

Wm. McCallister

M I R R O R,

REPRESENTING SOME

Religious Characters

OF THE

P R E S E N T T I M E S.

BY MR. JOHN ANDERSON.

All seek their own, not the Things which are Jesus Christ's.

PHILIP. ii. 21.



P H I L A D E L P H I A :

Printed by YOUNG, STEWART, and M'CULLOCH, the
Corner of *Chestnut* and *Second-streets*.

M.DCC.LXXXVI.

1786

P R E F A C E.

THIS account of some Religious Characters of the Times was published some years ago in Britain. It is now reprinted as suitable to the state of religion in this country. He must be a stranger indeed in the Church of Christ, who is not sensible how much these characters abound. Others, no less contrary to sound doctrine and the power of godliness, might have been pointed out; but these are selected, because they are such as the many in this generation either boast of, or consider as harmless. The reader is not to expect a full discussion of the various subjects here treated of, but only such an explanation of some prevailing evils as may be helpful to Christians in their endeavours to avoid them.

The form of dialogue was chosen, because it appeared most convenient for bringing together a variety of miscellaneous remarks, and for the refutation of some opinions which are often mentioned in conversation, though seldom to be met with in books.

E S S A Y, &c.

THE principal religious characters of the present age seem to be, the fashionable Deist, the Temporizer, the selfish Devotee, the Waverer, and the serious but desponding Christian.

I. THE *Deists*. They own the being of God, but deny the divine authority of the scriptures, or that the Bible teaches the only way in which a sinner can be saved. The causes of the plentiful growth of Deists, seem to be the following:

1. IGNORANCE. Such as reject Christianity without having read the bible with attention, or without having attained any distinct knowledge of its doctrines; such as think no credit is due to the bible because some of the facts have been represented as contradictory to one another, or set in a ridiculous light; such as have satisfied themselves with considering these parts only which appeared the most liable to exception without ever having taken, or seriously endeavoured to take, a connected view of the whole: all these are Deists from ignorance.

2. PRIDE. Those who, accounting their own reason and virtue sufficient to direct their steps and secure their happiness, see no need of a revelation for these purposes; who reject revelation because it is not communicated to as many as they think proper,—to the ancient heathens, or modern Indians;

who will not yield their assent to the doctrines of it, because they are such as reason could never discover, nor when discovered account for; who, in fine, reject the bible, because it exposes the weakness and depravity of human nature: all these are Deists from pride.

3. Vicious habits and dispositions in general. Those who think some other plan of morality more conducive to the happiness of man than which is laid down in the scriptures; who imagine the spiritual exercises and enjoyments recommended by the bible, are vain or unattainable; who fancy there is no need of any other guide in morals than their own taste, or feelings; who would rather have the scriptures false than their own depraved inclinations mortified; who condemn the bible, because the bible condemns them: all these are Deists, for the sake of their vicious habits and dispositions.

To these causes of infidelity, (besides, what is the root of them all, the natural enmity of man's heart against the purity of the scriptures,) we may add, the works of some elegant writers, and the example of the greater part of those who pique themselves on the superiority of their taste, their politeness, or their high rank. We do not think that infidelity in itself, is favourable to genius or to good taste; for it is truth alone that gives vigour to the one, or stability to the other. Sensible of this, such writers on the side of infidelity as are any way remarkable for these qualities, have always taken care, in the first place, to acquire a reputation by illustrating some useful truths, which are indeed perfectly agreeable to Christianity; but which they have attempted, by oblique reflections or by satyrical hints, to contrast with some part of Christianity.

It is another cause of the prevalence of Deism in the present age, that many who are called Christians, do not receive the truths and ordinances of the bible

as from God : they consider them as harmless things belonging to the religion of their country ; but they cannot see it any way necessary to adhere very strictly to them, or to engage in the zealous defence of them. They do not mean, for their part, *to suffer for the cause of Christ*. It is enough for them to hold a kind of system of natural religion, with which while they amuse themselves, they more and more lose sight of the evidence of Christianity. For when men have been long obstinate in rejecting his word, he at last suffers them to wander vainly in their own council, Psal. lxxxvi. 11, 12.

THE Sadducees, who were the Deists of the Jewish nation, never became very numerous till a little before the last destruction of Jerusalem. The general prevalence of Deism ought to alarm Christian kingdoms and commonwealths.

AS Lorenzo and Lælius, in a summer morning, were taking a walk in some fields belonging to the former, and were enjoying that freedom of conversation which naturally arose from the sincerity of friendship, they at last came to an eminence, where they had a full view of Lorenzo's estate ; on which he began to congratulate himself upon the improvements he had made, the profits he had reaped or expected to reap, and the refined pleasures which, he said, he tasted : " These, are solid enjoyments : these are elegant satisfactions." Lælius, thinking he was too much transported with such transitory things, and that he was too much like the covetous wretch who said to himself, *Soul, take thine ease, thou hast goods laid up for many years*, could not forbear interrupting his reverie, and suggesting a plain, but faithful and friendly admonition, in the following manner :

LÆLIUS. There is no doubt, a degree of satisfaction in these things which is lawful ; first, as they are instances of our Creator's bounty, *who giveth us all things*

things richly to enjoy : and, next, as they are the effects of a commendable industry, and proofs of some attention to the duties of the station wherein Providence hath placed us; for if we have been disposed and enabled to make a better use and application of our talents than some others, the praise is due to that God who gives us life, and breath, and all things. But we should still remember that these earthly enjoyments are no suitable portion to the soul; and that, in a little, we are to leave them, and to enter into a new state of being in which we have no reason to look for such sensible objects.

