the making us wise while we live here, and the saving us eternally. And this sure is the most generous, the most obliging design, that 'tis possible even for the Creator to have upon the creature: and this is it which the Holy Scripture negotiates with us.

78. AND first, the making us wise is so inviting a proposal to humanity, that we see when that was much wiser than now it is, it caught at a fallacious tender of it; the very sound of it, tho' out of the devils mouth, fascinated our first Parents, and hurried them to the higher disobedience, and certainest ruin. And therefore now God by the Holy Scriptures makes us an offer as much more safe, as it is more sincere; when he sends his Word thus to be a lamp to our feet, and a light to our paths, Ps. 119. 105. to teach us all that is good for us to know; our affectation of ignorance will be more culpable than theirs of knowledge, if we do not admire the kindness, and embrace the bounty of such a tender.

79. NOW the making us wise must be understood according to the Scripture notion of wisdom, which is not the wisdom of this world, nor the Princes of this world, which come to nought, as the Apostle speaks, 1 Cor. 2. 6. but that wisdom which descends from above, Ja. 3. 17. which he there describes to be first pure, then peaceable, gentle and easie to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisie. Indeed the Scripture usually comprehends these and all other graces under Wisdom; for it makes it synonymous to that which includes them all, viz. the fear of the Lord. Thus we find throughout the whole Book of Proverbs these us'd as terms convertible. In short, Wisdom is that practical knowledge of God and

our selves which engages us to obedience and duty; and this is agreeable to that definition the Wise man gives of it; The wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way, Prov. 14. 8. Without this, all the most refin'd and aerial speculations are but like Thales's star-gazing; which secur'd him not from falling into the water; nay, betray'd him to it. In this is all solid wisdom compris'd.

80. THE utmost all the wise men in the world have pretended to, is but to know what true happiness is, and what is the means of attaining it: and what they sought with so much study, and so little success, the Scripture presents us with in the greatest certainty, and plainest characters, such as he that runs may read, Hab. 2. 2. It acquaints us with that supreme felicity, that chief good whereof Philosophy could only give us a name, and it shews us the means, marks out a path which will infallibly lead us to it. Accordingly we find that Solomon after all the accurate search he had made to find what was that good for the sons of men; he shuts up his inquest in this plain conclusion: Fear God and keep his commandments; for God shall bring every work unto judgement, Eccl. 12. 13, 14. The regulating our lives so by the rules of Piety as may acquit us at our final account, is the most eligible thing that falls within human cognizance; and that not only in relation to the superlative happiness of the next world, but even to the quiet and tranquillity of this. For alas, we are impotent giddy creatures, sway'd sometimes by one passion, sometimes by another; nay often the interfering of our appetites makes us irresolute which we are to gratifie, whilst in the interim their struggling agitates and turmoils the mind. And what can be more desirable in such a case, than to put our selves under a wiser conduct than our own; and as oppres'd States use to defeat all lesser pretenders by becoming homagers to some more potent: so for us to deliver our selves from the tyranny of our lusts,

by giving up our obedience to him whose service is perfect freedom.

81. WERE there no other advantage of the exchange, but the bringing us under fix'd and determinate Laws, 'twere very considerable. Every man would gladly know the terms of his subjection, and have some standing rule to guide himself by; and Gods Laws are such, we may certainly know what he requires of us: but the mandates of our passions are arbitrary and extemporary: what pleases them to day disgusts them to morrow; and we must always be in readiness to do we know not what, and of all the Arbitrary governments that men either feel or fear, this is doubtless the most miserable. I wish our apprehensions of it were but as sensible: and then we should think the Holy Scripture did us the office of a Patriot, in offering us a rescue from so vile a slavery.

82. AND that it do's make us this offer, is manifest by the whole tenour of the Bible. For first it rowzes and awakes us to a sense of our condition, shews us that what we call liberty is indeed the saddest servitude that he that committeth sin is the servant of sin, Jo. 8. 34. that those vices which pretend to serve and gratifie us, do really subdue and enslave us, and fetter when they seem to embrace: and whereas the will in all other oppressions retains its liberty, this tyranny brings that also into vassallage: renders our spirits so mean and servile, that we chuse bondage, and are apt to say with the Israelites, Let us alone that we may serve the Egyptians, Exod. 14. 12.

83. AND what greater kindness can be done for people in this forlorn abject condition, than to animate them to cast off this yoke, and recover their freedom. And to this are most of the Scripture exhortations address'd; as may be seen in a multitude of places, particularly in the sixth chapter to the Romans, the whole scope whereof is directly to this purpose.

84. NOR do's it only sound the alarm, put us upon the contest with our

enemies, but it assists us in it, furnishes us with that whole armour of God which we find describ'd, Eph 6. 13. Nay further, it excites our courage, by assuring us that if we will not basely surrender our selves, we can never be overpower'd; if we do but stand our ground, resist our enemy, he will fly from us; Ja. 4. 7. And to that purpose it directs us under what banner we are to lift our selves; even his who hath spoil'd principalities and powers, Col. 2. 15. to whose conduct and discipline if we constantly adhere, we cannot miss of victory.

85. AND then lastly it sets before us the prize of this conquest; that we shall not only recover our liberty, manumit our selves from the vilest bondage to the vilest and cruellest oppressors; but we shall be crown'd for it too, be rewarded for being kind to our selves, and be made happy eternally hereafter for being willing to be happy here.

86. AND sure there are terms so apparently advantageous, that he must be infinitely stupid (foolish, to destruction) that will not be thus made wise unto salvation, that despises or cavils at this divine Book, which means him so much good, which designs to make him live here generously and according to the dignity of his nature, and in the next world to have that nature sublimated and exalted, made more capacious of those refin'd and immense felicities, which there await all who will qualifie themselves for them; who (as the Apostle speaks) by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, eternal life, Rom. 2. 7.

87. BUT besides the greatest and principal advantages which concern our spiritual interest, it takes in also the care of our secular, directs us to such a managery of our selves, as is naturally apt to promote a quiet and happy life. Its injunction to live peaceably with all men keeps us out of the way of many misadventures, which turbulent unruly spirits meet with, and so secures our peace. So also as to wealth, it

puts us into the fairest road to riches by prescribing diligence in our callings: what is thus got being like sound flesh, which will stick by us; whereas the hasty growth of ill-gotten wealth is but a tumour and impostume, which the bigger it swells, the sooner it bursts and leaves us lanker than before. In like manner it shews us also how to guard our reputation, by providing honest things not only in the sight of God, but also in the sight of men, 2 Cor. 8. 21. by abstaining even from all appearance of evil, 1 Thes. 5. 22. and making our light shine before men, Mat. 5. 16. It provides too for our ease and tranquillity, supersedes our anxious cares and sollicitudes, by directing us to cast our burden upon the Lord, Ps. 55. 22. and by a reliance on his providence how to secure to our selves all we really want. Finally it fixes us in all the changes, supports us under all the pressures, comforts us amidst all the calamities of this life, by assuring us they shall all work together for good to those that love God. Ro. 8. 28.

88. NOR do's the Scripture design to promote our interests consider'd only singly and personally, but also in relation to Societies and Communities; it gives us the best rules of distributive and commutative justice; teaches us to render to all their dues, Rom. 13. 7. to keep our words, to observe inviolably all our pacts and contracts; nay tho' they prove to our damage, Psa. 15. 4. and to preserve exact fidelity and truth; which are the sinews of human commerce. It infuses into us noble and generous principles, to prefer a common good before our private: and that highest flight of Ethnick vertue, that of dying for ones Country, is no more than the Scripture prescribes even for our common brethren, 1 Jo. 3. 16.

89. BUT besides these generals, it descends to more minute directions accommodated to our several circumstances; it gives us appropriate rules in reference to our distinct relations, whether natural, civil,

ecclesiastical, or oeconomical. And if men would but universally conform to them, to what a blessed harmony would it tune the world? what order and peace would it introduce? There would then be no oppressive Governours, nor mutinous Subjects; no unnatural Parents, nor contumacious Children: no idle Shepherds, or straying Flocks: none of those Domestick jars which oft disquiet, and sometimes subvert families: all would be calm and serene, and give us in reality that golden Age, whereof the Poets did but dream.

90. THIS tendency of the Scripture is remarkably acknowledg'd in all our publick judicatories, where before any testimony is admitted, we cause the person that is to give his testimony, first to lay hold of with his hands, then with his mouth to kiss the Holy Scriptures: as if it were impossible for those hands, which held the mysteries of Truth, to be immediately employ'd in working false-hood; or that those lips which had ador'd those Holy Oracles, should be polluted with perjuries and lies. And I fear, the civil Government is exceedingly shaken at this day in its firmest foundation, by the little regard that is generally had of the Holy Scriptures, and what is consequent thereto, the Oaths that are taken upon them.

91. 'TIS true, we are far remov'd from that state which Esaiah Prophecied of under the Gospel, tho' we have the Bible among us; that when the Law should go forth of Sion, and the Word of the Lord, from Jerusalem, they should beat their swords into plow-shares, and their spears into pruning hooks, Es. 2. 4. but that is not from any defect in it, but from our own perverseness: we have it, but (as the Apostle speaks in another sense) as if we had it not, 1 Cor. 7. 29. We have it (that is, use it) to purposes widely different from what it means. Some have it as a Supersedeas to all the duty it enjoins; and so they can but cap texts, talk glibly of Scripture, are not at all concern'd to

practise it: some have it as their Arsenal, to furnish them with Weapons, not against their spiritual enemies, but their secular: applying all the damnatory sentences they there find, to all those to whose persons or opinions they have prejudice. And some have it as a Scene of their mirth, a topick of raillery, dress their profane and scurrilous jests in its language; and study it for no other end but to abuse it. And whilst we treat it at this vile rate, no wonder we are never the better for it. For alas, what will it avail us to have the most sovereign Balsom in our possession, if in instead of applying it to our wounds, we trample it under our feet?

92. BUT tho' we may frustrate the use, we cannot alter the nature of things. Gods design in giving us the Scripture was to make us as happy as our nature is capable of being and the Scripture is excellently adapted to this end: for as to our eternal felicity, all that believe there is any such state, must acknowledge the Scripture chalks us out the ready way to it: not only because 'tis dictated by God who infallibly knows it, but also by its prescribing those things which are in themselves best, and which a sober Heathen would adjudge fittest to be rewarded. And as to our temporal happiness, I dare appeal to any unprejudic'd man, whether any thing can contribute more to the peace and real happiness of mankind, than the universal practice of the Scripture rules would do. Would God we would all conspire to make the experiment and then doubtless, not only our reason, but our sense too would be convinc'd of it.

93. AND as the design is thus beneficial, so in the second place is it as extensive also. Time was when the Jews had the inclosure of divine Revelation when the Oracles of God were their peculiar depositum and the Heathen then had not the knowledge of his Laws, Psal. 147. ult. but since that by the goodness of God the Gentiles are become fellow-heirs,

Eph. 3. 6. he hath also deliver'd into their hands the deeds and evidences of their future state, given them the Holy Scriptures as the exact and authentick registers of the covenant between God and man, and these not to be like the Heathen Oracles appropriated to some one or two particular places, so that they cannot be consulted but at the expence of a pilgrimage; but laid open to the view of all that will believe themselves concern'd.

94. IT was a large commission our Saviour gave his Disciples: go preach the Gospel to every creature, Mar. 16. 15. (which in the narrowest acception must be the Gentile world) and yet their oral Gospel did not reach farther than the written for wherever the Christian Faith was planted, the Holy Scriptures were left as the records of it; nay, as the conservers of it too, the standing rule by which all corruptions were to be detected. 'Tis true, the entire Canon of the New Testament, as we now have it, was not all at once deliver'd to the Church; the Gospels and Epistles being successively writ, as the needs of Christians, and the encroachment of Hereticks gave occasion: but at last they became all together the common magazine of the Church, to furnish arms both defensive and offensive. For as the Gospel puts in our hands the shield of Faith, so the Epistles help us to hold it, that it may not be wrested out of our hands again, either by the force of persecution, or the sly insinuations of vice or Heresie.

95. THUS the Apostles like prudent leaders have beat up the Ambushes, discover'd the snares that were laid for us; and by discomfiting Satans forlorn hope, that earliest Set of false Teachers and corrupt practices which then invaded the Church, have laid a foundation of victory to the succeeding Ages, if they will but keep close to their conduct, adhere to those Sacred Writings they have left behind them in every Church for that purpose.

96. NOW what was there deposited was design'd for the benefit of every particular member of that Church. The Bible was not committed (like the Regalia, or rarities of a Nation) to be kept under lock and key (and consequently to constitute a profitable office for the keepers) but expos'd like the Brazen Serpent for universal view and benefit: that sacred Book (like the common air) being every mans propriety, yet no mans inclosure: yet there are a generation of men whose eyes have been evil, because Gods have been good: who have seal'd up this spring, monopoliz'd the word of Life, and will allow none to partake of it but such persons, and in such proportions as they please to retail it: an attempt very insolent in respect of God, whole purpose they contradict; and very injurious in respect of man, whose advantage they obstruct. The iniquity of it will be very apparent, if we consider what is offer'd in the following Section.

SECT. TV.

The Custody of the Holy Scripture is a privilege and right of the Christian Church, and every member of it; which cannot without impiety to God, and injustice unto it and them, be taken away or impeach'd.

BESIDES the keeping of the divine Law, which is obsequious, and imports a due regard to all its Precepts, commonly express'd in Scripture by keeping the commandments, hearkning to, and obeying the voice of the Lord, walking in his ways, and observing and doing his statutes and his judgements; there is a possessory keeping it, in reference to our selves and others; in respect whereof, Almighty God, Deut. 6. and elsewhere frequently, having enjoin'd the people of Israel, to love the Lord their God with all their heart, and with all their soul, and with all their might, and that the words which be commanded them should be in their heart, he adds, that they shall teach them diligently to their children, and shall talk of them when they sit down in their houses, and when they walk by the way, and when they lie down, and when they rise up: and that they bind them for a sign upon their hand, and that they shall be as frontlets between their eyes, and that they shall write them upon the posts of their house, and on their gates. So justly was the Law call'd the Scripture, being written by them, and worn upon the several parts of the body, inscrib'd upon the walls of their houses, the entrance of their doors, and gates of their Cities; and in a word placed before their eyes wherever they convers'd.

2. AND this was granted to the Jews, as matter of privilege and favour. To them, says Saint Paul, Rom. 9. 4. pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the Law. And the same Saint Paul, at the 3. chap. 2, ver. of that Epistle, unto the question what

advantage hath the Jew, or what profit is there of circumcision, answers, that it is much every way, chiefly because unto them were committed the Oracles of God. This depositum or trust was granted to the Fathers, that it should be continued down unto their children. He made a covenant, says David, Ps. 78. v. 5. with Jacob, and gave Israel a Law, which he commanded our Fore-fathers to teach their children, that their posterity might know it, and the children which are yet unborn; to the intent that when they came up, they might shew their children the same. Which Scripture by a perpetual succession was to be handed down unto the Christian Church; the Apostles on all occasions appealing unto them, as being read in the Synagogues every Sabbath day, Act. 13. 27. and also privately, in their hands; so that they might at pleasure search into them, Jo. 5. 39. Act. 17. 11. Hereupon the Jews are by Saint Austin call'd the Capsarii, or servants that carried the Christian Books. And Athanasius in his Tract of the Incarnation, says, The Law was not for the Jews only, nor were the Prophets sent for them alone; but that Nation was the Divinity-School of the whole world; from whence they were to fetch the knowledge of God and the way of spiritual living: which amounts to what the Apostle says, Galat. 3. 24. That the Law was a School-master to bring us unto Christ.

3. AND 'tis observable that the very same word, Rom. 3. 2. in the Text even now recited, which expresses the committing of the Oracles of God to the Jews, is made use of constantly by Saint Paul, when he declares the trust and duty incumbent on him in the preaching of the Gospel: of which, see 1 Cor. 9. 17. Gal. 2. 7. 1 Thes. 2. 4. 1 Tim. 1. 11. Tit. 1.

3. And therefore, as he says, 1. Cor. 9. Tho' I preach the Gospel, I have nothing to glory of; for necessity is laid upon me, yea, wo is unto me if I preach not the Gospel, for if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, a dispensation of the Gospel is

commuted unto me: So may all Christians say; if we our selves keep and transmit to our posterities the Holy Scriptures, we have nothing to glory of, for a necessity is laid upon us, and wo be unto us if we do not our selves keep, and transmit to our posterity the Holy Scriptures. if we do this thing willingly, we have a reward; but if against our will, the custody of the Gospel, and at least that dispensation of it, is committed to us. But if we are Traditors, and give up our Bibles, or take them away from others, let us consider how black an apostacy and sacrilege we shall incur.