LOR. The Supreme Being will, I hope, in a future state be friendly and beneficent, as he is at present.

LÆL. Nothing is more essential to our idea of God than this;—That he is one who {delights in virtue or in righteousness. Hence his favour is annexed to virtue, and his hatred to vice: which hatred must be according to the degree of its object. But how common is it to see the man of distinguished wickedness arrayed in scarlet, and faring sumptuously every day; while he who is virtuous, or at least far less vicious, is clothed in rags and oppressed with poverty: a convincing proof, that it is, by no means, in proportion to the abundance and variety of a person's outward enjoyments, that he shares in the favour of God. The Supreme Disposer of human affairs is often seen to indulge a great degree of prosperity to those very states which he has doomed to a sudden and signal destruction: witness Carthage, Tyre, Babylon. History affords examples without number. In like manner, a person may be all his days in affluent circumstances, and yet not be certain but that, in a future scene, he may appear to have been all along an object of God's displeasure. Even in the ordinary course of providence, we cannot certainly conclude from our prosperity to-day, that we shall be prosperous to-morrow: far less can we infer from
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the kindness of providence in this life, that we shall not be miserable in the life to come.

LOR. It seems most reasonable to conceive of God as a mild and benevolent Being, who wants his creatures to be happy : sure then he does not observe all our faults with extreme severity.

LÆL. Let us try to consider the matter impartially. You will grant that God has appointed laws to the moral as well as to the natural world. A law suiting a reasonable creature must have rewards and punishments annexed to it. Now the same goodness of God that prescribed these laws, that delights in the obedience given to them, that desires in rational creatures the perfection and the happiness with which that obedience is connected ; even that very goodness must attend to the execution of these laws, must resent every instance of disobedience to them, and, at least, withhold its favours from the transgressors. Consider, Lorenzo, that his favour is our life, and to experience the loss of it, must be as death. Besides, we see a great deal of misery actually taking place among mankind. It is inconsistent with all that we understand of God's wisdom and power, to suppose that this or any other thing takes place against his will. Whatever misery, therefore, we ourselves or our fellow-creatures endure, we may be certain, that neither the appointment nor the infliction of it is inconsistent with the goodness of God.

LOR. The miseries of the present life are only for the chastisement and correction of mankind.

LÆL. Be it so ; yet the fact shews one thing incontestibly, *i. e.* That there are reasons which may make it agreeable to the goodness of God, to inflict punishment : you have mentioned one of these reasons : but for any thing we know, there may be others of equal or of greater importance : others which, for any thing nature can say with certainty, may render it necessary that we should be punished

at last in a manner of which we have no example in the present state.

LOR. The modes of religion are various: the substance of it is the same in all ages and in all countries. I am of the same opinion with the poet :

For modes of faith let graceless zealots fight ;
His can't be wrong, whose life is in the right

LÆL. But when may one's life be justly said to be in the right ?

LOR. When he does to others as he would be done by ; when he assists or instructs them ; when he acknowledges and corrects the faults himself may have fallen into.

LÆL. But is it no part of a good life to have a chief regard to God who gave us our being and all our enjoyments ? The benefits that men receive from one another lay them under obligations to do good to one another. But what are all these obligations compared with those we are under to him who is the *God of our life, and the length of our days.* Trust me, Lorenzo, unbiassed reason will pronounce your life entirely in the wrong, unless you are habitually remembering God ; unless you fear and love him ; unless you seek the knowledge of his will, walk according to it, and do all you can to make others esteem him. Hence we see in what sense we ought to understand, what the poet says concerning a person's faith,

His can't be wrong whose life is in the right ;

taking one's *life* here to signify our inward disposition as well as our outward behaviour ; our regard to God as well as to man : for if a person's life, so understood, is in the right, it can not proceed from a wrong, but from a right faith ; that is, from just views of God, as well as a proper concern for our neighbour's welfare. Besides, when we speak of what is acceptable to God, our secret principles and motives impenetrable to our fellow-creatures, which are much more to be attended to than our external conduct :

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the first thing to be enquired, is, Whether we are actuated by the love of God, by a willing submission of heart to his authority, by a single regard to his glory? and next, Whether our hearts are free from hatred, envy, vain-glory, or any other inordinate affection toward our neighbour? Whether we love our neighbour for God's sake? If we are deficient in these or the like internal principles of action, it is a poor vain imagination for us to think our life right before God, *who searcheth the heart.*

As to your observation, that the different modes of religion are, in substance, all the same; how far the various forms of superstition in different ages and countries may be resolved into the same general principles, might be a subject of curious and not unprofitable enquiry: but without any elaborate disquisition, it is plain that Christianity is essentially different from all other religions, and even from natural religion itself.

LOR. You surprize me, Lælius;—Christianity seems, indeed, to be more refined and free from superstition than the religion of the ancient Greeks and Romans, or that of the Mahometans; but, by the confession of many eminent writers on the side of Christianity, it is only an improvement on natural religion.