4. THE Mosaick Law was a temporary constitution, and only a shadow of good things to come, Heb. 10. 1. but the Gospel being in its duration as well as its intendment, everlasting, Rev. 14. 6. and to remain when time shall be no more, Rev. 10. 6. it is an infinitely more precious depositum and so with greater care and solemner attestation to be preserv'd. Not on1y the Clergy, or the people of one particular Church, nor the Clergy of the universal are intrusted with this care; but 'tis the charge, the privilege and duty of every Christian man, that either is, or was, or shall be in the world; even that collective Church which above all competition, is the pillar and ground of truth, 1 Tim. 3. 15. against which the assaults of men and devils, and even the gates of hell shall not prevail, Mat. 16. 18.

5. THE Gospels were not written by their Holy Pen-men to instruct the Apostles, but to the Christian Church, that they might believe Jesus was the Christ, the son of God, and that believing they might have life thro' his name, Jo. 20. 31. The Epistles were not address'd peculiarly to the Bishops and Deacons, but all the Holy brethren, to the Churches of that are sanctified in Jesus Christ, and to all those that call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Rom. 1. 7. 1 Cor. 1. 2. 2 Cor. 1. 1. Gal. 1. 2. Eph. 1. 1. Col. 4. 16. 1 Thes. 5. 27. Phil. 1. 1. Jam. 1. 1.

1 Pet. 1. 1. 2 Pet. 1. Rev. 1. 4. Or if by chance some one or two of the Epistles were address'd to an Ecclesiastick person, as those to Timothy and Titus, their purport plainly refers to the community of Christians, and the depositum committed to their trust; 1 Tim. 6. 20. And St. John on the other side directs his Epistles to those who were plainly secular; to fathers, young men and little children; and a Lady and her children, Epist. 1. chap. 2. 12, 13, 14. and Epist. 2. 1. 1.

6. BUT besides the interest which every Christian has in the custody of the Scripture upon the account of its being a depositum intrusted to him, he has also another no less forcible; that 'tis the Testament of his Saviour, by which he becomes a Son of God, no more a Servant but a Son; and if he be a Son, it is the Apostles inference, that he is then an heir, an heir of God thro' Christ, Gal. 4. 7. Now as he who is heir to an estate, is also to the deeds and conveyances thereof; which without injury cannot be detain'd, or if they be, there is a remedy at Law for the recovery of them: so it fares in our Christian inheritance: every believer by the privilege of faith, is made a Son of Abraham, and an heir of the promises made unto the fathers, whereby he has an hereditary interest in the Old Testament; and also by the privilege of the same Faith he has a firm right to the purchas'd possession, Eph. 1. 14. and the charter thereof, the New. Therefore the detention of the Scriptures, which are made up of these two parts, is a manifest injustice, and sacrilegious invasion of a right, which the person wrong'd is impower'd, nay, is strictly oblig'd by all lawful means to vindicate.

7. WHICH invasion of right will appear more flagrant when the nature and importance of it is consider'd; which relating to mens spiritual interest, renders the violation infinitely more injurious than it could be in any secular. I might mention several detriments consequent to

this detention of Scripture, even as many as there are benefits appendant to the free use of it; but there is one of so fundamental and comprehensive a nature, that I need name no more; and that is, that it delivers men up to any delusion their teachers shall impose upon them, by depriving them of means of detecting them. Where there is no standard or measures, 'tis easie for men to falsifie both; and no less easie is it to adulterate doctrines, where no recourse can be had to the primary rule. Now that there is a possibility that false teachers may arise, we have all assurance; nay we have the word of Christ, and his Apostles that it should be so and all Ecclesiastick Story to attest it has been so. And if in the first and purest times (those Ages of more immediate illumination) the God of this world found instruments whereby to blind mens minds, 2 Cor. 4. 4. it cannot be suppos'd impossible or improbable he should do so now.

8. BUT to leave generals, and to speak to the case of that Church which magisterially prohibits Scripture to the vulgar: she manifestly stands liable to that charge of our Saviour, Luk. 11. 52. Ye have taken away the key of knowledge; and by allowing the common people no more Scripture than what she affords them in their Sermons and private Manuals, keeps it in her power to impose on them what she pleases. For 'tis sure those portions she selects for them, shall be none of those which clash with the doctrines she recommends: and when ever she will use this power to the corrupting their faith, or worship (yea, or their manners either) they must brutishly submit to it, because they cannot bring her dictates to the rest.

9. BUT 'twill be said, this danger she wards by her doctrine of infallibility: that is, she enervates a probable supposition attested by event, by an impossible one confuted by event. For 'tis certain that all particular Churches may err; and tho' the consciousness of that

forces the Roman Church upon the absurd pretence of universality, to assert her infallibility; yet alas Tyber may as well call it self the Ocean, or Italy the world, as the Roman Church may name it self the universal; whilst 'tis so apparent that far the less part of Christians are under her communion. And if she be but a particular Church, she has no immunity from errours, nor those under her from having those errours (how pernicious soever) impos'd upon them. As to her having actually err'd, and in diverse particulars, the proof of that has been the work of so many Volumes, that 'twould be impertinent here to undertake it: I shall only instance in that of Image-worship, a practice perfectly irreconcilable with the second commandment; and doubtless clearly discern'd by her to be so; upon which account it is, that tho' by Translations and Paraphrases she wrests and moulds other Texts to comply with her Doctrines, yet she dares not trust to those arts of this: but takes a more compendious course, and expunges the Commandment; as is evident in her Catechisms and other Manuals. Now a Church that can thus sacrilegiously purloin one Commandment (and such a one as God has own'd himself the most jealously concen'd in) and to delude her Children split another to make up the number, may as her needs require, substract and divide what others she please: and then whilst all resort to Scripture is obstructed, how fatal a hazard must those poor souls run, who are oblig'd to follow these blind, or rather these winking guides into the ditch?

10. BUT all these criminations she retorts by objecting the dangers of allowing the Scriptures to the vulgar, which she accuses as the spring of all Sects, Schisms, and Heresies. To which I answer first, that supposing this were true, 'twas certainly foreseen by God, who notwithstanding laid no restraint; probably as fore-seeing, that the dangers of implicate faith (to which such a restraint must subject men)

would be far greater: and if God saw fit to indulge the liberty, those that shall oppose it must certainly think they do not only partake, but have transplanted infallibility from God to themselves.

11. BUT secondly, 'tis not generally true, that Sects, Schisms, and Heresies are owing to this liberty: All Ecclesiastical Story shews us that they were not the illiterate Lay-men, but the learned Clerks who were usually the broachers of Heresies. And indeed many of them were so subtile and aerial, as could never have been forg'd in grosser brains; but were founded not on Scripture merely mistaken, but rack'd and distorted with nice criticisms, and quirks of Logick, as several of the Ancients complain: some again sprang from that ambition of attaining, or impatience of missing Ecclesiastical dignities; which appropriates them to the Clergy. So that if the abuse infer a forfeiture of the use, the Learned have of others the least title to the Scriptures; and perhaps those who now ingross them, the least title of all the Learned.

12. ON the other side, Church story deed mentions some Lay-propugners of Heresies but those for the most part were either so gross and bestial; as disparag'd and confuted themselves and Authors, and rose rather from the brutish inclination of the men, than from their mistakes of Scripture: or else they were by the immediate infusion of the devil, who back'd his Heretical suggestions with sorcerie and lying wonders, as in Simon Magus, Menander, &c. And for latter times, tho' sometimes there happens among the vulgar a few pragmatick spirits, that love to tamper with the obscurest Texts, and will undertake to expound before they understand; yet that is not their common temper: the generality are rather in the other extreme, stupid and unobservant even of the plainest doctrines. And if to this be objected the multitude of Quakers and Fanaticks, who generally are of the ignorant sort; 1 answer, that 'tis manifest the first propugners of those tenets in

Germany were not seduc'd into them by mistakes of Scripture, but industriously form'd them, at once to disguise and promote their villainous designs of sedition and Rapine: and as for those amongst us, it is not at all certain that their first errors were their own productions: there are vehement presumptions that the seeds were sown by greater Artificers; whose first business was to unhinge them from the Church, and then to fill their Heads with strange Chimera's of their priviledges and perfections; and by that intoxication of Spiritual Pride, dispose them for all delusions: and thereby render them like Samsons Foxes, fit instruments to set all in combustion.

13. BUT admit this were but a conjecture, and that they were the sole Authors of their own frenzy; how appears it that the liberty of reading the Scriptures was the cause of it? Had these men been of the Romish Communion, and so been interdicted private reading, yet some broken parts of Scripture would have been in Sermons and Books of Devotion communicated to them; had it not been as possible for them to have wrested what they heard as what they read? In one respect it seems rather more likely: for in those loose and incidental quotations the connexion is sometimes not so discernable: and many Texts there are whose sense is so interwoven with the context, that without consulting that, there may be very pernicious mistakes: on which account it is probably more safe that the Auditor should have Bibles to consult. So that this restraint of Scripture is a very fallible expedient of the infallible Church. And indeed themselves have in event found it so; for if it were so sovereign a prophylactick against error, how comes it to pass that so many of their members who were under that discipline have revolted from them into that which they call Heresie? If they say, the defection was made by some of the Learned to whom the Scripture was allow'd, why do they not (according to their way of arguing) take it

from them also upon that experiment of its mischief, and confine it only to the Infallible Chair? but if they own them to have been unlearned (as probably the Albigenses and Waldenses, &c. were) they may see how insignificant a guard this restraint is against error: and learn how little is got by that policy which controuls the Divine Wisdom.

14. NOR can they take shelter in the example of the primitive Christians: for they in the constant use of the Holy Scriptures yielded not unto the Jews. Whereas the Jews had the Scriptures read publickly to them every Sabbath-day; which Jorephus against Appion thus expresses: Moses expounded to the Jews the most excellent and necessary learning of the Law; not by hearing it once or twice, but every seventh day laying aside their works, he commanded them to assemble for the hearing of the Law, and throughly and exactly to learn it. Parallel to this was the practice of the primitive Church, perform'd by the Lector, or Reader, of which Justin Martyr in his 2 Apol. gives this account. On the day call'd Sunday, all that abide in Towns or the countries about, meet in one place, and the writings of the Apostles and Prophets are read, so far as there is place. So Tertullian in his Apol. describing the offices in the publick Assemblies: We feed our faith with the sacred Words, we raise our hopes, and establish our reliance.

15. AND as the Jews thought it indecent for persons professing piety, to let three days pass without the offices thereof in the congregation; and therefore met in their Synagogues upon every Tuesday and Thursday in the week, and there perform'd the duties of fasting, prayer, and hearing the Holy Scriptures; concerning which is the boast of the Pharisee, Luk. 18. 12. in conformity hereto the Christians also, their Sabbath being brought forward from the Saturday to the day following, that the like number of days might not pass them without performing the

aforesaid duties in the congregation, met together on the Wednesdays and Fridays which were the days of Station, so frequently mention'd in Tertullian, and others, the first writers of the Church. Tertullian expressly says, that the Christians dedicated to the offices of Piety, the fourth and sixth day of the week: and Clemens Alex. says of the Christians, that they understood the secret reasons of their weekly fasts, to wit, those of the fourth day of the week, and that of preparation before the Sabbath, commonly call'd Wednesday and Friday. Where, by the way, we may take notice what ground there is for the observation of the Wednesday and Friday in our Church, and the Litanies then appointed, so much neglected in this profligate Age.

16. BUT secondly, as the Jews were diligent in the private reading of the Scripture; being taught it from their infancy: which custome Saint Paul refers to 1 Tim. 3. 15. whereof Josephus against Appion says, That if a man ask any Jew concerning the Laws, he will tell every thing readier than his name: for learning them from the first time they have sense of any thing, they retain them imprinted in their minds. So were the first Christians equally industrious in improving their knowledge of divine Truth. The whole life of a Christian says Clem. Alex. Strom.

I. 7. is a Holy solemnity, there his sacrifices are prayers and praises; before every meal he has the readings of the Holy Scriptures; and Psalms, and hymns at the time of his meals. Which Tertullian also describes in his Apol. and St. Cyprian in the end of the Epist. to Donatus.

17. AND this is farther evidenc'd by the early and numerous Versions of the Scriptures into all vulgar Languages; concerning which Theodoret speaks in his Book of the Cure of the Affections of the Greeks, Serm. 5. We Christians (says he) are enabled to shew the power of Apostolick and Prophetick Doctrines, which have fill'd all Countries under Heaven.

For that which was formerly utter'd in Hebrew, is not only translated into the Language of the Grecians, but also the Romans, Egyptians, Persians, Indians, Armenians, Scythians, Samaritans; and in a word into all the Languages that are us'd by any Nation. The same is said by Saint Chrysostom in his first Homily upon Saint John.

18. NOR was this done by the blind zeal of inconsiderable men, but the most eminent Doctors of the Church were concern'd herein: such as Origen, who with infinite labour contriv'd the Hexapla. Saint Chrysostom, who translated the New Testament, Psalms, and some part of the Old Testament into the Armenian Tongue, as witnesses Geor. Alex. in the life of Chrysost. So Ulphilas the first Bishop of the Goths translated the Holy Scripture into the Gothick; as Socrat. Eccl. Hist. l. 4. cap. 33. and others testifie. Saint Jerome, who translated them not only into Latin from the Hebrew, the Old Italick version having been from the Greek; but also into his native vulgar Dalmatick: which he says himself in his Epistle to Sophronins.

19. BUT the peoples having them for their private and constant use appears farther by the Heathens making the extorting of them a part of their persecution: and when divers did faint in that trial, and basely surrender'd them, we find the Church levell'd her severity only against the offending persons, did not (according to the Romish equity) punish the Innocent, by depriving them of that Sacred Book, because the others had so unworthily prostituted it (though the prevention of such a profanation for the future had been as fair a plea for it as the Romanists do now make:) but on the contrary the primitive Fathers are frequent, nay indeed importunate in their exhortations to the private study of Holy Scripture, which they recommend to Christians of all Ranks, Ages, and Sexes.

20. AS an instance hereof let us hear Clemens of Alex. in his

Exhortation. The word, says he, is not hid from any, it is a common light that shineth to all men; there is no obscurity in it; hear it you that be far off, and hear it you that are nigh.

21. TO this purpose St. Jerome speaks in his Epistle to Leta, whom he directs in the education of her young daughter, and advises, that instead of gems and silk, she be enamour'd with the Holy Scripture; wherein not gold, or skins, or Babylonian embroideries, but a correct and beautiful variety producing faith, will recommend its self. Let her first learn the Psalter, and be entertain'd with those songs; then be instructed unto life by the Proverbs of Solomon: let her learn from Ecclesiastes to despise worldly things; transcribe from Job the practice of patience and vertue: let her pass then to the Gospels, and never let them be out of her hands: and then imbibe with all the faculties of the mind, the Acts of the Apostles, and Epistles. When she has enrich'd the storehouse of her breast with these treasures, let her learn the Prophets, the Heptateuch, or books of Moses, Joshua and Judges, the books of Kings and Chronicles, the volumes of Ezra and Esther; and lastly the Canticles. And indeed, this Father is so concern'd to have the unletter'd Female Sex skilful in the Scriptures, that tho' he sharply rebukes their pride and over-weening; he not only frequently resolves their doubts concerning difficult places in the said Scriptures, but dedicates several of his Commentaries to them.

22. THE same is to be said of Saint Austin, who in his Epistles to unletter'd encourages their enquiries concerning the Scripture, assuring Volusianus Ep. 3* that it speaks those things that are plain to the heart of the learned and unlearned, as a familiar friend; in the mysterious, mounts not up into high phrases which might deter a slow and unlearned mind, (as the poor are in their addresses to the rich;) but invites all with lowly speech, feeding with manifest truth, and

exercising with secret. And Ep. 1. 21. tells the devout Proba, that in this world, where we are absent from the Lord, and walk by faith and not by sight, the soul is to think it self desolate, and never cease from prayer, and the words of Divine and Holy Scripture, &c.

23. SAINT Chrysostom in his third Homily of Lazarus thus addresses himself to married persons, house-holders, and people engag'd in trades and secular professions; telling them, that the reading of the Scripture is a great defensative against sin; and on the other side, the ignorance whereof is a deep and head-long precipice; that not to know the Law of God, is the utter loss of salvation; that this has caused Heresies, and corruption of Life, and has confounded the order of things: for it cannot be by any means, that his labour should be fruitless, who employs himself in a daily and attentive reading of the Scripture.

24. I am not, says the same Saint Chrysostom, Homil. 9. on Colos 3. a Monk, I have Wife and Children, and the cares of a Family. But 'tis a destructive opinion, that the reading of the Scripture pertains only to those who have addicted themselves to a Monastick life; when the reading of Scripture is much more necessary for secular persons: for they who converse abroad, and receive frequent wounds, are in greatest needs of remedies and preservatives. So Hom. 2. on Matt. Hearken all you that are secular, how you ought to order your Wives and Children; and how you are particularly enjoyn'd to read the Scriptures, and that not perfunctorily, or by chance, but very diligently.

25. LIKEWISE Hom. 3. on Lazarus. What sayest thou, O man? it is not thy business to turn over the Scripture, being distracted by innumerable cares; no, thou hast therefore the greater obligation: others do not so much stand in need of the aids of the Scripture, as they who are conversant in much business. Farther, Homil. 8. on Hebr. 5. I beseech

you neglect not the reading of the Scriptures; but whether we comprehend the meaning of what is spoken or not, let us always be conversant in them: for daily meditation strengthens the memory; and it frequently happens, that what you now cannot find out, if you attempt it again, you will the next day discover: for God of his goodness will enlighten the mind. It were endless to transcribe all the Exhortations of the ancient Doctors and Fathers of the Church; they not only permitted, but earnestly press upon all Christians, whatever their state or condition were, the constant reading of the holy Scripture. Nor indeed was their restraint ever heard of till the Church of Rome had espous'd such doctrines as would not bear the test of Scripture and then as those who deal in false wares are us'd to do, they found it necessary to proportion their lights accordingly.

26. THIS Peter Sutor in his second Book Cap. 22. of the Translation of the Scripture honestly confesses, that whereas many things are enjoyn'd which are not expressly Scripture, the unlearned observing this will be apt to murmur and complain that so heavy burthens are laid upon them, and their Christian liberty infringed. They will easily be with-drawn from observing the Constitutions of the Church, when they find that they are not contain'd in the Law of Christ. And that this was not a frivolous suggestion, the desperate attempt of the Romanists above mention'd, in leaving out the second Commandment in their Primers and Catechisms, which they communicate to the people, may pass for an irrefragable evidence; For what Lay-man would not be shockt to find Almighty God Command, not to make any graven image, nor the likeness of any thing that is in Heaven above, or in the Earth beneath, or in the Water under the Earth; that no one should bow down to them, nor worship them: when he sees the contrary is practiced and commanded by the Church.

27. BUT would God none but the Romanist were impeachable of this detention of Scripture: there are too many among us that are thus false and envious to themselves: and what the former do upon policy and pretence of reverence, those do upon mere oscitancy and avow'd profaneness; which are much worse inducements. And for such as these to declaim against detention of the Scripture, is like the Law-suits of those who contend only about such little punctilio's as themselves design no advantage from, but only the worsting their Adversaries and it would be much safer for them to lie under the interdict of others, than thus to refrain themselves: even as much as the errours of obedience are more excusable, than those of contempt and profaneness.

28. AND here I would have it seriously consider'd that the Edict of Diocletian for the demolishing the Christian Churches, and the burning their Bibles, became the character and particular aggravation of his most bloody persecution. Now should Almighty God call us to the like trial, should Antichristian violence, whether heathen or other, take from us our Churches and our Bibles, what comfort could we have in that calamity, if our contempt of those blessings drove them from us nay, prevented persecution, and bereft us of them even whilst we had them in our power? He who neglects to make his constant resort unto the Church, which by Gods mercy now stands open; or to read diligently the holy Scriptures, which by the same divine Goodness are free for him to use, is his own Diocletian; and without the terrours of death, or torments, has renounc'd, if not the Faith, the great instruments of its conveyance, and pledge of God Almightyes presence among the sons of men.

29. BUT what if men either upon the one motive or the other, will not read; yet the Scriptures continue still most worthy to be read: they retain still their propriety for all those excellent ends to which God

design'd them: and as the Prophet tells the Jews, Ez. 2. 5. whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, they shall know that there has been a Prophet among them: so whether we will take the benefit or no, we shall one day find that the holy Scripture would have made us wise unto salvation. If thro' our fault alone they fail to do so, they will one day assume a less grateful office; and from guides and assistants, become accusers and witnesses against us.

SECT. V.

The Scripture has great propriety and fitness towards the attainment of its excellent end.

WE are now in the next place to consider how exactly the holy Scriptures are adapted to those great ends to which they are directed: how sufficient they are for that important negotiation on which they are sent: and that we than certainly find them, if we look on them either intrinsically, or circumstantially. For the first of these 11 notions we need only to reflect on the third Part of this discourse, where the Scripture in respect of the subject Matter is evinc'd to be a systeme of the most excellent Laws, back'd with the most transcendent rewards and punishments; and the certainty of those confirm'd by such pregnant inflames of Gods mercies and vengeance in this world, as are the surest gages and earnest of what we are bid to expect in another.

2. NOW what method imaginable can there be used to rational creatures of more force and energy? Nay it seems to descend even to our passions and accommodates it self to our several inclinations. And seeing how few Proselytes there are to bare and naked vertue, and how many to interest and advantage; God closes with them upon their own terms, and does not so much injoin as buy those little services he asks from us.

3. BUT because some mens natures are so disingenuous as to hate to be oblig'd no less than to be reform'd, the Scripture has goads and scourges to drive such beasts as will not be led; terrours and threatnings, and those of most formidable sorts, to affright those who will not be allur'd. Nay lest incredulous men should question the reality of future rewards or punishments, the Scripture gives as sensible evidence of them as we are capable of receiving in this world;

by registering such signal protections and judgements proportioned to vertue and vice, as sufficiently attests the Psalmists Axiom: Doubtless there is a God that judgeth the earth, Psal. 58. 11. and leaves nothing to the impenitent firmer, but a fearful expectation of that fiery indignation threatned hereafter; Heb, 10. 27.

4. AND now methinks the Scripture seems to be that net our Saviour speaks of, that caught of every sort, Matt. 13. 47. it is of so vast a compass, that it must, one would think, fetch in all kind of tempers: and sure had we not mixt natures with fiends contracted some of their malice and obstinacy, mere human gravity could not hold out.

5. AND as the Holy Scripture is thus fitly proportion'd to its end in respect of the subject matter, so is it also in reference to its circumstances, which all conspire to render it, the power of God unto salvation, Rom. 1. 16. In the first rank of those we must place its Divine Original, which stamps it with an uncontrollable authority; and is an infallible security that the matter of it is perfectly true: since it proceeds from that Essential Verity which cannot abuse us with fraudulent promises or threatnings: and from that Infinite Power that cannot be impeded in the execution of what he purposes.

6. YET to render this circumstance efficacious there needs another; to wit, that its being the Word of God be sufficiently testify'd to us: and we have in the foregoing discourse evinced it to be so; and that in the utmost degree that a matter of that kind is capable of, beyond which no sober man will require evidence in any thing. And certainly these two circumstances thus united, have a mighty force to impress the dictates of Scripture on us. And we must rebel against God and our own convictions too, to hold out against it.

7. A third circumstance relates to the frame and composure of this Divine Book, both as to method, and stile: concerning which I have

already made some reflexions. But now that I may speak more distinctly, I observe it takes its rise from the first point of time wherein 'twas possible for mankind to be concern'd; and so gradually proceeds to its fall and renovation: shews us first our need of a Redeemer, and then points us out who it is by Types and Promises in the Old Testament, and by way of History and Completion in the New. In the former it acquaints us with that Pedagogy of the Law which God design'd as our School master to bring us to Christ, Gal. 3. 25. And in the Gospel shews us yet a more excellent way; presents us with those more sublime, elevated doctrines, which Christ came down from Heaven to reveal.

8. As for the stile, that is full of grateful variety, sometimes high and majestick, as becomes that High and only One that inhabiteth Eternity, Esaiah 57. 15. and sometimes so humble and after the manner of men, as agrees to the other part of his Character, his dwelling is with him that is of an humble spirit, Esai. 57. 15. I know profane wits are apt to brand this as an unevenness of stile: but they may as well accuse the various notes of Musick as destructive to harmony, or blame an Orator for being able to tune his tongue to the most different strains.

9. ANOTHER excellency of the stile, is its propriety to the several subjects it treats of. When it speaks of such things as God would not have Men pry into, it wraps them up in clouds and thick darkness; by that means to deter inquisitive man (as he did at Sinai) from breaking into the Mount, Exod. 20. And that he gives any intimation at all of such, seems design'd only to give us a just estimate how shallow our Comprehensions are; and excite us to adore and admire that Abyss of Divine Wisdom which we can never fathom.

10. THINGS of a middle nature, which may be useful to some, but are not indispensibly necessary to all, the Scripture leaves more accessible;

yet not so obvious as to be within every mans reach: but makes them only the prize of industry, prayer, and humble endeavours. And it is no small benefit, that those who covet the knowledge of divine Truth, are by it engag'd to take these vertues in the way. Besides, there is so much time requir'd to that study, as renders it inconsistent with those secular businesses wherein the generality of men are immerst: and consquently 'tis necessary that those who addict themselves to the one, have competent vacancy from the other: And in this it hath a visible life by being very contributive to the maintaining that Spiritual subordination of the people to the Pastors; which God has establish'd. Miriam and Corahs Partisans are a pregnant instance how much the opinion of equal knowledge unfits for subjection and we see by sad experience how much the bare pretence of it has disturb'd the Church, and made those turn Preachers who never were understanding Hearers.

11. BUT besides these more abstruse, there are easier truths in which every man is concern'd; the explicit knowledge whereof is necessary to all: I mean the Divine Rules for saving Faith and Manners. And in those the Scripture stile is as plain as possible; condescends to the apprehensions of the rudest Capacities: so that none that can read the Scripture but will there find the way to bliss evidently chalked out to him. That 1 may use the words of Saint Gregory, The Lamb may wade in those waters of Life, as well as the Elephant may swim. The Holy Ghost, as Saint Austin tells as, lib. 2. of Christian doctrine, cap. 6. has made in the plainer places of Scripture magnificent and healthful provision for our hunger; and in the obscure, against satiety. For there are scarce any things drawn from obscure places, which in others are not spoken most plainly. And he farther adds, that if any thing happen to be no where explain'd, every man may there abound in his own sense.

12. SO again in the same Book, cap. 9. he saies, that all those things which concern Faith and Manners, are plainly to be met with in the Scripture: and Saint Jerome in his Comment on Es. 19. tells us, that 'tis the custom of the Scripture to close obscure sayings with those that are easy; and what was first express'd darkly, to propose in evident words: which very thing is said likewise by Saint Chrysostom, Hom. 9. 2 Cor. 4. 11. who in his first Homily on St. Mat. farther declares, that the Scriptures are easy to be understood, and expos'd to vulgar capacities.

13. HE saies again, Hom. upon Essay, that the Scriptures are not mettals that require the help of Miners, but afford a treasure easily to be had to them that seek the riches contain'd in them. It is enough only to stoop down, and look upon them, and depart replenish'd with wealth; it is enough only to open them, and behold the splendour of those Gems. Again Hom. 3. on Gen. 14. It cannot be that he who studious in the holy Scripture should be rejected: for though the instruction of men be wanting, the Lord from above will inlighten our minds, shine in upon our reason, reveal what is secret, and teach what we do not know. So Hom. 1. on Jo. 11. Almighty God involves his doctrine with no mists, and darkness, as did the Philosophers: his doctrine is brighter than the Sun-beams and more illustrious; and therefore every where diffus'd: and Hom. 6. on Jo. 11. His doctrine is so facile, that not only the wise, but even women, and youths must comprehend it. Hom. 13. on Gen.

2. Let us go to the Scripture as our Mark, which is its own interpreter. And soon after saies, that the Scripture interprets itself, and suffers not its Auditor to err. To the same purpose saies Cyril in his third book against Julian. In the Scripture nothing is difficult to them, who are conversant in them as they ought to be.

14. IT is therefore a groundless cavil which men make at the obscurity

of the Scripture; since it is not obscure in those things wherein 'tis our common interest it should be plain: which sufficiently justifies its propriety to that great end of making us wise unto Salvation. And for those things which seem less intelligible to us, many of them become so, not by the innate obscurity of the Text, but by extrinsick circumstances (of which perhaps the over-busy tampering of Paraphrasts, pleased with new notions of their own, may be reckon'd for one.) But this subject the Reader may find so well pursued in Mr. Boyls Tract concerning the stile of Scripture, that I shall be kindest both to him and it to refer him thither; as also for answer to those other querulous objections, which men galled with the sense of the Scripture have made to its stile.

15. A third circumstance in which the Scripture is fitted to attain its end, is its being committed to writing, as that is distinguish'd from oral delivery. It is most true, the word of God is of equal authority and efficacy which way soever it be deliver'd: The Sermons of the Apostles were every jot as divine and powerful out of their mouths, as they are now in their story. All the advantage therefore that the written Word can pretend to is in order to its perpetuity, as it is a securer way of derivation to posterity, than that of oral Tradition. To evince that it is so, I shall first weigh the rational probabilities on either side. Secondly, I shall consider to which God himself appears in Scripture to give the deference.

16. FOR the first of these, I shall propose this consideration, which I had occasion to intimate before, that the Bible being writ for the universal use of the faithful, 'twas as universally disperst amongst them: The Jews had the Law not only in their Synagogues, but in their private houses, and as soon as the Evangelical Books were writ, they were scatter'd into all places where the Christian Faith had obtain'd.

Now when there was such a vast multitude of Copies, and those so revered by the possessors, that they thought it the highest pitch of Sacrilege to expose them, it must surely be next to impossible entirely to suppress that Book. Besides, it could never be attempted but by some eminent violence, as it was by the heathen Persecutors; which (according to the common effect of opposition) serv'd to enhance the Christians value of the Bible: and consequently when the storm was past, to excite their diligence for recruiting the number. So that, unless in after Ages, all the Christians in the world should at once make a voluntary defection, and conspire to eradicate their Religion, the Scriptures could not be utterly extinguish'd.

17. AND that which secures it from total suppression, do's in a great degree do so from corruption and falsification. For whilst so many genuine copies are extant in all parts or the world, to be appeal'd to, it would be a very difficult matter to impose a spurious one; especially if the chang'd were so material as to awaken mens jealousies. And it must be only in a place and age of gross ignorance, that any can be daring enough to attempt it. And if it should happen to succeed in such a particular Church, yet what is that to the universal? And to think to have the forgery admitted there, is (as a learned man saies) like attempting to poison the Sea.

18. ON the other side, oral Tradition seems much more liable to hazards; error may there insinuate it self much more insensibly. And tho' there be no universal conspiracy to admit it at first; yet like a small eruption of waters, it widens its own passage, till it causes an inundation. There is no impression so deep, but time and intervening accidents may wear it out of mens minds; especially where the notions are many and are founded not in nature, but positive institution, as a great part of Christian Religion is. And when we consider the various

tempers of men, 'twill not be strange that succeeding Ages will not always be determin'd by the Traditions of the former. Some are pragmatick, and think themselves fitter to prescribe to the belief of their Posterity, than to follow that of their Ancestors: some have interests and designs which will be better serv'd by new Tenets: and some are ignorant and mistaking, and may unawares corrupt the doctrine they should barely deliver: and of this last sort we may guess there may be many, since it falls commonly to the Mothers lot to imbue Children with the first rudiments.

19. NOW in all these cases how possible is it that primitive Tradition may be either lost or adulterated? and consequently, and in proportion to that possibility, our confidence of it must be stagger'd. I am sure according to the common estimate in seculars it must be so. For I appeal to any man whether he be not apter to credit a relation which comes from an eye-witness than at the third or fourth, much more at the hundredth rebound: (as in this case.) And daily experience tells us, that a true and probable story by passing thro' many hands, often grows to an improbable lye. This man thinks he could add one becoming circumstance; that man another and whilst most men take the liberty to do so, the relation grows as monstrous as such a heap of incoherent fancies can make it.

20. IF to this be said, that this happens only in trivial secular matters, but that in the weighty concern of Religion, mankind is certainly more serious and sincere: I answer that 'tis very improbable that they are; since 'tis obvious in the common practice of the world, that the interests of Religion are postpon'd to every little worldly concern. And therefore when a Temporal advantage requires the bending and warping of Religion, there never be wanting force that will attempt it.

21. BESIDES; there is still left in human nature so much of the venom of the Serpents first temptation, that tho' Men cannot be as God, yet they love to be prescribing to him, and to be their own Assessors as to that Worship and Homage they are to pay him.