LÆL. Christianity is not contrary to pure Theism or natural religion, as it certainly is to idolatry and superstition. But Christianity discovers much concerning God and concerning the way of salvation from sin, which is far beyond the sphere of what is commonly called natural religion. That religion never taught any thing like the doctrine of God manifesting himself, and communicating his favours to poor sinners by a Mediator, who is himself the Most High God. To a mere moral philosopher nothing can appear more absurd than this proposition; *That God is in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing*

imputing their trespasses to them. Neither Socrates, nor Plato, nor Aristotle was known to use such language. The philosopher could have but an obscure notion of *God reconciling the world to himself*: he might conjecture that it was a strange, out-of-the-way expression for *reclaiming mankind from vice*. But when he came to read, *not imputing their trespasses to them*, he would be apt to ask, whether it were not downright nonsense? For to whom should a person's own trespasses be imputed but to himself? At best, he must look upon it as a paradoxical, harsh and improper phraseology for a very plain idea, that of *pardoning sin, or forbearing to punish it*; though still he would think *pardoning* the world but a very poor way of *reclaiming* it. Above all, the very first words of the sentence, *God is in Christ*, would absolutely puzzle and confound him. He would not be able to conceive how God can be in Christ; or how God, by being in Christ, reconciles the world to himself. Indeed, Lorenzo, the duties that are most commonly inculcated in the New Testament are utterly unintelligible on the supposition that they are, in substance, no other than what we are informed of by natural religion; such as these; *Putting on Christ, receiving him, walking in him, praying in the Spirit, putting off the old man, eating the flesh and drinking the blood of the Son of God*. Were Christianity materially the same with natural religion, men might attain a sufficient knowledge of it by the diligent use of their natural faculties without any special or supernatural illumination. But this is contrary to the scripture itself, 1 Cor. xi. 14. *The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, they are foolishness to him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.* Mat. xiii. 11. *It is given to you,* said Christ to his disciples, *to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.* Mat. xvi. 17. *Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art*

art thou Simon Bar-jona, for flesh and blood (an expression denoting whatever naturally and essentially belongs to man) hath not revealed it to thee, but my Father who is in heaven.

FARTHER, Lorenzo, Christianity affords a vastly more glorious display of the divine perfections than the religion of nature. That religion says, God is so just that he will give every one his due. But, says Christianity, He is so just, that rather than let the sins of those whom he had determined to save, pass with impunity, he chose to make his own Son suffer for their sins; for *it pleased the Lord to bruise him, to put him to grief, and to make his soul an offering for sin.* The religion of nature says, God is so true, that he never will deceive his creatures: but Christianity declares, that God is so true and faithful, that rather than one jot or tittle of his word should fail, he would not spare the Son of his love, but made him sin and a curse though he knew no sin, that the scriptures might be fulfilled. In the same manner, we might go on to shew how much superior the testimony of revelation is to that of nature with respect to the other perfections of the Deity.

LOR. You speak so mystically that I cannot understand you.

LÆL. I endeavour to be plain. Take heed, Lorenzo, lest, while you seem not to understand revelation, you be, in reality despising it. You are at least a Theist; you believe a God: Consider that you cannot shew a greater contempt of him than by rejecting the only revelation he has given to mankind.

LOR. I have heard of a great many systems of religion; each of which, according to its votaries, came down from heaven; while some find their account in propagating pious frauds.

LÆL. Do you mean the systems of the ancient philosophers? They ascribed their pretended wisdom, not to the kindness of heaven, but to their

own industry and penetration. So well did they succeed in exposing the vanity and absurdity of one another's systems, that the perusal of all their writings would only serve to convince us that they were all in the wrong. Besides, there was never a philosophical system so much adapted to the capacities and situations of the bulk of mankind, as in any age or country to have any proper influence on the minds of the people. Do you mean the systems of the Bonzes in China or the Magi in Persia? These claim no other original than the authority of Fohi or Zoroaster: nor do we learn that Zoroaster or Fohi pretended to be favoured with divine revelations: they enjoined their observances on their followers in their own names only. Or do you mean the system of Mahomet? Consider the life of Mahomet: Consider his manner of propagating his religion: review the trivial conceits, the inconsistencies, and the palpable falsehoods of his Koran; and then say, whether Mahometanism will bear a comparison with the religion of the Bible. Besides, by acknowledging the authority of our JESUS as a prophet, Mahomet has for ever overthrown his own; since the testimony of Jesus, that his ordinances were to be observed till the end of the world, destroys the pretensions of Mahomet. Or farther, with some wits of modern days, would you prefer the traditions of the untutored Indians, who expect at their death to be wafted to certain green islands, where they shall sit under the shady trees, and drink wine out of the skulls of their enemies; and as they have no idea of rational society, their dogs shall bear them company?—But why should we insist? Know you a composition that bears such evident marks of a divine original as the scriptures? Or while it speaks in the name of the only living and true God who created heaven and earth, carries such conviction of its truth to the conscience?

FALSE religions become ridiculous, but Christianity becomes more venerable by the progress of true knowledge. Every science attests the superior excellence of the Bible. For example, geography gives its testimony to the accuracy of scripture narration by shewing how exactly it corresponds to the true situation of places: Ancient history, where it is not plainly fabulous or inconsistent with itself, agrees with that of the Old and New Testament; while modern history verifies what is there foretold. Natural philosophy shews how justly the system of the universe or the productions of the earth are alluded to or described in scripture. In fine, true criticism points out the propriety, the majestic simplicity, the native elegance, and pathetic energy of the inspired writings †.