22. BUT above all 'tis considerable that in this case Satan has a more peculiar concern, and can serve himself more by a falsification here than in Temporal affairs. For if he can but corrupt Religion, it ceases to be his Enemy, and becomes one of his most useful Engines, as sufficiently appear'd in the Rites of the Heathen Worship. We have therefore no cause to think this an exempt case; but to presume it may be influenc'd by the same pravity of human nature, which prevails in others; and consequently are oblig'd to bless God that he has not left our Spiritual concerns to such hazards, but has lodg'd them in a more secure Repository, the written word.

23. BUT I fore-see 'twill be objected, that whilst I thus disparage Tradition, I do virtually invalidate the Scripture it self, which comes to us upon its credit. To this I answer first, that since God has with-drawn immediate Revelation from the word, Tradition is the only means to convey to us the first notice that this Book is the word of God: and it being the only means he affords, we have all reason to depend on his goodness, that he will not suffer that to be evacuated to us: and that how lyable soever Tradition may be to err, yet that it shall not actually err in this particular.

24. BUT in the second place; This Tradition seems not so lyable to falsification as others: It is so very short and simple a proposition, such and such writings are the Word of God, that there is no great room for Sophistry or mistake to pervert the sense; the only possible deception must be to change the subject, and obtrude supposititious writings in room of the true, under the title of the Word of God. But

this has already appear'd to be unpracticable, because of the multitude of copies which were disperst in the world; by which such an attempt would soon have been detected. There appears therefore more reason as well as more necessity, to rely upon Tradition in this, than in most other particulars.

25. NEITHER yet do I so far decry oral Tradition in any, as to conclude it impossible it should derive any Truth to Posterity: I only look on it as more casual; and consequently a less fit conveyance of the most important and necessary verities than the written Word: In which I conceive my self justify'd by the common sense of mankind; who use to commit those things to writing, which they are most sollicitous to derive to Posterity. Do's any Nation trust their Fundamental Laws only to the memory of the present Age, and take no other course to transmit them to the Future? Do's any man purchase an Estate, and leave no way for his Children to lay claim to. it, but the Tradition the present witnesses shall leave of it? Nay, do's any considering man ordinarily make any important pact or bargain (tho' without relation to posterity) without putting the Articles in writing? And whence is all this caution but from a universal consent that writing is the surest way of transmitting?

26. BUT we have yet a higher appeal in this matter than to the suffrage of men: God himself seems to have determin'd it; And what his decision is, 'tis our next business to inquire.

27. AND first he has given the most real and comprehensive attestation to this way of writing, by having himself chose it. For he is too wise to be mistaken in his estimate of better and worse, and too kind to chuse the worst for us: and yet he has chosen to communicate himself to the latter Ages of the world by writing; and has summ'd up all the Eternal concerns of mankind in the sacred Scriptures, and left those

sacred Records by which we are to be both inform'd and govern'd; which if oral Tradition would infallibly have done, had been utterly needless: and God sure is not so prodigal of his spirit, as to inspire the Authors of Scripture to write that, whose use was superseded by a former more certain expedient.

28. NAY, under the Mosaick oeconomy, when he made use of other ways of revealing himself, yet to perpetuate the memory even of those Revelations, he chose to have them written. At the delivery of the Law, God spake then viva voce, and with that pomp of dreadful solemnity, as certainly was apt to make the deepest impressions; yet God fore-saw that thro' every succeeding Age that stamp would grow more dim, and in a long revolution might at last be extinct. And therefore how warm soever the Israelites apprehensions then were, he would not trust to them for the perpetuating his Law, but committed it to writing; Exod.

31. 18. nay wrote it twice himself.

29. YET farther even the ceremonial Law, tho' not intended to be of perpetual obligation, was not yet referr'd to the traditionary way, but was wrote by Moses, and deposited with the Priests, Deut. 31. 19. And after-event shew'd this was no needless caution. For when under Manasses, Idolatry had prevail'd in Jerusalem, it was not by any dormant Tradition, but by the Book of the Law found in the Temple, that Josiah was both excited to reform Religion, and instructed how to do it; 2 Kings 22. 10. And had not that or some other copy been produc'd, they had been much in the dark as to the particulars of their reformation; which that they had not been convey'd by Tradition, appears by the sudden startling of the King upon the reading of the Law; which could not have been, had he been before possest with the contents of it. In like manner we find in Nehemiah, that the observation of the Feast of Tabernacles was recover'd by consulting the

Law; the Tradition whereof was wholly worn out; or else it had sure been impossible that it could for so long a time had been intermitted, Neh. 1. 18. And yet mens memories are commonly more retentive of an external visible rite, than they are of speculative Propositions, or moral Precepts.

30. THESE instances shew how fallible an expedient mere oral Tradition is for transmission to posterity. But admit no such instance could be given, 'tis argument enough that God has by his own choice of writing given the preference to it. Nor has he barely chosen it, but has made it the standard by which to measure all succeeding pretences. 'Tis the means he prescribes for distinguishing divine from diabolical inspirations To the Law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this Word, there is no light in them. Isai. 8. 20. And when the Lawyer interrogated our Saviour what he should do to inherit eternal life, he sends him not to ransack Tradition, or the cabalistical divinity of the Rabbins, but refers him to the Law: What is written in the Law? how readest thou? Luk. 10. 26. And indeed, throughout the Gospel, we still find him in his discourse appealing to Scripture, and asserting its authority: as on the other side inveighing against those Traditions of the Elders which had evacuated the written Word: Ye make the Word of God of none effect by your Tradition, Matt. 15. 6. Which as it abundantly shews Christs adherence to the written word, so 'tis a pregnant instance how possible it is for Tradition to be corrupted, and made the instrument of imposing mens fancies even in contradiction to Gods commands.

31. AND since our blessed Lord has made Scripture the test whereby to try Traditions, we may surely acquiesce in his decision, and either embrace or reject Traditions, according as they correspond to the supreme rule, the written Word. It must therefore be a very

unwarrantable attempt to set up Tradition in competition with (much more in contradiction to) that to which Christ himself hath subjected it.

32. SAINT Paul reckons it as the principal privilege of the Jewish Church, that it had the Oracles of God committed to it, i. e. that the Holy Scriptures were deposited, and put in its custody and in this the Christian Church succeeds it, and is the guardian and conservator of holy Writ. I ask then, had the Jewish Church by vertue of its being keeper, a power to supersede any part of those Oracles intrusted to them? if so, Saint Paul was much out in his estimate, and ought to have reckon'd that as their highest priviledge. But indeed, the very nature of the trust implies the contrary; and besides, 'tis evident, that is the very Crime Christ Charges upon the Jews in the place above cited. And if the Jewish Church had no such right, upon what account can the Christian claim any? Has Christ enlarg'd its Charter? Has he left the Sacred Scriptures with her, not to preserve and practise, but to regulate and reform? to fill up its vacancies, and supply its defects by her own Traditions? If so, let the Commission be produc'd; but if her office be only that of Guardianship and Trust, she must neither substract from, nor by any superadditions of her own evacuate its meaning and efficacy: and to do so, would be the same guilt that it would be in a person intrusted with the Fundamental Records of a Nation, to foist in such clauses as himself pleases.

33. IN short, God has in the Scriptures laid down exact rules for our belief and practice, and has entrusted the Church to convey them to us: if she varies, or any way enervates them, she is false to that trust, but cannot by it oblige us to recede from that rule she should deliver, to comply with that she obtrudes upon us. The Case may be illustrated by an easy resemblance. Suppose a King has a Forreign Principality for

which he composes a body of Laws; annexes to them rewards and penalties, and requires an exact and indispensable conformity to them. These being put in writing, he sends by a select messenger: now suppose this messenger delivers them, yet says withal, that himself has authority from the King to supersede these Laws at his pleasure; so that their resort must be to his dictates, yet produces no other testimony but his own bare affirmation. Is it possible that any men in their wits should be so stupidly credulous, as to incur the penalty of those Laws upon so improbable an indemnity? And sure it would be no whit less madness in Christians, to violate any precept of God, on an ungrounded supposal of the Churches power to dispense with them.

34. AND if the Church Universal has not this power, nor indeed ever claim'd it, it must be a strange insolence for any particular Church to pretend to it, as the Church of Rome do's; as if we should owe to her Tradition all our Scripture, and all our Faith insomuch that without the supplies which she affords from the Oracle of her Chair, our Religion were imperfect, and our Salvation insecure. Upon which wild dictates I shall take liberty in a distinct Section farther to animadvert.

SECT. VI.

The suffrage of the primitive Christian Church, concerning the propriety and fitness which the Scripture has towards the attainment of its excellent end.

AGAINST what has been hitherto said to the advantage of the Holy Scripture, there opposes it self (as we have already intimated) the authority of the Church of Rome; which allows it to be only an imperfect rule of Faith, saying in the fourth Session of the Council of Trent, That Christian Faith and Discipline are contain'd the Books written and unwritten Tradition. And in the fourth Rule of the Index, put forth by Command of the said Council, the Scripture is declar'd to be so far from useful, that its reading is pernicious, if permitted promiscuously in the vulgar Tongue, and therefore to be with-held: insomuch that the study of the Holy Bible is commonly by persons of the Roman Communion, imputed to Protestants as part of their Heresy; they being call'd by them in contempt, the Evangelical Men, and Scripturarians. And the Bible in the vulgar Tongue of any Nation is commonly reckon'd among prohibited Books, and as such, publickly burnt when met with by the Inquisitors: and the person who is found with it, or to read therein, is subjected to severe penalties.

2. FOR the vindication of the Truth of God, and to put to shame those unhappy Innovators, who, amidst great pretences to Antiquity, and veneration to the Scriptures, prevaricate from both: I think it may not be amiss to shew plainly the mind of the primitive Church herein; and that in as few words as the matter will admit.

3. FIRST, I premise that Ireneus and Tertullian having to do with Hereticks, who boasted themselves to be Emendators of the Apostles, and

Wiser than they, despising their authority, rejecting several parts of the Scripture, and obtruding other writings in their stead, have had recourse unto Tradition, with a seeming preference of it unto Scripture. Their Adversaries having no common principle besides the owning the name of Christians; it was impossible to convince them, but by a recourse to such a medium which they would allow. But these Fathers being to set down and establish their Faith, are most express in resolving it into Scripture: and when they recommend Tradition ever mean such as is also Apostolical.

4. IRENEUS in the second Book, 37. cap. tells us, That the Scriptures are perfect, as dictated by the word of God and his Spirit. And the same Father begins his third Book in this manner, The disposition of our salvation is no otherwise known by us, than by those by whom the Gospel was brought to us; which indeed they first preach'd, but afterward deliver'd it to us in the Scripture, to be the foundation and pillar of our Faith. Nor may we imagine, that they began to preach to others, before they themselves had perfect knowledge, as some are bold to say; boasting themselves to be emendators of the Apostles. For after our Lords Resurrection, they were indued with the power of the Holy Spirit from on high; and having perfect knowledge, went forth to the ends of the earth, preaching the glad tidings of salvation, and celestial praise unto men. Each and all of whom had the Gospel of God. So Saint Matthew wrote the Gospel to the Hebrews in their tongue. Saint Peter and Saint Paul preach'd at Rome, and there founded a Church: Mark the Disciple and Interpreter of Peter, deliver'd in writing what he had preach'd, and Luke the follower of Paul set down in his Book the Gospel he had deliver'd. Afterward Saint John at Ephesus in Asia publish'd his Gospel &c. in his fourth Book, ch. 66. he directs all the Hereticks with whom he deals, to read diligently the Gospel deliver'd by the

Apostles, and also read diligently the Prophets, assuring them they shall there find every action, every doctrine, and every suffering of our Lord declared by them.

5. THUS Tertullian in his Book of Prescriptions ch. 6. It is not lawful for us to introduce any thing of our own will, nor make any choice upon our arbitrement. We have the Apostles of our Lord for our Authors, who themselves took up nothing on their own will or choice; but faithfully imparted to the Nations the discipline which they had receiv'd from Christ. So that if an Angel from heaven should teach another doctrine, he were to be accurst. And ch. 25. 'Tis madness, says he of the Hereticks, when they confess that the Apostles were ignorant of nothing, nor taught things different, to think that they did not reveal all things to all: which he enforces in the following Chapter. In his Book against Hermogenes, ch. 23, he discourses thus; I adore the plenitude of the Scripture, which discovers to me the Creator, and what was created. Also in the Gospel I find the Word was the Arbiter and Agent in the Creation. That all things were made of preexistent matter I never read. Let Hermogenes, and his journey-men shew that it is written. If it be not written, let him fear the woe, which belongs to them that add or detract. And in the 39 ch. of his Prescript, We feed our faith, raise our hope, and establish our reliance with the sacred Word.

6. IN like manner Hippolytus in the Homily against .Noctus declares, that we acknowledge only from Scripture that there is one God. And whereas secular Philosophy is not to be had but from the reading of the doctrine of the Philosophers; so whosoever of us will preserve piety towards God, he cannot otherwise learn it than from the holy Scripture. Accordingly Origen in the fifth Homily on Leviticus, says, that in the Scripture every word appertaining to God, is to be sought and discust;

and the knowledge of all things is to be receiv'd.

7. WHAT Saint Cyprian's opinion was in this point, we learn at large from his Epistle to Pompey. For when Tradition was objected to him, he answers; Whence is this Tradition? is it from the authority of our Lord and his Gospel; or comes it from the commands of the Apostles in their Epistles? Almighty God declares that what is written should be obey'd and practised. The Book of the Law, says he in Joshua, shall not depart from thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate on it day and night, that you may observe and keep all that is written therein. So our Lord sending his Apostles, commands them to baptise all Nations, and teach them to observe all things that he had commanded. Again what obstinacy and presumption it is to prefer human Tradition to divine command: not considering that Gods wrath is kindled as often as his Precepts are dissolv'd and neglected by reason of human Traditions. Thus God warns and speaks by Isaiah: This people honour me with their lips but their heart is far from me; but in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. Also the Lord in the Gospel checks and reproveth, saying; you reject the Law of God, that you may establish your Tradition. Of which Precept the Apostle Saint Paul being mindful, admonishes and instructs, saying; If any man teaches otherwise and hearkens not to sound doctrine, and the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, he is proud, knowing nothing: From such we must depart. And again he adds, There is a compendious way for religious and sincere minds, both to deposit their errors, and find out the truth. For if we return to the force and original of divine Tradition; humane error will cease, and the ground of heavenly mysteries being seen, whatsoever was hid with clouds and darkness, will be manifest by the light of truth. If a pipe that brought plentiful supplies of water, fail on the suddain, do not men look to the fountain, and thence learn the cause of the defect,

whether the spring it self be dry; or if running freely, the water is stopt in its passage; that if by interrupted or broken conveyances, it was hindred to pass, they being repair'd, it may again be brought to the City, with the same plenty as it flows from the spring? And this Gods Priests ought to do at this time, obeying the commands of God, that if truth has swerv'd or fail'd in any particular, we go backward to the source of the Evangelical and Apostolical Tradition, and there found our actings: from whence their order and origination began.

8. IT is true Bellarmine reproaches this discourse as erroneous; but whatever it might be in the inference which Saint Cyprian drew from it, in it self it was not so. For Saint Austin, tho' sufficiently engag'd against Saint Cyprian's conclusion, allows the position as most Orthodox; saying, in the fourth Book of Baptism, cap. 35. Whereas he admonishes to go back to the fountain, that is, the Tradition of the Apostles, and thence bring the stream down to our times; 'tis most excellent, and without doubt to be done.

9. THUS Eusebius expresses himself in his second Book against Sabellius. As it is a point of sloth, not to seek into those things, whereof one may enquire; so 'tis insolence to be inquisitive in others. But what are those things which we ought to enquire into? Even those which are to be found in the Scriptures: those things which are not there to be found, let us not seek after. For if they ought to be known, the Holy Ghost had not omitted them in the Scripture.

10. ATHANASIUS in his Tract of the Incarnation, says, It is fit for us to adhere to the Word of God, and not relinquish it, thinking by syllogisms to evade what is there clearly deliver'd. Again, in his Tract to Serap. of the Holy Ghost: Ask not, says he, concerning the Trinity, but learn only from the Scriptures. For the instructions which you will find there, are sufficient. And in his Oration against the

Gentiles, declares, That the Scriptures are sufficient to the manifestation of the Truth.