WITH regard to persons finding their account in promoting particular systems of religion, it may be sufficient to observe that it was not Christianity itself, but the abuses and corruptions of it that ever served the purposes of avarice and ambition. Read the Bible, and you cannot fail to see how unjust it is to blame Christianity for the pride, for the aspiring or interested views of too many priests and prelates.

LOR. I am perplexed with the different readings of the Old and New Testament; with the different opinions as to the degree of inspiration under which the sacred penmen wrote; and with the different interpretations of many passages.

LÆL.

† The classical writers of ancient Greece and Rome, as might be expected from the time in which they lived and from the subjects of which they treat, mention many of the facts recorded in scripture, and throw light upon many passages of it, by the view they give us of the political state of nations, of ancient languages, customs and manners. It is, therefore, a remarkable dispensation of Providence that so many of their productions have been preserved, and in almost every civilized country, are accounted the standards of taste and of elegant composition.

LÆL. The spots in the sun's bright orb hinder him not from communicating light and heat to the world; Nor will the variations of different copies of the scriptures hinder them from being profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction and instruction in righteousness. None of the leading and distinguishing truths of Christianity depend upon a word, but are fully displayed and frequently repeated through the whole Bible: so that we can be at no loss to find them in the most incorrect copies, and in the worst translations. No body questions whether Homer's genius and knowledge of human nature appear in the Iliad and the Odessey; or Virgil's judgment and delicacy of taste in the Georgics and the Eneid; though the variations in the reading of those poems are incomparably greater and more numerous than the variations in the reading of the scriptures. And shall we suppose that a few blunders of a transcriber of the Old and New Testament may hinder us from discerning the authority, holiness, wisdom, power and mercy of God so peculiarly displayed in the sacred pages? Surely, the character of God is more uniformly and strongly marked in his word, than the characters of Homer and of Virgil in their poems. Indeed, there is no comparison; for the manner of expression or of arrangement is almost all that characterises the poets; whereas God's word is characterised by the great and glorious things that it reveals. Farther, the same wisdom and goodness of God that bestowed this revelation on mankind, we may assure ourselves, will take care, by a special providence, to preserve it in such purity as is necessary to make it answer the end for which it was bestowed. Hence we have good reason to believe, not only that the various readings are mostly immaterial; but likewise that, in every instance, the true reading is preserved

preserved somewhere, and may be found out by a careful collation of copies, by attending to the scope and connection, by observing the analogy of faith, and by the use of other means.

As to the degree in which the penmen of scripture were inspired, it is sufficient for us to believe that the matter which they spoke and wrote, as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, was only what was necessary to constitute the perfect rule of the church's faith and practice; and that they expressed that matter, under the same infallible guidance, by the fittest words which the language they wrote in could supply. How far the holy Spirit made use of the particular natural geniuses of the penmen in those divine compositions, is rather a matter of curiosity than of importance or edification.

WHY are you stumbled at the misinterpretation of the scriptures? The works of creation and the ways of providence are often misinterpreted as well as the scriptures; so that this, like too many of the objections of Deism, will serve the cause of Atheism as well. Turn away your attention from jarring interpretations of the scriptures to the scriptures themselves: there you may find such plain passages as he that runs may read and understand. And if you seek in earnest to increase in this which is the best kind of knowledge, you will by degrees obtain more and more satisfaction as to the meaning of passages that are more obscure. Then instead of being perplexed with the various interpretations of authors, you will be enabled to make a proper use of them.

LOR. It is not improbable, but that God may be delighted with the various modes of worshipping him which take place in the world.

LÆI. The love of variety is owing to the imperfection of our nature. Wanting satisfaction in ourselves, we look for it in other things; missing it in
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one of these things, we seek it in another: disappointed in our expectation from that, we have recourse to a third, and so on without end. Carried to excess, this passion is exceedingly hurtful: it is a levity of temper which unfits one for any useful employment or any laudable pursuit: a passion, surely, never to be ascribed to the supreme Being who is necessarily happy in the contemplation of his own perfections.

As we know not what is acceptable to God, unless he teach us; as both the manner and matter of our worship should express our regard to his supreme authority; so it is most reasonable to believe that he hath himself appointed the manner in which he is to be worshipped. If this be the case, then worshipping God in any other way than that which he has appointed, instead of doing him acceptable service, must be a transgression of his law; and a transgression so much the more aggravated that it is committed under the pretext of paying him homage. And shall we consider the supreme Being as delighted with the variety of ways in which his creatures trample on his law and commit rebellion?

LOR. Our religion is for the most part no other thing than the prejudice of education.

LÆL. What then! Do you mean that it is a sufficient reason for dropping our religion, that we have been taught it in our infancy? This can be no reason against Christianity, or indeed against any thing at all, being a circumstance compatible alike with truth and with falsehood. The word prejudice may be applied to any opinion whether true or false which we are led to entertain without rational conviction. The real errors in which we are educated are always prejudices as long as we adhere to them; because we relinquish them as soon as we begin to reason right about them. On the other hand, even the truths in
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which we are educated may be called predjudices while we are ignorant of the reasons of them; but they become our genuine principles when those reasons are discerned. Properly speaking, prejudices respect the manner in which persons assent to propositions, not the propositions themselves.

LOR. I am perplexed whenever I turn my thoughts to the subject of religion: I am apt to say with Cato, that—Shadows, clouds, and darkness rest upon it.