11. AGREEABLE to there is Optatus in his fifth Book against Parmen, who reasons thus, You say 'tis lawful to Rebaptize, we say 'tis not lawful: betwixt your saying and our gain-saying the Peoples minds are amus'd. Let no man believe either you or us. All men are apt to be contentious. Therefore Judges are to be call'd in. Christians they cannot be, for they will be parties, and thereby partial. Therefore a Judge is to be look'd out from abroad. If a Pagan, he knows not the mysteries of our Religion. If a Jew, he is an enemy to our Baptism. There is therefore no Earthly Judge; but one is to be sought from Heaven. Yet there is no need of a resort to Heaven, when we have in the Gospel a Testament: and in this case, Celestial things may be compar'd to Earthly. So it is as with a Father who has many Children; while he is present he orders them all, and there is no need of a written Will: Accordingly Christ when he was present upon Earth, from time to time commanded the Apostles whatsoever was necessary. But as the Earthly Father finding himself to be at the point of death, and fearing that after his departure his Children should quarrel among themselves, he calls witnesses, and puts his mind in writing; and if any difference arise among the brethren, they go not to their Fathers Sepulchre, but repair to his Will and Testament; and he who rests in his grave, speaks still in his writing, as if he were alive. Our Lord who left his Will among us, is now in Heaven, therefore let its seek his Commands in the Gospel as in his Will.

12. THUS Cyril of Jerusalem, Cat. 4. Nothing, no not the least concernment of the Divine and Holy Sacraments of our Faith, is to be deliver'd without the Holy Scripture: believe not me unless I give you a demonstration of what I say from the Scripture.

13. SAINT Basil in his Book of the true Faith says, If God be faithful in all his sayings, his words, and works, they remaining for ever, and being done in truth and equity, it must be an evident sign of infidelity and pride, if any one shall reject what is written, and introduce what is not written. In which Books he generally declares that he will write nothing but what he receives from the Holy Scripture: and that he abhors from taking it elsewhere. In his 29. Homily against the Antitrinitarians. Believe, says he, those which are written; seek not those which are not written. And in his Eth. reg. 26. Every word and action ought to be confirm'd by the testimony of the divinely inspir'd Scriptures, to the establishment of the Faith of the good, and reproof of the wicked.

14. SAINT Ambrose in the first Book of his Offic. says: How can we make use of any thing which is not to be found in Scripture? And in his Institut. of Virgins. I read he is the first, but read not he is the second; let them who say he is the second, shew it from the reading.

15. GREG. Nyssen in his Dial. of the Soul and Resurrection, says, 'Tis undeniable, that truth it there only to be plac'd, where there is the Seal of Scripture Testimony.

16. SAINT Jerom against Helvidius declares. As we deny not that which is written, so we refuse those which are not written. And in his Comment on the 98. Psal. Every thing that we assert, we must shew from the Holy Scripture. The word of him that speaks has not that authority as Gods Precept. And on the 87. Psal. Whatever is said after the Apostles, let it be cut off, nor have afterwards authority. Tho' one be holy after the Apostles, tho' one be eloquent, yet has he not authority.

17. SAINT Austin in his Tract of the unity of the Church, cap. 12. Acknowledges that he could not be convinc'd but by the Scriptures of

what he was to believe; and adds, they are read with such manifestation, that he who believes them must confess the doctrine to be most true. In the second Book of Christian doctrine, cap. 9. he says, That in the plain places of Scripture are found all those things that concern Faith and Manners. And in Epistle 42. All things which have been exhibited heretofore as done to mankind, and what we now set and deliver to our Posterity, the Scripture has not past in silence, so far forth as they concern the search or defence of our Religion. In his Tract of the good Widowhood, he says to Julian, the person to whom he addresses, What shall I teach you more than that we read in the Apostles? for the holy Scripture settles the rule of our doctrine; that we think not any thing more than we ought to think; but to think soberly, as God has dealt to every man the measure of Faith. Therefore my teaching is only to expound the words of this Doctor, Ep. 157. Where any subject is obscure, and passes our comprehension, and the Scripture do's not plainly afford its help, there human conjecture is presumptuous in defining.

18. THEOPHILLUS of Alex. in his second Paschal Homily, tells us that 'tis the suggestion of a diabolical spirit to think that any thing besides the Scripture has divine authority. And in his third he adds, that the Doctors of the Church having the Testimony of the Scripture, lay firm foundation of their Doctrine.

19. CHRYSOSTOM in his third Homily on the first of the Thessal. asserts, that from alone reading or hearing of the Scripture one may learn all things necessary. So Hom. 34. on Acts 15. he declares. A heathen comes and says, I would willingly be a Christian, but I know not whom to join my self to; for there are many contentions among you, many seditions and tumults; so that I am in doubt what opinion I should chuse. Each man says, what I say is true, and I know not whom to

believe; each pretends to Scripture which I am ignorant of. 'Tis very well the issue is put here: for if the appeal were to reason, in this case there would be just occasion of being troubled: but when we appeal to the Scriptures, and they are simple and certain, you may easily yourself judge. He that agrees with the Scriptures is a Christian, he that resists them, is far out of the way. And on Psal. 95. If any thing be said without the Scripture, the mind halts between different opinions; sometimes inclining as to what is probable, anon rejecting as what is frivolous: but when the testimony of holy Scripture is produc'd, the mind both of speaker and hearer is confirm'd. And Hom. 4. on Lazar. Though one should arise from the dead, or an Angel come down from heaven, we must believe the Scriptures; they being fram'd by the Lord of Angels, and of the quick and dead. And Hom. 13. 2 Cor. 7. Is it not an absurd thing that when we deal with men about money, we will trust nobody, but cast up the sum, and make use of our counters; but in religions affairs, suffer our selves to be led aside by other mens opinions, even then when we have by an exact scale and touchstone the dictate of the divine Law? Therefore I pray and exhort you, that giving no heed to what this or that man says, you would consult the holy Scripture, and thence learn the divine riches, and pursue what you have learn'd. And Hom. 58. on Jo. 10. 1. 'Tis the mark of a thief, that he comes not in by the door, but another way: now by the door the testimony of the Scripture is signified. And Hom. on Gal. 1. 8. The Apostle says not if any man teach a contrary doctrine let him be accurs'd, or if he subvert the whole Gospel; but if he teach any thing besides the Gospel which you have receiv'd, or vary any little thing, let him be accurs'd.

20. CYRIL of Alex. against Jul. l. 7. says, The holy Scripture is sufficient to make them who are instructed in it wise unto salvation,

and endued with most ample knowledge.

21. THEODORET Dial, 1. I am persuaded only by the holy Scripture. And Dial. 2. I am not so bold to affirm any thing, not spoken of in the Scripture. And again, qu. 45. upon Genes. We ought not to enquire after what is past over in silence, but acquiesce in what is written.

22. IT were easy to enlarge this discourse into a Volume; but having taken, as they offer'd themselves, the suffrages of the writers of the four first Centuries, I shall not proceed to those that follow. If the holy Scripture were a perfect rule of Faith and Manners to all Christians heretofore, we may reasonably assure our selves it is so still; and will now guide us into all necessary truth, and consequently make us wise unto salvation, without the aid of oral Tradition, or the new mintage of a living infallible Judge of controversy. And the impartial Reader will be enabled to judge whether our appeal to the holy Scripture, in all occasions of controversy, and recommendation of it to the study of every Christian, be that heresy and innovation which it is said to be.

23. IT is, we know, severely imputed to the Scribes and Pharisees by our Saviour, that they took from the people the key of knowledge, Luke 11. 52. and had made the word of God of none effect by their Traditions, Matt. 15. 6. but they never attempted what has been since practised by their Successors in the Western Church, to take away the Ark of the Testament it self, and cut off not only the efficacy, but the very possession of the word of God by their Traditions. Surely this had been exceeding criminal from any hand: but that the Bishops and Governours of the Church, and the universal and infallible Pastor of it, who claim the office to interpret the Scriptures, exhort unto, and assist in the knowledge of them, should be the men who thus rob the people of them, carries with it the highest aggravations both of

cruelty and breach of trust. If any man shall take away from the words of the Book of this prophecy says Saint John, Revel. 22. 19. God shall take away his part out of the Book of Life, and out of the holy City, and from the things which are written in this Book. What vengeance therefore awaits those, who have taken away not only from one Book, but at once the Books themselves, even all the Scripture, the whole Word of God?

SECT. VII.

Historical reflexions upon the Events which have happen'd in the Church since the with-drawing of the Holy Scripture.

'TWILL in this place be no useless contemplation to observe, after the Scriptures had been ravish'd from the people in the Church of Rome, what pitiful pretenders were admitted to succeed. And first, because Lay-men were presum'd to be illiterate, and easily seducible by those writings which were in themselves difficult, and would be wrested by the unlearned to their own destruction; Pictures were recommended in their stead, and complemented as the Books of the Laity, which soon improv'd into a necessity of their Worship, and that gross Superstition which renders Christianity abominated by Turks, and Jews, and Heathens unto this day.

2. I would not be hasty in charging Idolatry upon the Church of Rome, or all in her Communion; but that their Image-worship is a most fatal snare, in which vast numbers of unhappy Souls are taken, no man can doubt who hath with any regard travail'd in Popish Countries. I myself, and thousands of others, whom the late Troubles, or other Occasions sent abroad, are and have been witnesses thereof. Charity, 'tis true, believes all things, but it do's not oblige men to disbelieve their eyes. 'Twas the out-cry of Micah against the Danites, Jud. 18. 24. ye have taken away my Gods which I have made, and the Priest, and are gone away, and what have I more? But the Laity of the Roman Communion may enlarge the complaint and say; you have taken away the Oracles of our God, and set up every where among us graven and molten Images, and Teraphims, and what have we more? And 'twas lately the loud, and I doubt is still the unanswerable complaint of the poor

Americans, that they were deny'd to worship their Pagod once in the year, when they who forbad them, worship'd theirs every day.

3. THE Jews before the Captivity, notwithstanding the recent memory of the Miracles in Egypt and the Wilderness, and the first Conquest of the Land of Canaan, with those that succeeded under the Judges and Kings of Israel and Juda, as also the express Command of God, and the Menaces of Prophets, ever and anon fell to downright Idolatry: but after their return unto this day have kept themselves from falling into that Sin, tho' they had no Prophets to instruct them, no Miracles or Government to encourage or constrain them. The reason of which a very learned man in his discourse of Religious Assemblies takes to be, The reading and teaching of the Law in their Synagogues; which was perform'd with great exactness after the return from the Captivity, but was not so perform'd before. And may we not invert the observation, and impute the Image-worship now set up in the Christian Church to the forbidding the reading of the Scriptures in the Churches, and interdicting the private use, and institution of them?

4. FOR a farther supplement in place of the Scriptures, whose History was thought not edifying enough, the Legends of the Saints were introduc'd; stories so stupid, that one would imagine them design'd as an experiment how far credulity could be impos'd upon; or else fram'd to a worse intent, that Christianity by them might be made ridiculous. Yet these are recommended to use and veneration, while in the mean time the word of God is utterly forbidden, whereby the parties to this unhappy practice (that I may speak in the words of the Prophet Jeremiah 2. 13.) Have committed two evils, they have forsaken the fountain of living waters, hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

5. FARTHER yet, the same unreasonable tyranny, which permitted not the

Laity to understand Almighty God speaking to them in the Scripture, hinder'd them from being suffer'd to understand the Church or themselves speaking to him in their prayers; whilst the whole Roman office is so dispos'd, that in defiance of the Apostles discourse, 1 Cor. 14. he that occupies the room of the unlearned must say amen to those prayers and praises which he has no comprehension of: and by his endless repetitions of Pater's, Ave's and Credo's, falls into that battology reprov'd by our Saviour, Mat. 6. 7. And as 'twas said of the woman of Samaria, Jo. 4. 22. knows not what he worships, Yet this unaccountable practice is so much the darling of that Church, that when in France about eighteen years since, the Roman Missal was translated into the vulgar Tongue, and publish'd by the direction of several of their Bishops, the Clergy of France rose up in great fury against the attempt, anathematizing in their circular Epistles, all that sold, read, or us'd the said Book: and upon complaint unto Pope 41^{ex.} the 7. he resented the matter so deeply, as to issue out his Bull against it in the following words.

6. WHEREAS sons of perdition, endeavouring the destruction of souls, have translated the Roman Missal into the French Tongue, and so attempted to throw down and trample upon the majesty of the holy Rites comprehended in Latin words: As we abominate and detest the novelty, which will deform the beauty of the Church, and produce disobedience, temerity, boldness, sedition and schism; so we condemn, reprobate and forbid, the said and all other such Transactions, and interdict the reading, and keeping, to all and singular the faithful, of whatever sex, degree, order, condition, dignity, honour, or preeminence, &c. under pain of excommunication. And we command the copies to be immediatly burnt, &c. So mortal a sin it seems 'twas thought for the Laity to understand the prayers in which they must communicate.

7. NOR is this all; agreeable to the other attempts upon the holy Scripture was the bold insolence of making a new authentick Text in that unknown Tongue in which the offices of prayer had been, and were to be kept disguis'd; which was done by the decree of the Council of Trent in the fourth Session. But when the Council had given this Prerogative to the Version which it call'd vulgar, the succeeding Popes began to consider what that Version was; and this work Pius the fourth and fifth set upon, but prevented by death fail'd to compleat it; so that the honour of the performance fell to Sixtus the fifth, who in the plenitude of his Apostolick power, the Translation being reform'd to his mind, commanded it to be that genuine ancient Edition which the Trent Fathers had before made authentick, and under the pain of excommunication requir'd it to be so received: which he do's in this form. Of our certain knowledge, and the plenitude of Apostolick power, we order and declare that the vulgar Edition which has been receiv'd for authentick by the Council of Trent, is without doubt or controversy to be esteem'd this very one, which being amended as well as it is possible, and printed at the Vatican Press, we publish to be read in the whole Christian Republick, and in all Churches of the Christian world. Decreeing that it having been approv'd by the consent of the holy universal Church, and the holy Fathers, and then by the Decree of the general Council of Trent, and now by the Apostolick authority deliver'd to us by the Lord; is the true, legitimate authentick, and undoubted, which is to be received and held in all publick and private Disputations, Lectures, Preachings, and Expositions, &c. But notwithstanding this certain knowledge, and plenitude of Apostolick power, soon after came Clement the eighth, and again resumes the work of his Predecessor Sixtus, discovers great and many errors in it, and puts out one more reform'd, yet confess'd by himself to be imperfect;

which now stands for the authentick Text, and carries the title of the Bible put forth by Sixtus, notwithstanding all its alterations. So well do's the Roman Church deserve the honour which she pretends to, of being the mistress of all Churches; and so infallible is the holy Chair in its determinations; and lastly, so authentick a Transcript of the word of God (concerning which 'tis said; Matt. 5. 18. one jot or one title shall not fail) is that which the establish'd, and that has receiv'd so many, and yet according to the confession of the infallible Corrector, wants still more alterations.

8. DEPENDENT upon this, and as great a mischief as any of the former, consequent to the withdrawing of the Scripture, I take to be the step it made to the overthrow of the Ancient and most useful discipline of the Church in point of Penance, whose rigours always heretofore proceeded the possibility of having absolution. Now of this we know a solemn part was the state of Audience, when the laps'd person was receiv'd, after long attendance without doors, prostrations, and lamentations there, within the entrance of the Church; and was permitted with the Catechumens or Candidates of Baptism, to hear the readings of the Scripture, and stay till Prayer began, but then depart. He was oblig'd to hear the terrours of the Lord, the threats of the divine Law against sin and sinners, to stand among the unbaptiz'd and heathen multitude, and learn again the elements of that holy Faith from which he had prevaricated; and so in time be render'd capable of the devotions of the faithful, and afterwards of the reception of the Eucharist. But when the Scriptures were thought useless or dangerous to be understood and heard, it was consequent that the state of Audience should be cut off from Penance, and that the next to it, upon the self-same principle should be dismiss'd: and so the long probation formerly requir'd should be supplanted: and the compendious way of

Pardoning first, and Repenting afterwards, the endless circle of Sinning and being Absolv'd, and then Sinning and being Absolv'd again, should prevail upon the Church. Which still obtains, notwithstanding the complaints, and irrefragable demonstrations of learned men even of the Romish Communion, who plainly shew this now receiv'd method to be an Innovation groundless and unreasonable, and most pernicious in its consequents.

9 AND, by the way, we may take notice that there cannot be a plainer evidence of the judgement of the Church, concerning the necessity of the Scriptures being known, not only by the learned but mean Christians, and the interest they have therein, than is the ancient course of Penance, establish'd by the practice of all the first Ages, and almost as many Councils, whether general or local, as have decreed any thing concerning Discipline, with the Penitentiary Books and Canons, which are written for the first eleven hundred years in the whole Christian world. For if even the unbaptiz'd Catechumen, and the laps'd Sinner, notwithstanding their slender knowledge in the mysteries of Faith, or frail pretence to the priviledge thereof, had a right to the state of Audience, and was oblig'd to hear the Scripture read; surely the meanest unobnoxious Laick was in as advantageous circumstances, and might not only be trusted with the reading of those sacred Books, but might claim them as his birthright.

10. I may justly, over and above what has been hitherto alledg'd, impute to the Governours of the same Church, and their withholding from the Laity the Holy Scripture, the many dangerous errors, gross ignorances, and scandalous immoralities which have prevail'd among them both. It is no new method of Divine vengeance, that there should be like People, like Priest, Hos. 4. 9. And that the idle Shepherd who led his flock into the ditch, should fall therein himself, Mat. 15. 14. And

as the Prophet Zachary describes it, ch. 11. 17. The sword shall be upon his arm, and upon his right eye: his arm shall be clean dried up, and his right eye shall be utterly darkned.

11. BUT no consequence can be more obviously deducible from that practice, than that men should justify the with-holding of the Scripture by lessening its Credit, and depreciating its Worth: which has occasion'd those reproaches which by the Writers of the Church of Rome, of best note, have been cast upon it. As that it was a Nose of wax, a leaden rule, a deaf and useless Deputy to God in the office of a Judge; of less authority than the Roman Church, and of no more credit than Æsops Fables, but for the testimony of the said Church; that they contain things apt to raise laughter or indignation, that the Latin Translation in the Complutensian Bible is placed between the Hebrew Text and the Septuagint Version, as our Saviour was at his Crucifixion between two thieves; and that the Vulgar Edition is of such authority that the Originals ought to be mended by it, rather than it should be mended from them: which are the complements of Cardinal Bellarmin, Hofius, Eckius, Perron, Ximines, Coqueus, and others of that Communion: words to be answer'd by a Thunderbolt, and fitter for the mouth of a Celsus or a Porphyry, than of the pious Sons, and zealous Champions of the Church of Christ.

12. 'TIS to be expected that the Romanists should now wipe their mouths, and plead not guilty; telling us that they permit the Scripture to the Laity in their Mother Tongue: And to that purpose the Fathers of Rhemes and Doway have publish'd an English Bible for those of their Communion. I shall therefore give a short and plain account of the whole affair, as really it stands, and then on Gods Name let the Romanists make the best of their Apology.

13. THE fourth rule of the Index of prohibited Books compos'd upon the

command and auspice of the Council of Trent, and publish'd by the Authority of Pius the fourth, Sixtus the fifth, and Clement the eighth, runs thus: Since 'tis manifest by experience, that if the Holy Bible be suffer'd promiscuously in the Vulgar Tongue, such is the temerity of men, that greater detriment than advantage will thence arise; in this matter let the judgement of the Bishop or Inquisitor be stood to: that with the advice of the Curate or Confessor, they may give leave for the reading of the Bible in the vulgar Tongue, Translated by Catholicks, to such as they know will not receive damage, but increase of Faith and Piety thereby. Which faculty they shall have an writing; and whosoever without such faculty shall presume to have or to read the Bible, he shall not 'till he has deliver'd it up, receive Absolution of his Sins. Now (to pass over the iniquity of obliging men to ask leave to do that which God Almighty commands) when 'tis consider'd how few of the Laity can make means to the Bishop or, Inquisitor, or convince them, or the Curate or Confessor, that they are such who will not receive damage, but increase of Faith and Piety by the reading of the Scripture; and also have interest to prevail with them for their favour herein: and after all, can and will be at the charge of taking out the faculty, which is so penally requir'd: 'tis easy to guess what thin numbers of the Laity are likely, or indeed capable of reaping benefit by this Indulgence pretended to be allowed them.

14. BUT, besides all this, what shall we say, if the power it self of giving Licences be a mere shew, and really signifies just nothing? In the observation subjoyn'd to this fourth rule it is declar'd, that the Impression and Edition thereof gives no new faculty to Bishops, or Inquisitors, or Superiors of regulars, to grant Licenses of buying, reading, or retaining Bibles publish'd in a vulgar Tongue; since hitherto by the command and practice of the holy Roman and universal

Inquisition, the power of giving such faculties, to read or retain vulgar Bibles, or any parts of Scripture of the Old or New Testament, in any vulgar Tongue; or also summaries or historical compendiums of the said Bibles or Books of Scripture, in whatsoever Tongue they are written, has been taken away. And sure if a Lay-man cannot read the Bible without a faculty, and it is not in any ones power to grant it, 'twill evidently follow that he cannot read it: And so the pretence of giving liberty, owns the shame of openly refusing it, but has no other effect or consequence. And if any Romanist among us, or in any other Protestant Country enjoys any liberty herein, 'tis merely by connivance, and owed to a fear lest the Votary would be lost, and take the Bible where it was without difficulty to be had, if strictness should be us'd. And should Popery, which God forbid, become paramount; the Translations of the Scripture into our Mother Tongues would be no more endur'd here, than they are in Spain and they who have formerly been wary in communicating the Scriptures, remembering how thereby their errors have been detected, would upon a revolution effectually provide for the future, and be sure to keep their people in an Egyptian darkness that might it self be felt, but that allow'd the notices of no other object. They would not be content with that composition of the Ammonites, to thrust out all the right eyes of those that submitted to them, 1 Sam. 11. 2. but would put out both, as the Philistines did to Samson, that they might make their miserable captives for ever grind in their Mill, Jud. 16. 21.

15. BUT this heaviest of judgements will never fall upon the reform'd Churches, till by their vicious practice and contempt of the divine Law, they have deferred their profession, and made themselves utterly unworthy of the blessings they enjoy, and the light of that Gospel which with noon-day brightness has shin'd among them. Upon which

account, I suppose it may not be impertinent in the next place to subjoyn some plain directions, and cautionary advices, concerning the use of these sacred Books.

SECT. VIII.

Necessary cautions to be us'd in the reading of the holy Scriptures.

IT is a common observation, that the most generous and sprightly Medicines are the most unsafe, if not apply'd with due care and regimen: and the remark holds as well in spiritual as corporal remedies. The Apostle asserts it upon his own experience, that the doctrine of the Gospel, which was to some the savour of life unto life, was to others the savour of death, 2 Cor. 2. 16. And the same effect that the oral Word had then, the written Word may have now; not that either the one or the other has any thing in it that is of it self mortiferous, but becomes so by the ill disposition of the persons who so pervert it. It is therefore well worth our inquiry, what qualifications on our part are necessary to make the Word be to us what it is in it self, the power of God unto salvation, Rom. 1. 16. Of these some are previous before our reading, some are concomitant with it, and some are subsequent and follow after it.

2. OF those that go before, sincerity is a most essential requisite: by sincerity, I mean an upright intention, by which we direct our reading to that proper end for which the holy Scriptures were design'd: viz. the knowing God's will in order to the practising it. This honest simplicity of heart is that which Christ represents by the good ground, where alone it was that the seed could fructify, Matt. 13. 8. And he that brings not this with him, brings only the shadow of a Disciple. The word of God, is indeed, sharper than a two-edged sword, Heb. 4. 12. but what impression can a sword make on a body of air, which still slips from, and eludes its thrusts? And as little can all the practical discourses of Holy Writ make on him, who brings only his speculative

faculties with him, and leaves his will and affections behind him; which are the only proper subjects for it to work on.

3. TO this we may probably impute that strange, inefficaciousness we see of the Word. Alas! men rarely apply it to the right place: our most inveterate diseases lie in our morals, and we suffer the Medicine to reach no farther than our intellects. As if he that had an ulcer in his bowels should apply all his balsoms and sanatives only to his head. 'Tis true, the holy Scriptures are the treasuries of divine Wisdom; the Oracles to which we should resort for saving knowledge: but they are also the rule and guide of holy Life: and he that covets to know God's will for any purpose but to practise it, is only studious to entitle himself to the greater number of stripes, Luke 12. 47.

4. NAY farther, he that affects only the bare knowledge is oft disappointed even of that. The Scripture, like the Pillar of Fire and Cloud, enlightens the Israelites, those who sincerely resign themselves to its guidance; but it darkens and confounds the Egyptians, Exod. 14.

20. And 'tis frequently seen, that those who read only to become knowing, are toll'd on by their curiosity into the more abstruse and mysterious parts of Scripture, where they entangle themselves in inextricable mazes and confusions; and instead of acquiring a more superlative knowledge, lose those easy and common notions which lye obvious to every plain well meaning Reader. I fear this Age affords too many, and too frequent instances of this, in men who have lost God in the midst of his Word, and study'd Scripture till they have renounc'd its Author.

5. AND sure this infatuation is very just, and no more than God himself has warn'd us of, who takes the wise in their own craftiness, Job 5.

13. but appropriates his secrets only to them that fear him, and has promis'd to teach the meek his way, Psal. 25. 9, 14. And this was the

method Christ observ'd in his Preaching, unveiling those truths to his Disciples, which to the Scribes and Pharisees, his inquisitive, yet refractory hearers, he wrapt up in parables; not that he dislik'd their desire of knowledge, but their want of sincerity: which is so fatal a defect as blasts our pursuit, tho' of things in themselves never so excellent. This we find exemplify'd in Simon Magus, Acts 8. who, tho' be coveted a thing in it self very desireable, the power of conferring the Holy Ghost, yet desiring it not only upon undue conditions, but for sinister ends, not only miss'd of that, but was (after all his convincement by the Apostles Miracle, and the engagement of his Baptism) immers'd in the gall of bitterness; and at last advanc'd to that height of Blasphemy, as to set up himself for a God, so becoming a lasting memento, how unsafe it is to prevaricate in holy things.

6. BUT as there is a sincerity of the Will in order to practice, so there is also a sincerity of the Understanding in order to belief; and this is also no less requisite to the profitable reading of Scripture.

I mean by this, that we come with a preparation of mind, to embrace indifferently whatever God there reveals as the object of our Faith; that we bring our own opinions, not as the clue by which to unfold Scripture, but to be try'd and regulated by it. The want of this has been of very pernicious consequence in matters both of Faith and Speculation. Men are commonly prepossess'd strongly with their own notions, and their errand to Scripture is not to lend them light to judge of them, but aids to back and defend them.

7. OF this there is no Book of controversy that do's not give notorious proof. The Socinian can easily over-look the beginning of Saint John, that says, The Word was God, Joh. 1. 1. and all those other places which plainly assert the Deity dour Saviour, if he can divert to that other more agreeable Text, that the Father is greater than I. Among the

Romanists, Peters being said to be first among the Apostles, Matt. 10. 2. and that on that Rock Christ would build his Church, Matt. 16. 18. carries away all attention from those other places, where Saint Paul says he was not behind the very chiefest of the Apostles, 2. Cor. 11. 5. that upon him lay the care of all the Churches, 2 Cor. 11. 28. and that the Church was not built upon the foundation of some one, but all the twelve Apostles, Revelat. 21. 14. So it fares in the business of the Eucharist: This is my body, Matt. 26. 26. carries it away clear for Transubstantiation, when our Saviours calling that which he drunk the fruit of the vine, Matt. 26. 29, and then Saint Paul's naming the Elements in the Lords Supper several times over, Bread and Wine; The Bread that we break, is it not the Communion of the Body of Christ? The Cup that we bless, is it not the Communion? &c. 1. Cor. 10. 16. And again, He that eats this Bread, and drinks this Cup unworthily, &c. 1. Cor. 11. 29. can make no appearance of an Argument.

8. THUS men once engag'd ransack for Texts that carry some correspondency to the opinions they have imbib'd, and those how do they rack and scruce to bring to .a perfect conformity, and improve every little probability into a demonstration? On the other side, the contrary Texts the look on as enemies, and consider them no farther than to provide fences and guards against them: So they bring Texts not into the scales to weigh, but into the field to skirmish, as Partizans and Auxiliaries of such or such Opinions.

9. By this force of prepossession it is, that that Sacred Rule, which is the measure and standard of all rectitude, is it self bow'd and distorted to countenance and abet the most contrary Tenets: and like a variable picture, represents differing shapes, according to the light in which you view it. And sure we cannot do it a worse office than to represent it thus dissonant to it self. Yet thus it must still be till

men come unbyast to the reading of it. And certainly there is all the reason in the world they should do so: the ultimate end of our faith is but the salvation of our souls, 1. Pet. 1. 9. and we may be sure the Scripture can best direct us what Faith it is which will lead us to that end.

10. WHY should we not then have the same indifference which a traveller hath, whether his way lie on this hand or that: so as it be the direct road to his journeys end? For although it be infinitely material that I embrace right principles, yet 'tis not so that this should be right rather than the other: and our wishes that it should be so proceed only from our prepossessions and fondness of our own conceptions, than which nothing is more apt to intercept the clear view of truth. It therefore nearly concerns us to deposit them, and to give up our selves without reserve to the guidance of Gods Word, and give it equal credit when it thwarts, as when it complies with our own notions.

11. WITHOUT this, though we may call Scripture the rule of Faith, and judge of controversies; yet 'tis manifest we make it not so, but reserve still the last appeal to our own prejudicate fancies: and then no wonder, though we fall under the same occecation which our Saviour upbraids to the Jews, that seeing, we see not, neither do we understand, Matt. 13.14. For he that will not be sav'd Gods way, will hardly be so by his own. He that resolves not impartially to embrace all the Scriptures dictates comes to them as unsincerely, as the remnant of the Jews did to Jeremiah to inquire of the Lord for them, which he no sooner had done, but they protest against his message, Jer. 41. 20. and may expect as fatal an event.

12. BUT there are a set of men who deal yet more unsincerely with the Word; that read it insidiously, on purpose to collect matter of objection and cavil; that with a malicious diligence compare Texts in

hope to find contradictions: and read attentively, but to no other end than to remark incoherences and defects in the stile: which when they think they have started, they have their design; and never will use a quarter of the same diligence in considering how they may be solv'd, or consulting with those who may assist them in it. For I think I may appeal to the generality of those who have rais'd the loudest clamours against the Scripture, whether they have endeavour'd to render themselves competent judges of it by inquiring into the Originals, or informing themselves of those local Customs, peculiar Idioms, and many other circumstances, by which obscure Texts are to be clear'd. And though I do not affirm it necessary to salvation that every man should do this; yet I may affirm it necessary to him that will pretend to judge of the Bible: and he that without this condemns it, do's it as manifest injury, as a judge that should pass sentence only upon the Indictment, without hearing the defence.

13. AND certainly there cannot be any thing more unmanly and disingenuous, than for men to inveigh and condemn before they inquire and examine. Yet this is the thing upon which so many value themselves, assuming to be men of reason, for that for which the Scripture pronounces them brute Beasts, viz, the speaking evil of those things they understand not, 2 Pet. 2. 12. Would men use due diligence, no doubt many of those seeming contradictions would be reconcil'd, and the obscurities clear'd: and if any should after all remain, they might find twenty things fitter to charge it on, than want of verity or discourse in the inspir'd writers.

14. ALAS what human writing is there of near that Antiquity, wherein there are not many passages unintelligible? And indeed, unless modern times knew all those national customs, obsolete Laws, particular Rites and Ceremonies, Phrases and proverbial Sayings, to which such ancient

Books refer, 'tis impossible but some passages must still remain obscure. Yet in these we ordinarily have so much candour, as to impute their unintelligibleness to our own ignorance of those things which should clear them, the improprieties of stile to the variation that times make in dialects, or to the errors of Scribes, and do not presently exclaim against the Authors as false or impertinent, or discard the whole Book for some such passages.

15. AND sure what allowances we make to other Books may with more reason be made to the Bible; which having been writ so many Ages since, past thro' infinite variety of hands, and (which is above all) having been the object of the Devils, and wicked mens malice, lies under greater disadvantages than any human composure: And doubtless men would be as equitable to that as they are to others, were it not that they more wish to have that false or irrational than any other Book. The plain parts of it, the precepts and threatnings speak clearer than they desire, gall and fret them; and therefore they will revenge themselves upon the obscurer: and seem angry that there are some things they understand not, when indeed their real displeasure is at those they do.

16. A second qualification preparatory to reading the Scripture is reverence. When we take the Bible in our hands, we should do it with other sentiments and apprehensions than when we take a common Book; considering that it is the word of God, the instrument of our salvation, or upon our abuse of it, a promoter of our ruin.

17. AND sure this, if duly apprehended, cannot but strike us with a reverential awe, make us to say with Jacob, Gen. 28. 16. surely God is in this place; controul all trifling fancies, and make us read, not for custome or divertisement, but with those solemn and holy intentions; which become the dignity of its Author. Accordingly we find holy men have in all Ages been affected with it; and some to the inward

reverence of the mind have joyn'd the outward of the body also, and never read it but upon their knees: an example that may both instruct and reproach our profaneness; who commonly read by chance, and at a venture: If a Bible happen in our way, we take it up as we would do a Romance, or a Play-book; only herein we differ, that we dismiss it much sooner, and retain less of its impressions.