LÆL. The reason why most people find so little satisfaction in their enquiries concerning religion is the want of a due sense of its importance. If ever you would have any solid, satisfying views of religion, you must look upon yourself as a poor and miserable creature; you must have a felt conviction that none of the creatures, neither the necessaries nor the conveniences of life, nor your personal qualities, nor your friends and relations can help and relieve you; but God Almighty can: he can easily make himself known to you as your refuge and your portion. The great, the tremendous question is, Whether he *will* do so or not? The scriptures, (I declare it without the least hesitation) in proportion as you discern more clearly the internal evidence of their divine authority; and as you become more acquainted with the *great things of God's law*; the scriptures alone will give you an answer more and more satisfying, clear and comfortable.

CONSIDER yourself as in the sight and presence of God who knows the heart, and who is in a little to be your judge; and then ask your own heart the important question, whether you have diligently perused the scriptures; and having fairly examined the external and especially the internal evidence of their divine authority; whether you are satisfied in your conscience that there is nothing at all in it? Ask your
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own heart, whether you are absolutely sure that the account given in scripture, of the entrance of sin among mankind, of the present deplorable state of human nature, and of the manifestation of God's holiness and mercy in the salvation of sinners by a divine Redeemer, be all a cunningly devised fable?

OBSERVE the present state of the world; search antient and modern history, and see whether the characters of men and the course of providence be not a continued fulfilment of the scriptures. Compare, especially, the history of the church with the description of her lot in the Bible. Consider whether the same Almighty hand that made and that preserves the world, be not manifest in the erection, in the propagation, in the defence, and in the various deliverances of the church.

SERIOUSLY consider the testimony of many thousands (which could not be refused in any civil matter) concerning their experience of God manifesting himself to them and holding communion with them according to and by means of the scriptures. You cannot reasonably call them dishonest, without direct and positive evidence in opposition to their testimony: but such evidence it is impossible to produce. It would be rash and absurd in the extreme to say they were only persons of a weak or disordered judgment. Besides, they had the best opportunity of judging, whether living in the faith of the scriptures, or living in unbelief be the best and the most comfortable kind of life; because they had tried both; which no infidel ever did.

It is common with infidels to consider religion only with respect to the enjoyment of the present life, and to like or dislike it as it appears to suit or to be inconsistent with temporal prospects and pleasures. On the contrary, when you set about enquiring what religion you shall embrace, I would have you annihilate

hilate the present life, which in this enquiry can only serve to prejudice or pervert your judgment; and consider yourself as on the point of being called before God's awful tribunal; on the point of entering into an eternal and unchangeable state. It is true, godliness is for our present comfort; but in order to our knowledge of this, it is first necessary to know that it has the promise of the life which is to come.

MAKE trial of Christianity. You are often proposing your doubts and difficulties to your fellow creatures: you should rather be employed in seeking to know God *your maker, who giveth songs in the night*: he alone can give you a satisfactory solution of those doubts and difficulties; and therefore if you sincerely want it, apply to him for it: and try to come to him as the scripture directs, making mention of Christ's name. Say to him that you have heard that he has devised a method of glorifying all the perfections of his nature by shewing mercy to such sinners as you are, by pardoning and saving them through a Mediator: Cry to him that he would make you understand this wonderful method; and that he would shine in your heart to give you the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Try immediately to trust in this Saviour, according to the knowledge you have of him, and that knowledge will increase.

II. *THE Temporizers.* They are always of that religious persuasion which is the most agreeable to their connections, in which they have been educated, or which is fashionable in the age or country wherein they live. They are chiefly of three sorts.

I. *THE slothful or dissipated temporizers.* Persons who, from the love of ease, are averse to all enquiries concerning religion; whose time is so much engrossed by business or amusements, that they have

none left for thinking deliberately of religious concerns; who find pious exercises inconsistent with their favourite pursuits or their favourite pleasures; who instead of aiming at or desiring perfection in holiness, would have only so much of it as they think necessary to evidence them to be in a state of grace; who, in their choice of a religious profession, are sure to fix on that which is likely to be the least attended with trouble or inconveniency; all these are temporizers from indolence and dissipation. Their sloth hinders them from *following those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.*

2. THE covetous and and aspiring temporizers. Persons who are apprehensive that a strict adherence to the ways of religion would be utterly inconsistent with their views of rising in the world; who *make haste to be rich*, and find religion would be an obstacle in their way; who having formed a plan for making a fortune, or for obtaining preferment, resolve to heed nothing that would divert them from the prosecution of it; who study to appear either lukewarm or zealous about the matters of God, as lukewarmness or zeal bids fairest to recommend them to the wealthy and the great; all these are temporizers from interested and ambitious views. Of this sort was Demas, who *forsook Paul, having loved the present world.*

3. THE cowardly temporizers. Persons who would not, for a world, be reckoned either more or less religious than their neighbours; who are as much afraid of being accounted strict professors as of being accounted abandoned profligates; who have not the resolution to abide by a religious profession, unless the world countenance them in it; who dread the wrath of man more than the wrath of God, and love the praise of man more than the praise of God; who incessantly frighten themselves and others with terrible representations of the losses and hardships they
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are likely to suffer in adhering to the cause of Christ and a good conscience; who talk a great deal about prudence as the first of human virtues, by which they mean the art of keeping in favour with the world; and a great deal about moderation, by which they mean a disposition to forbear being pointed or explicit in a religious profession before its avowed enemies; in fine, who have some conviction of the truth, but suppress that conviction so far as to neglect endeavouring to glorify God by an open profession of it: all these are *Temporizers* from that *fear of man which bringeth a snare*. Such was Nicodemus, who came to our Saviour by night.

TIMOTHY had long been a fashionable Temporizer. He possessed many valuable talents; but it was chiefly his complaisance, and the art he had of accommodating himself to the humour of the great, which induced a man of quality to appoint him governor to his eldest son. Timothy had been a considerable time in that station, when he was brought under deep impressions of his sin and danger. His concern for *the great salvation* made him indifferent to his former worldly pursuits. The sense he had of the *exceeding sinfulness of sin*, constrained him to reprove it, even when the reproof was contrary to the maxims of worldly prudence. The Spirit of God had shewn him the vanity of man's wisdom, as to matters of religion, in so strong a light, that now he could not bear human devices in the worship of God: On that account, he thought proper to withdraw from the church of England; and excused himself from attending his pupil, as usual, on the Sabbath. Finding that the alteration of his conduct in these particulars was disagreeable to the family, he chose to resign his charge, and to seek the society of such as worshipped God with more of the simplicity of the New Testament. Some time after, Timothy having met with his old acquaintance

acquaintance Lyfander; part of their conversation was to the following purpose:

LYSANDER. So, it seems, Timothy, you have left our Church: Sure you might have been as good a Christian in our communion as in any other. If I should grant that our church is somewhat wrong, in circumstantials, I would not leave her, while she retains *judgment, mercy and truth*, which our Saviour calls *the weightier matters of the law*.

TIM. The passage itself you refer to affords a convincing argument for a sacred and inviolable regard to what you call *circumstantials* as well as to the weightier matters: for our Lord adds, *These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone*. From which it appears, that our Lord did not find fault with the Pharisees for their exactness in observing the *ceremonial law*, but for the want of a due regard to God's authority in observing it; which they evidenced by their neglect of the most important duties of morality.

WHY, Lyfander, did you turn off your steward Fungofus! Was he dishonest?

LYS. No.

TIM. Did he use his fellow-servants ill?

LYS. No.

TIM. Did he grow inattentive to his business?

LYS. No; but he would never follow my directions in any thing. It is true, the fellow was very ingenious, and executed his own plans dextrously; but I could never make him execute mine. Indeed he had such a spirit of contradiction as no merit in other respects could render sufferable.

TIM. Are we poor insignificant mortals apt to be so angry with our inferiors, when they happen to cross our inclination? And shall not the Lord of heaven and earth be much more displeased, if in any instance, we disregard his will revealed to us in the scriptures;

scriptures; as we certainly do, when we pretend to worship him by human devices? *In vain*, says our Lord, *do ye worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.* Vain worship is a profanation of God's name: Vain worship brings the curse instead of the blessing on its observers.

Lys. You know our Saviour himself was in communion with the established church of the Jews, and used to join in their public worship. Perhaps the liturgy which the Jews then made use of was as exceptionable as the English liturgy. We are sure the Jews were, at that time, exceedingly corrupt.

TIM. We have no account in the New Testament of any public liturgy among the Jews. As to the Talmud and other compositions of the Jewish Rabbins, however useful they may be for preserving some of their national customs or opinions, little credit is due to them with respect to historical facts.

As our Lord set us a perfect example of every duty, so particularly of a faithful testimony against the evils of our times. With what wholesome severity did he expose the reigning vices of the Pharisees; their pride, their hypocrisy, their covetousness and extortion? He never neglected an opportunity of tendering suitable reproof: When he was at meat in the house of a Pharisee, he faithfully reprov'd his entertainer for his pride and self conceit, Luke vii. 36,——47. When he was in the family of Lazarus which had so distinguished a share of his affection, we find him dealing plainly with Martha, as to the excess of her care and anxiety about the things of the world, Luke x. 41. When Peter, from a mistaken tenderness, expressed himself against the sufferings of his beloved Lord, he received this terrible rebuke, *Get thee behind me, Satan; thou savourest not the things that are of God, but the things that are of men* †.

WE

† This is perhaps the severest reproof our Lord ever administered

WE are sure our Lord would never countenance in his practice those evils against which he cried so loudly in his doctrine. He *was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separated from sinners*. He never practised any of their unwritten traditions: he and his followers openly distinguished themselves from all the sects into which the Jews were divided at that time. If we find him often in the synagogues or in the temple, it was because these were places of public course where he had an opportunity to preach the gospel to the people. Another reason for his attendance in the temple was, that he might perform such parts of Old Testament-service as were appropriated to that holy place.

Lys. Our Saviour instead of approving a secession from the scribes and Pharisees, exhorted the disciples to hear their instructions, Matth. xxiii. 3.