18. IT was a Law of Numa, that no wan should meddle with divine things, or worship the Gods in passing or by accident, but make it a set and solemn business. And every one knows with how great ceremony and solemnity the Heathen Oracles were consulted. How great a shame is it then for Christians to defalk that reverence from the true God, which Heathens allow'd their false ones?

19. NOW this proceeds sometimes from the want of that habitual reverence we should always have to it as Gods word, and sometimes from want of actually exciting it, when we go to read: for if the habit lye only dormant in us, and be not awak'd by actual consideration, it avails us as little in our reading, as the habitual strength of a man do's towards labour, when he will not exert it for that end.

20. WE ought therefore, as to make it our deliberate choice to read Gods word; so when we do it, to stir up our selves to those solemn apprehensions of its dignity and authority, as may render us malleable, and apt to receive its impressions; for where there is no reverence, 'tis not to be expected there should be any genuine or lasting obedience.

21. SAINT Austin in his Tract to Honoratus, of the advantage of believing, makes the first requisite to the knowledge of the Scriptures to be the love of them. Believe me, says he, every thing in the Scripture is Sublime and Divine, its truth and doctrine are most accommodate to the refreshment, and building up of our minds: and in

all respects so order'd, that every one may draw thence what is sufficient for him; provided he approach it with Devotion, is Piety, and Religion. The proof of this may require much reasoning and discourse. But this I am first to perswade, that you do not hate the Authors, and then that you love them. Had we an ill opinion of Virgil, nay, if upon the account of the reputation he has gain'd with our Predecessors, we did not greatly love, before we understood him, we should never patiently go through all the difficult questions Grammarians raise about him. Many employ themselves in Commenting upon him; we esteem him most, whose Exposition most commends the Book, and shews that the Author, not only was free from error, but did excellently well where he is not understood. And if such an account happen not to be given, we impute it rather to the Interpreter than the Poet.

22. THUS the good Father; whose words I have transcrib'd at large, as being remarkable to the present purpose; he also shews that the mind of no Author is to be learnt from one averse to his doctrine: as that 'tis vain to enquire of Aristotles Books from one of a different Sect: Or of Archimedes from Epicurus: the discourse will be as displeasing as the speaker; and that shall be esteem'd absurd, which comes from one that is envy'd or despis'd.

23. A third preparative to our reading should be prayer. The Scripture as it was dictated at first by the Holy Spirit, so must still owe its effects and influence to its co-operation. The things of God, the Apostle tells us, are spiritually discern'd, 1. Cor. 2. 14. And tho' the natural man may well enough apprehend the letter, and grammatical sense of the Word; yet its power and energy, that insinuating perswasive force whereby it works on hearts, is peculiar to the Spirit; and therefore without his aids, the Scripture whilst it lyes open

before our eyes, may still be as a Book that seal'd Esai. 29. 11. be as ineffective as if the characters were illegible.

24. BESIDES, our Saviour tells us, the devil is still busy to steal away the seed as soon as it is sown, Matt. 13. 19. And unless we have some better guard than our own vigilance, he is sure enough to prosper in his attempt. Let it therefore be our care to invoke the Divine Aid; and when ever we take the Bible into our hands, to dart up at least a hearty ejaculation, that we may find its effects in our hearts. Let us say with holy David, open thou mine eyes, O Lord, that I may see the wondrous things of thy Law. Blessed art thou O Lord, O teach me thy statutes, Psal. 119. Nay, indeed 'twill be fit matter of a daily solemn devotion, as our Church has made it an annual in the Collect on the second Sunday in Advent: a prayer so apt and fully expressive of what we should desire in this particular, that if we transcribe not only the example, but the very words, I know not how we can form that part of our devotion more advantageously.

25. IN the second place we are to consider what is requir'd of us at the time of reading the Scripture; which consist principally in two things. The first of these is attention, which is so indispensably requisite, that without it all Books are alike, and all equally insignificant: for he that adverts not to the sense of what he reads, the wisest discourses signify no more to him, than the most exquisite Musick do's to a man perfectly deaf. The letters and syllables of the Bible are no more sacred than those of another Book; 'tis the sense and meaning only that is divinely inspir'd: and he that considers only the former may as well entertain himself with a spelling-book.

26. WE must therefore keep our minds fix'd and attent to what we read: 'tis a folly and lightness not to do so in human Authors, but 'tis a sin and danger not to do so in this divine Book. We know there can

scarce be a greater instance of contempt and disvalue, than to hear a man speak, and not at all mind what he says: yet this vilest affront do all those put upon God, who hear or read his Word, and give it no attention. Yet I fear the practice is not more impious than it is frequent: for there are many that read the Bible, who, if at the end of each Chapter they shall be call'd to account, I doubt could produce but very slender collections: and truly 'tis a sad consideration, that that sacred Book is read most attentively by those, who read it as some preach the Gospel, Phil. 1. 15. out of envy and strife. How curiously do men inspect, nay ransack and embowel a Text to find a pretence for cavil and objection; whilst men who profess to look there for life and salvation read with such a reckless heedlessness, as if it could tell them nothing they were concern'd in: and to such 'tis no wonder if their reading bring no advantage. God is not in this sense found of those that seek him not, Esai. 65. 1. 'tis Satans part to serve himself of the bare words and characters of holy Writ, for charms and amulets: the vertue God has put there consists in the sense and meaning, and can never be drawn out by drousy inadverting Readers.

27. THIS unattentiveness fore-stalls all possibility of good. How shall that convince the understanding, or persuade the affections, which do's not so much as enter the imagination. So that in this case the seed seems more cast away than in any of those instances the parable gives, Matt. 13. In those it still fell upon the soil, but in this it never reaches that; but is scatter'd and dissipated, as with a mighty wind, by those thoughts which have prepossess'd the mind. Let no man therefore take this sacred Book into his hand, till he has turn'd out all distracting fancies and has his faculties free and vacant for those better objects which will there present themselves. And when he has so dispos'd himself for attention, then let him contrive to improve that

attention to the best advantage.

28. TO which purpose it may be very conducive to put it into some order and method. As for instance, when he reads the doctrinal part of Scripture, let him first and principally advert to those plain Texts which contain the necessary points of Faith: that he may not owe his Creed only to his education, the institution of his Parents or Tutors; but may know the true foundation on which it is bottom'd, viz. the word of God, and may thence be able to justify his Faith: and as Saint Peter exhorts, be ready to give an answer to every man that asks him a reason of the hope that is in him, 1 Pet. 3. 15. For want of this it is, that Religion fits so loose upon men, that every wind of doctrine blows them into distinct and various forms; till at last their Christianity it self vaporus away and disappears.

29. BUT let men be careful thus to secure the foundation, and then 'twill be commendable in them (who are capable of it) to aspire to higher degrees of speculation: yet even in these it will be their safest course chiefly to pursue such as have the most immediate influence on practice, and be more industrious to make observations of that sort, than curious and critical remarks or bold conjectures upon those mysteries on which God has spread a veil.

30. BUT besides a mans own particular collections, it will be prudence in him to advantage himself of those of others, and to consult the learnedest and best Expositors; and that not only upon a present emergency, when he is to dispute a point; (as most do) but in the constant course of his reading, wherein he will most sedately, and dispassionately judge of the notions they offer.

31. AS to the choice of the portions of Scripture to be read in course, though I shall not condemn that of reading the whole Bible in order, yet 'tis apparent that some parts of it (as that of the Levitical Law)

are not so aptly accommodated to our present state, as others are; and consequently not so edificatory to us: and therefore I cannot see why any man should oblige himself to an equal frequency in reading them. And to this our Church seems to give her suffrage, by excluding such out of her publick Lessons. And if we govern our private reading by her measure it will well express our deference to her judgement; who has selected some parts of Scripture, nor that she would keep her children in ignorance of any, but because they tend most immediately to practice.

32. NEITHER will the daily reading the Scripture in the Rubricks order hinder any man from acquainting himself with the rest. For he may take in the other parts as supernumeraries to his constant task, and read them as his leisure and inclination shall prompt. So that all the hurt that can accrue to him by this method, is the being invited to read sometimes extraordinary proportions.

33. IF it be objected, that to those who daily hear the Church Service 'twill be a kind of tautology, first to read those Lessons in private, which soon after they shall hear read publickly; I answer, that whatever men may please to call it, 'twill really be an advantage: For he that shall read a Chapter by himself with due consideration, and consulting of good Paraphrasts, will have div'd so far into the sense of it, that he will much better comprehend it when he hears it read: as on the other side, the hearing it read so immediately after, will serve to confirm and rivet the sense in his mind. The one is as the conning, the other the repeating the Lesson; which every School-boy can tell us is best done at the nearest distance to each other. But I shall not contend for this, or any particular method: let the Scriptures be read in proportion to every mans leisure and capacity, and read with attention; and we need not be scrupulous about circumstances when the

main duty is secur'd.

34. BUT as in the Doctrinal, so in the Preceptive part, there is a caution to be us'd in our attention. For we are to distinguish between those temporary precepts that were adapted to particular times and occasions, and such as are of perpetual obligation. He that do's not this may bring himself under the Jewish Law, or believe a necessity of selling all and giving it to the poor, because 'twas Christs command to the rich man; Matt. 19. or incur other considerable mischiefs.

35. THUS frequently commands are put in comprehensive indefinite words, but concern only the generality to whom the Law is written and not those who are intrusted with the vindication of their contempt.

Accordingly 'tis said, thou shalt not kill, Mark 10. 19. which concerns the private person but extends not to the Magistrate in the execution of his office, who is a revenger appointed by God, and bears not the sword in vain, Rom. 13. 4. So the injunction not to swear at all, Matt. 5. 34. refers to the common transactions of life, but not those solemn occasions where an oath is to give glory to God, and is the end of all strife, Hebr. 6. 16. Yet these mistakes at this day prevail with Anabaptists and Quakers, and bottom their denyal of the Magistrates power to protect his Subjects by War, and to determine differences in Peace by the Oath of witnesses in judicial proceedings.

36. THERE is another distinction we are to attend to; and that is between absolute and primary commands, and secondary ones: the former we are to set a special remark upon, as those upon whose observance or violation our Eternal Life or Death inseparably depends. And therefore our first and most solicitous care must be concerning them. I mention this not to divert any from aspiring to the highest degrees of perfection, but to reprove that preposterous course many take, who lay the greatest weight upon those things on which God lays the least; and

have more zeal for oblique intimations, than for express downright commands; nay, think by the one to commute for the contempt of the other. For example, Fasting is recommended to us in Scripture, but in a far lower key than moral duties: rather as an expedient and help to virtue, than as properly a virtue it self. And yet we may see men scrupulous in that, who startle not at injustice and oppression (that clamorous sin that crys to Heaven) who pretend to mortify their appetites by denying it its proper food, or being luxurious in one sort of it; and yet glut their avarice, eat up the poor, and devour widows houses, Matt. 23.

37. TO such as these 'twould be good advice to fix their attention on the absolute commands, to study moral Honesty and the essentials of Christianity; to make a good progress there, and do what God indispensably requires: and then it may be seasonable to think of voluntary oblations: but till then they are so far from Homage, that they are the most reproachful Flattery: an attempt to bribe God against himself; and a Sacrilege, like that of Dionysius, who took away Apollo's golden robe and gave him a stuff one.

38. THE second thing requisite in our reading, is application: this is the proper end of our attention; and without this we may be very busy to very little purpose. The most laborious attention without it puts us but in the condition of those poor slaves that labour in the Mines, who with infinite toil dig that Ore of which they shall never partake. If therefore we will appropriate that rich treasure, we must apply, and so make it our own.

39. LET us then at every period of Holy Writ reflect and look on our selves as the persons spoke to. When we find Philip giving Baptism to the Eunuch upon this condition, that he believe with all his heart, Acts 8. let us consider that unless we do so, our Baptism (like a thing

surreptitiously obtain'd) conveys no title to us, will avail us nothing.

40. WHEN we read our Saviours denunciation to the Jew, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish; Luke 13. 5. we are to look on it as if address'd immediately to our selves; and conclude as great a necessity of our repentance. In those black catalogues of crimes which the Apostle mentions, 1. Cor. 6. 10. and Gal. 5. 19, 20, 22. as excluding from the Kingdom of' Heaven, we are to behold our own guilts arraign'd and to resolve that the same crimes will as certainly shut Heaven gates against us, as those to whom those Epistles were immediately directed. In all the precepts of good life, and Christian Vertue, we are to think our selves as nearly and particularly concern'd, as if we had been Christs Auditors on the mount. So proportionably in all the threats and promises we are either to tremble or hope, according as we find our selves adhere to those sins or vertues to which they are affix'd.

41. THIS close application would render what we read operative and effective, which without it will be useless and insignificant. We may see an instance of it in David; who was not at all convinc'd of his own guilt by Nathans parable (though the most apposite that was imaginable) till he roundly apply'd it, saying, thou art the man, 2 Sam. 12. And unless we treat our selves at the same rate, the Scripture may fill our heads with high notions, nay with many speculative truths which yet amounts to no more than the Devils Theology, Ja. 2. 19. and will as little advantage us.

42. IT now remains that we speak of what we are to do after our reading; which may be summ'd up in two words: Recollect and practise. Our memories are very frail as to things of this nature. And therefore we ought to impress them as deep as we can, by reflecting on what we

have read. It is an observation out of the Levitical Law, that those beasts only were clean, and fit for sacrifice, that chew'd the cud, Lev. 11. 4. And tho' the ceremony were Jewish, the moral is Christian, and admonishes us how we should revolve and ruminare on spiritual instructions. Without this what we hear or read slips insensibly from us, and like letters writ in chalk, is wiped out by the next succeeding thought but recollection engraves and indents the characters in the mind. And he that would duly use it would find other manner of impressions more affective and more lasting than bare reading will leave.

43. WE find it thus in all Sciences: he that only reads over the rules, and lays aside the thoughts of them together with his Book will make but a slow advance; whilst he that plods and studies upon them, repeats and reinforces them upon his mind, soon arrives to an eminency. By this it was that David attain'd to that perfection in Gods Law as to out-strip his teachers, and understand more than the Ancients, Psal. 119. 99, 100. because it was his meditation as himself tells us, ver. 97. 99.

44. LET us therefore pursue the same method; and when we have read a portion of Scripture, let us recollect what observable things we have there met with: what exhortions to vertue, or determents from vice; what promises to obedience, or menaces for the contrary; what examples of Gods vengeance against such or such sins, or what instances of his blessing upon duties. If we do this daily, we cannot but amass together a great stock of Scripture documents, which will be ready for us to produce upon every occasion. Satan can assault us no where, but we shall be provided of a guard, a Scriptum est; which we see was the sole armour the captain of our Salvation us'd in his encounter with him, Matt. 4. ver. 4. 7. and 10. and will be as successful to us, if we will

duly manage it.

45. THE last thing requir'd as consequent to our reading, is practice.

This is the ultimate end, to which all the fore-going qualifications are directed. And if we fail here, the most assiduous diligence in all the former will be but lost labour. Let us mean never so well, attend never so close, recollect never so exactly, if after all we do not practise, all the rest will serve but to enhance our guilt.

Christianity is an active Science, and the Bible was given us not merely for a theme of speculation, but for a rule of life.

46. AND alas, what will it avail us that our opinions are right, if our manners be crooked? When the Scripture has shew'd us what God requires of us, nay, has evinc'd to us the reasonableness of the injunctions, the great agreeableness which they have to the excellency of our nature; and has back'd this with the assurance that in keeping of them there shall be a great reward, Psal. 19, 11. if in the midst of full importunate invitations to life we will choose death; we are indeed worthy, as the wise man speaks, to take part with it, Wisd. 1. 16. our crimes are hereby increas'd to a monstrous bulk, and also depriv'd of that veil and shelter which darkness and ignorance would have given them. And a vicious Christian may have cause at the last day to wish that he had studied the Alcoran rather than the Bible. His sensualities might then have pleaded, that they were but the anticipating his Paradise, taking up that before hand, which his Religion propos'd to him as his summum bonum, his final and highest aim. But with what confusion must a Christian then appear, whose institution obliges him to mortify the flesh, and yet has made it the business of his life, not only to satisfy, but even to enrage, and enflame its appetites? that has set up a counter-discipline to that of the Gospel he professes; and when that requires austerities and self-denials, to

reduce corrupt nature to a tameness and subjection, has not only pull'd off the bridle, but us'd the spur; contriv'd Arts to debauch even corruption it self; and has forc'd his reluctant nature upon studied and artificial leudness? Such men may be thought to have read the Scripture with no other design but to be sure to run counter to it; that by informing themselves of Gods will they may know the more exactly how to affront and contradict it.