Tim. Our Lord could never be inconsistent with himself. But in Matth. xvi. he charges his disciples to *beware of the doctrine of the Pharisees*. In Matth. xv. he calls them *blind, leaders of the blind*. He says, they would not *suffer those that were entering into the kingdom of heaven, to go in*. They made their proselytes *twofold more the children of hell than themselves*. It seems plain, therefore, that our Lord considered them as false teachers, whose *instructions caused to err from the words of knowledge*. It must be owned, however, that our Lord adhered to the Jewish church, as being then the only true church of God upon earth. Hence in his discourse to the woman of Samaria, he plainly bears testimony in favour of the Jewish church
in

to any of his faithful followers. And whence was his severity on this occasion? Was it because his heart was so much set upon finishing the work that was necessary for the salvation of sinners, that nothing was so offensive to him as the least opposition to it? An evidence of the greatness of Christ's love to poor sinners. A caveat against unbelief.

in opposition to the sect of the Samaritans: John iv. 22. *Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews.* In like manner, in the passage you have mentioned, he expresses his approbation of the office of declaring and interpreting the divine law; which was the office of those who sat in Moses seat; of the scribes and Pharisees; whose instructions our Saviour exhorted his hearers to observe and do, whose practice however, he charged them to avoid. But how will our Lord's commendation of what was proper in their administration of an office which God had appointed, warrant us to countenance offices and forms of worship which he never appointed? Our Lord undoubtedly withdrew from these false teachers in such a manner as to maintain an uniform and consistent testimony against their vices and errors. As to the temple worship, it was not warrantable to withdraw from it under the Old Testament: for that would have been to withdraw not merely from a particular church communion, but likewise from an ordinance of God which, during that dispensation, was appropriated to Jerusalem; a peculiar circumstance never to be found in the case of any particular church under the New Testament.

Lys. You are too rigid: you must make allowances for the weakness and the variety of men's understanding and tempers.

Tim. In those instances where a person or a church has not, as yet, attained to the knowledge of the truth, or is only ignorant or misinformed, or is sincerely struggling against some evil not yet overcome: in such cases we ought to entertain sentiments of charity and forbearance: we are indeed to testify plainly and particularly against every real evil; but in the above mentioned cases, we are to encourage rather than condemn the church and the individual; we are to encourage them to proceed in reformation.

On the other hand, when there appears much contempt of the truth, with the aggravation of apostacy from it, and of obstinacy and enmity against it, a sharper manner of reproof becomes necessary; we must withstand such opposers to the face; we must withdraw ourselves from them; such *tongues* as thus *rise up against Zion, she must condemn.*

CHRISTIANS can tell, as matter of experience, that there is not any thing more usually accompanied with the sensible hiding of the Lord's face and with his sharp rebukes, than the wilful neglect of opportunities of reproofing sin, or of testifying against error: and no wonder; since it is so peculiarly nauseous to Christ for church-members to be of such a lukewarm temper, *neither cold nor hot*, as to be indifferent to the indignities that are done to him: it makes him threaten to *spue them out of his mouth.*

Lys. It seems to be the part of a wise man to comply with the humour of the times in some things, that he may procure attention to his instructions in other things of more importance. So did Socrates and Plato, and Pythagoras, who conformed to the established worship of their country, though, it is probable, they were sensible of its absurdities. Even the apostle Paul *became all things to all men.*

TIM. The false prudence or policy of the world may suggest, That we may do evil that good may come; that the end may sanctify, or at least excuse unlawful means. But the Bible knows no such maxims. Christians are expressly forbidden *to follow a multitude to do any evil.* It is at their peril if they deny Christ's name in any respect, or on any account.

THE representation you have given of some celebrated philosophers is little to their advantage. They were, it seems, poor cowardly wretches, who durst not utter a syllable against what they knew to be a
system

system of the grossest lies that were ever imposed upon the credulity of mankind: for in that light, if they had any knowledge of the true God, they must have considered the religion of their country. They were as cruel as cowardly; otherwise how could they have remained silent spectators of the delusions in which they saw their fellow men bewildered, with regard to points of so much consequence to their happiness as the being of God and the right manner of worshipping him. Sure, one honest man that endeavours to make an upright stand for truth in opposition to fashion and vulgar prejudice, deserves far better of society, than a thousand such pusillanimous philosophers.

A WITNESS of Christ, however should guard against giving any unnecessary offence; he may study to be agreeable without being unfaithful: *Be courteous*, is a divine command, as well as *be steadfast in the faith*. We are to shew out of a good conversation our works *in meekness of wisdom*. There are certain prepossessions in favour of particular indifferent customs of a country; and certain innocent peculiarities of temper and demeanour, on which it would be a morose peevishness, rather than any necessary zeal for the truth, to criticise with severity. It was in such respects as these, that Paul *became all things to all men*; but as to any point in which the cause of Christ or of his truth was really concerned, never man was more steady or more determined than was this apostle.

YES, Lyfander, let us detest the character of him who deliberately *sells the truth*; who, at the call of interest or of worldly favour, tramples on conscience and the honour of God. On the other hand, let us contemplate as a pattern for our imitation, such a character as that of the seraph Abdiel in Milton:

Among the faithless, faithful only he:

Among innumerable false, unmov'd,

D

Unshaken,

*Unshaken, uneduc'd, unterrify'd,
His loyalty he kept, his love, his zeal.
Nor number, nor example, with him wrought,
To swerve from truth, or change his constant mind,
Though single.*

Let us follow them who have been *faithful unto death*. Let us follow Christ especially; whose ardent zeal for the house of God *did eat him up*; who *set his face like a flint* to accomplish our salvation in his *obedience unto death, even the death of the cross*. How hard are our hearts, that can resist the influence of such an example, and of *love that passeth knowledge!*

III. *THE Selfish Devotees*. A person of this character pretends to be so much taken up with heart-religion, that he has no leisure for attending to external or positive institutions. He thinks all questions about the outward order and government of the church quite needless. With him it is a matter of mere indifference what profession a person makes, provided his heart be right, which, in his opinion, is equally the case with devout Christians of all denominations.