47. NAY, so it is, too many unto malice add contempt; are not content only sullenly to resist its Precepts, but despise and revile them also, arraign the Wisdom of God, and pronounce the Divine Laws to be weak arid impertinent; lay their Scenes of ridiculous mirth in the Bible; rally in the Sacred Dialect, and play the Buffoons with the most serious thing in the world. An impious licentiousness which is now grown to that height, that it is one of the wonders of Gods long-suffering that there are not as many eminent instances of the vengeance, as there are of the guilt. I have formerly complain'd of it, and must still crave leave to do so. It is indeed so spreading an infection, that we can never be sufficiently arm'd against it. Some degrees of it have tainted many who have not utterly renoued their reverence for the Bible: there being those who in their solemn moods own it as Gods Word, and profess they must finally stand or fall by its verdict; who, yet in their jocular humours make light and irreverent applications of its phrases and sentences, furnish out their little jests in its attire, and use it as if they thought it good for nothing else.

48. AND certainly this abuse in men that own the Bible, is infinitely more monstrous than in those who defy it: the latter look on it as a common thing, and use it as such: but for those who confess it Sacred thus to prostitute it, is a flat contradiction as much against the

rules of Discourse as Religion: 'tis to offer the same abuse to Christ in his Word, which the rude Souldiers did to his Person; to bow the knee before it, and yet expose it as an object of scorn and laughter. But sure there cannot be two things more inconsistent, than the avowing it to be dictated by God in order to the most important concern of man, and yet debate it to the vilest purposes; make it the drudge and hackney to our sportful humours, and bring it out as the Philistines did Samson, only to make us merry, Jud. 16. 25.

49. INDEED one would wonder how that should become a proper instrument for that purpose, that those doctrines of righteousness, temperance, and judgement to come (every where scatter'd thro' that Book) which set Heathen Felix a trembling, should set Christians a laughing: and yet should men cite the same things and phrases out of another Author, there would be no jest in it. It seems therefore that the spirit and essence in this sort of wit lyes in the profaness. How absurd is it then for men that do not utterly abjure Religion to affect this impious sort of raillery, which has nothing but daring wickedness to recommend it? for certainly of all the ways of discourse that ever pretended to wit, this has the least claim to it.

50. WHAT strength of reason, or height of fancy is there in repeating of phrases and fragments of Books, when what they would say, they might much more properly express in their own words? In any other instance but this of the Bible, it would pass rather for a defect than an excess of wit. But that which I suppose renders it so taking, is, that it is the cheapest expedient for men to arrive to that reputation. Men, that cannot go to the cost of any thing that is truly ingenious, can by this means immediately commence wits; if they can but charge their memories with half a dozen Texts, they need no other furniture for the Trade: these mangled and transposed will be ready at all turns, and render

them applauded by those who have no other treasure of wit, but its opposition to Piety. But would God, men would look a little before them, and consider what the final reckoning will be for such divertisements; and if the whole world be an unequal change for a Soul, what a miserable merchant is he that barter his for a bald insipid jest? Such as a sober man would avoid were there no sin in it.

51. I know men are apt to Batter themselves, that these lighter frolicks will pass for nothing, so long as they do not seriously and maliciously oppose Gods Word: but I fear they will find God in earnest, tho' they be in jest. He that has magnified his Word above all things, Psal. 138. 2. cannot brook that we should make it vile and cheap, play and daily with it. And if it were a capital crime to convert any of the perfume of the Sanctuary to common use, Exod. 30. 32. can we think God can be pleas'd to see his more Sacred Word the Theme of our giddy mirth, and have his own words ecchoed to him in profane drollery?

52. BUT besides 'tis to be consider'd, that this wanton liberty is a step to the more solemn and deliberate contempt of Gods word: custom do's strangely prescribe to us, and he that a while has us'd any thing irreverently will at last bring his practice into argument, and conclude that there is no reverence due to it. God knows we are naturally too apt to have slight and easy apprehensions of Sacred things, and had need to use all Arts and Instruments to impress an awe upon our minds.

53. IT will sure then be very unsafe for us to trifle with them, and by so undue a familiarity draw on that contempt which we should make it our care to avoid. The Wise Man says, he that contemns small things, shall fall by little and little, Eccl. 19. 1. And tho' no degree of irreverence towards God or his Word, can be call'd a small thing absolutely consider'd, yet comparatively with the more exorbitant

degrees it may: and yet that smaller is the seed and parent of the greatest. It is so in all sins: the kingdom of Satan, like that of God, may be compar'd to a grain of mustard seed, Mat. 31. 31. which tho' little in it self is mighty in its increase.

54. NO man ever yet began at the top of villany, but the advance is still gradual from one degree to another; each commission smoothing and glibbing the way to the next. He that accustoms in his ordinary discourse to use the sacred Name of God with as little sentiment and reverence as he do's that of his neighbour or servant; that makes it his common by-word, and cries Lord and God upon every the lightest occasion of exclamation or wonder, this man has a very short step to the using it in oaths, and upon all frivolous occasions; and he that swears vainly is at no great distance from swearing falsely. It is the same in this instance of the Scriptures: He that indulges his wit to rally with them will soon come to think them such tame things that he may down-right scorn them: And when he is arriv'd to that, then he must pick quarrels to justify it, till at last he arrive even to the height of enmity.

55. LET every man therefore take heed of setting so much as one step in this fatal circle; guard himself against the first insinuation of this guilt: and when a jest offers it self as a temptation, let him balance that with a sober thought, and consider whether the jest can quit the cost of the profanation. Let him possess his mind with an habitual awe, take up the Bible with solemn thoughts, and other kind of apprehensions than any human Author: and if he habituate himself to this reverence, every clause and phrase of it that occurs to his mind will be apter to excite him to devout ejaculations than vain laughter.

56. IT is reported of our excellent Prince, King Edward the sixth; that when in his Council Chamber, a Paper that was call'd for happen'd to

lie out of reach, and the Person concern'd to produce it took a Bible that lay by, and standing upon it reach'd down the Paper: the King observing what was done ran himself to the place, and taking the Bible in his hands kissed it, and laid it up again. Of this it were a very desirable moral that Princes, and all persons in authority, would take care not to permit any to raise themselves by either a hypocritical or profane trampling upon holy things. But besides that, a more general application offers its self; that all men of what condition soever should both themselves abstain from every action that has the appearance of a contempt of the holy Scripture; and also when they observe it in others; discountenance the insolence: and by their words and actions give Testimony of the veneration which they have for that holy Book, they see others so wretchedly despise.

57. BUT above all, let him who reads the Scripture, seriously set himself to the practice of it, and daily examine how he proceeds in it: he that diligently do's this will not be much at leisure to sport with it: he will scarce meet with a Text which will not give him cause of reflection, and provide him work within his own breast: every duty injoin'd will prompt him to examine how he has perform'd: every sin forbidden will call him to recollect how guilty he has been; every pathetick strain of devotion will kindle his zeal, or at least upbraid his coldness; every heroick example will excite his emulation. In a word, every part of Scripture will, if duly apply'd, contribute to some good and excellent end. And when a thing is proper for such noble purposes, can it be the part of a wise man to apply it only to mean and trivial? Would any but an Idiot wast that Sovereign Liquor in the washing of his feet, which was given him to expell poison from his heart? And are not we guilty of the like folly when we apply Gods word to serve only a ludicrous humour; and make ourselves merry with that

which was design'd for the most serious and most important purpose, the salvation of our Souls. And indeed who ever takes any lower aim than that, and the vertues preparatory to it in his study of Scripture, extremely debases it.

58. LET us therefore keep a steady eye upon that mark, and press towards it as the Apostle did, Phil. 3. 14. walk by that rule the holy Scripture proposes; faithfully and diligently observe its precepts, that we may finally partake it promises. To this end continually pray we, in the words of our holy mother the Church, unto Almighty God, who has caus'd all holy Scripture to be written for our learning; that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of his holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting Life, which he has given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ.

THE CONTENTS.

SECTION.

Sect. 1. The several methods of Gods communicating the knowledge of himself.

Pag. 1.

Sect. 2. The divine Original, Endearments; and Authority of the Holy Scripture.

p. 9.

Sect. 3. The Subject Matter treated of in the holy Scripture is excellent, as is also its end and deign.

p. 63.

Sect. 4. The Custody of the holy Scripture is a privilege and right of the Christian Church, and every member of it, which cannot without impiety to God, and injustice unto it and them, be taken away or impeach'd.

p. 123.

Sect 5. The Scripture has great propriety and fitness towards the attainment of its excellent end.

p. 145.

Sect. 6. the suffrage of the primitive Christian Church, concerning the propriety and fitness which the Scripture has, towards the attainment of its excellent end.

p. 165.

Sect. 7. Historical reflections upon the events which have happen'd in the Church, since the withdrawing of the holy Scripture.

p. 180.

Sect. 8. Necessary Cautions to be us'd in the reading of the Scripture.

p. 193.

FINIS.

Index of Scripture References

Genesis

[1]1:31 [2]2:1-25 [3]2:7 [4]3:15 [5]4:4 [6]5:15 [7]9:13
[8]14:1-24 [9]15:18-21 [10]18:12 [11]18:18 [12]18:25
[13]22:11 [14]28:16 [15]37:19

Exodus

[16]4:14 [17]8:19 [18]14:12 [19]14:20 [20]15:11 [21]18:11
[22]20:1-26 [23]30:32 [24]31:18 [25]32:4 [26]34:29 [27]45:19

Leviticus

[28]11:4

Numbers

[29]12:1 [30]20:24 [31]23:19 [32]23:19

Deuteronomy

[33]6:1-25 [34]11:9 [35]11:21 [36]13:1 [37]21:20 [38]28:1
[39]28:1-13 [40]28:1-68 [41]28:1-68 [42]28:65-67 [43]30:14
[44]30:19 [45]31:19

Judges

[46]16:21 [47]16:25 [48]18:24

1 Samuel

[49]11:2 [50]15:17

2 Samuel

[51]12:7

1 Kings

[52]21:19 [53]21:23

2 Kings

[54]15:10 [55]22:10

Nehemiah

[56]1:18

Job

[57]4:19 [58]5:13 [59]19:25 [60]20:22

Psalms

[61]1:2 [62]1:6 [63]12:6 [64]15:4 [65]19:7 [66]19:7

[67]19:10 [68]19:11 [69]22:1 [70]22:8 [71]22:16-17

[72]22:18 [73]25:9 [74]25:14 [75]27:10 [76]34:8 [77]34:9

[78]37:19 [79]48:2 [80]50:10 [81]51:4 [82]55:22 [83]55:23

[84]58:11 [85]62:9 [86]69:11 [87]73:1-28 [88]78:5

[89]95:1-11 [90]106:15 [91]109:1-31 [92]119:1-176 [93]119:24

[94]119:50 [95]119:72 [96]119:97 [97]119:99 [98]119:99

[99]119:99-100 [100]119:105 [101]126:3 [102]138:2 [103]140:11

[104]147:20

Proverbs

[105]3:16 [106]3:35 [107]4:1 [108]9:11 [109]10:3 [110]10:3

[111]10:7 [112]10:7 [113]10:22 [114]13:25 [115]14:8

[116]14:13 [117]31:31

Ecclesiastes

[118]7:29 [119]12:13-14 [120]19:1

Isaiah

[121]1:3 [122]1:11 [123]1:13 [124]2:4 [125]5:3 [126]7:14

[127]8:20 [128]14:20-21 [129]17:15 [130]18:20 [131]19:1-25

[132]29:11 [133]44:1-28 [134]44:25 [135]44:28 [136]48:22

[137]49:15 [138]49:15 [139]53:5 [140]53:9 [141]53:10

[142]53:11 [143]57:15 [144]57:15 [145]59:5 [146]61:1-11

[147]65:1

Jeremiah

[148]2:11 [149]2:13 [150]5:22 [151]7:4 [152]7:9-11 [153]8:7

[154]10:1-25 [155]31:31 [156]41:20

Ezekiel

[157]2:5 [158]18:29 [159]18:31-32

Daniel

[160]7:13 [161]9:26

Hosea

[162]2:19 [163]4:9 [164]11:4 [165]11:8

Habakkuk

[166]1:13 [167]2:2 [168]2:6

Zechariah

[169]11:17 [170]12:10

Malachi

[171]1:14

Matthew

[172]2:5 [173]4:4 [174]4:7 [175]4:10 [176]5:1 [177]5:11-12

[178]5:16 [179]5:18 [180]5:34 [181]5:48 [182]6:7 [183]6:32

[184]6:33 [185]7:7 [186]7:11 [187]7:21-27 [188]10:2

[189]12:34 [190]12:42 [191]13:1-58 [192]13:8 [193]13:11

[194]13:14 [195]13:19 [196]13:47 [197]15:6 [198]15:6

[199]15:14 [200]16:18 [201]16:18 [202]17:1 [203]19:8

[204]19:16-24 [205]21:25 [206]21:36 [207]23:1-39 [208]23:23

[209]24:11 [210]24:24 [211]25:14 [212]25:21 [213]25:29

[214]26:8 [215]26:26 [216]26:29 [217]26:65 [218]27:43

[219]31:31

Mark

[220]9:48 [221]10:19 [222]16:15

Luke

[223]4:18 [224]10:16 [225]10:26 [226]11:52 [227]11:52

[228]12:47 [229]13:5 [230]13:28 [231]16:31 [232]16:31

[233]18:12 [234]24:13 [235]24:49

John

[236]1:1 [237]3:2 [238]3:16 [239]4:22 [240]5:39 [241]5:39
[242]5:43 [243]7:1-52 [244]7:17 [245]8:9 [246]8:34
[247]10:1 [248]11:1-57 [249]11:1-57 [250]12:48 [251]12:48
[252]13:13 [253]15:13 [254]20:10 [255]20:31

Acts

[256]2:1-12 [257]2:13 [258]4:20 [259]4:22 [260]4:24
[261]5:18 [262]5:28 [263]5:40 [264]7:1-60 [265]7:38
[266]8:1-40 [267]8:26-39 [268]10:43 [269]10:45-46 [270]12:22
[271]13:27 [272]15 [273]17:11 [274]19:19

Romans

[275]1:7 [276]1:16 [277]1:16 [278]2:7 [279]3:2 [280]3:2
[281]3:4 [282]6:1-23 [283]8:17 [284]8:17 [285]8:18
[286]8:18 [287]8:28 [288]9:4 [289]10:18 [290]11:8 [291]13:4
[292]13:7

1 Corinthians

[293]1:1 [294]1:2 [295]2:6 [296]2:6 [297]2:14 [298]6:10
[299]7:29 [300]9:16-17 [301]9:17 [302]10:13 [303]10:16
[304]11:29 [305]13:12 [306]14:16 [307]15:28

2 Corinthians

[308]1:20 [309]2:16 [310]4:4 [311]4:5 [312]4:6 [313]4:11
[314]7:1-16 [315]8:21 [316]8:21 [317]10:5 [318]11:5
[319]11:28 [320]12:16

Galatians

[321]1:2 [322]1:8 [323]1:12 [324]2:7 [325]3:24 [326]3:25
[327]4:7 [328]5:19-20 [329]5:22

Ephesians

[330]1:1 [331]1:14 [332]3:6 [333]4:23 [334]6:13

Philippians

[335]1:1 [336]1:15 [337]3:14

Colossians

[338]2:3 [339]2:15 [340]4:16

1 Thessalonians

[341]2:4 [342]4:17 [343]5:21 [344]5:22 [345]5:22 [346]5:27

2 Thessalonians

[347]2:11

1 Timothy

[348]1:11 [349]3:15 [350]3:15 [351]3:16 [352]4:8 [353]4:9

[354]6:20

2 Timothy

[355]3:15 [356]3:15

Titus

[357]1:3

Hebrews

[358]1:1-2 [359]4:12 [360]4:12 [361]4:14 [362]6:6 [363]6:16

[364]9:14 [365]10:1 [366]10:16 [367]10:27 [368]10:27

[369]10:29 [370]12:9 [371]12:10 [372]12:29

James

[373]1:1 [374]2:19 [375]3:6 [376]3:17 [377]4:7

1 Peter

[378]1:1 [379]1:9 [380]1:12 [381]1:15 [382]1:25 [383]3:15

2 Peter

[384]1:1-21 [385]1:3 [386]1:4 [387]2:12 [388]3:16

1 John

[389]2:12-14 [390]3:2 [391]3:8

2 John

[392]1:1

Revelation

[393]1:4 [394]2:10 [395]6:14 [396]10:6 [397]10:9 [398]14:6

[399]20:21 [400]21:14 [401]22:11 [402]22:19

Wisdom of Solomon

[403]1:16 [404]2:24 [405]11:26 [406]12:26

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