SOME of this character are very talkative about religion: others are against uttering a syllable on that subject; for, say they, when we shew our religious knowledge, we feed our vanity. But they all agree in despising what they call outward forms.

AMONG the causes or occasions of this devotional extravagance, we may reckon the following:

I. *THE* offence that some have taken at the abuses of the outward forms of religion. When they saw men cover their schemes of ambition with the pretext of zeal for the external ordinances of religion, they were tempted to consider these ordinances as always connected with evil designs. Having seen them made subservient to the purpose of vice, they no longer thought they could be so to those of virtue and true piety.

2. *THE*

2. THE want of proper views of God's authority in those ordinances; and of the connection between the due observance of them and our partaking of spiritual blessings. No one that ever attained such views of those institutions, can altogether lose his esteem of them. But it is no wonder to see one disregard them, who never sought more in attending on them, than merely to amuse himself with the external part, or what is exhibited to the carnal eye. Besides, in our day, when iniquity abounds, ordinances are little accompanied with visible effects; a providential dispensation whereby men harden themselves in their contempt of them.

PRIDE. Persons must have a very high notion of their attainments in religion, when they think they can do well enough without those outward helps which are so necessary to other Christians. To be sure, they must be soaring (in their own conceit) to wonderful heights in the divine life, when they pretend to be devout in some other way than by using the ordinary means of God's appointment. Indeed, some of them have carried their extravagant pretensions so far as actually to boast of being already perfect.

IF it be asked, Where are these Devotees to be found? Perhaps among the Quakers, or the followers of Madam Guion? † We answer not among them only. Are there not many called Presbyterians, and other Protestants, who, in place of contending for the purity of the external institutions of Christ, regard a testimony against the corruptions of them with the coldest indifference? Do they not defend that indifference by alledging that such a testimony is of little importance to the religion of the heart? And

† She gave rise to Quietism in France. She preached up, says Voltaire, the tranquillity of the soul, the annihilation of all its faculties, and inward worship.

And yet is it not plain, that if these ordinances themselves are of importance to practical godliness, a testimony on their behalf must be so too; since on the one hand, it is only while we endeavour to observe the institutions of Christ according to his word, that we can warrantably expect his blessing on them; and since, on the other hand, Satan and man's depraved nature are ever at work to corrupt those institutions? We heartily approve of the sentiments which devout people of this description express with respect to the difficulty and importance of heart-religion: we only mean that they are guilty of inconsistency and of abuse, when they set these sentiments in opposition to the profession of the truth, and an open adherence to the cause of Christ.

VERUS had knowledge to discern the spiritual beauty of our Lord's appointments, and resolution to adhere to such of them as meet with peculiar opposition from the world. He was not ashamed to appear among the witnesses of Christ; and would sometimes undertake a considerable journey to have an opportunity of enjoying their fellowship in public ordinances. His neighbour Simplicius, who was himself reckoned very religious, found fault with his conduct. I fear, said he to Verus one day, you are too anxious about your testimony, your outward forms, and the purity of your profession. These things divert your attention, Verus, from the exercises of the heart.

VERUS. Does a merchant's exactness in executing the commissions of his correspondents abroad, argue inattention to his business at home?

SIM. Quite the reverse: for these correspondents make him such returns as enable him to deal to a far greater extent than before.

VER. In like manner, though a particular ordinance may not appear so closely connected with the case of our souls as some others; yet, Simplicius, if

we observe it from a single regard to the divine authority, we shall find it more to our spiritual advantage than a great many selfish endeavours to better our case. Keeping the words of Christ is the way to have communion with him, John xiv. 23. *He that is liberal in this respect, shall be made fat,* Prov. vi. 25. If we would be *kept from the hour of temptation,* we should be careful to *keep the word of Christ's patience,* Rev. iii. 10. But what think you of a servant who cares not for obeying his master's commands, unless they be nearly connected with his own interest?

SIM. He may be said to observe himself rather than his master.

VER. How provoking, then, to the Lord of heaven and earth is that selfishness which lead us to dispute his commands, because they do not seem to contribute so much to our comfort or our interest as we could wish! A reverence of the divine authority should make us have respect to all God's commandments, *If I am a master, where is my fear, saith the Lord of hosts?*

SIM. Surely this is a chief command, *Keep thy heart with all diligence.*

VER. True, Simplicius; and we should be careful to keep the heart by watching against a cold indifference to any of God's truths or institutions: for in receiving or despising these, we receive or despise him.

SIM. I have often observed, that persons who are very rigid adherents to what they call scripture-forms of worship and church-government, are very remarkable for pride and self-conceit.

VER. Consider, Simplicius, that various principles enter into the composition of every human character; and many different motives may occasion the same appearances of temper and behaviour. Hence when we lay the blame of what is wrong in a person's

son's character or conduct upon any religious opinion which he seems to entertain, we should know, either from the nature and tendency of the opinion itself, or from proper evidence of the fact, that it actually is the cause of that wrong: if we find it to be the cause, we are likewise to examine [the degree in which it is so: and farther still, whether the person has just views of it; or whether he does not pervert it.

But with respect to the character of those who endeavour after an exact observance of the institutions of Christ, allow me, Simplicius, to ask you a question. Suppose two persons are the patients of the same physician: the one follows the physician's prescription in every part of it as exactly as he can: the other observes only as much as he thinks essential. Say, now, which of the two distrusts himself, and confides in the honour and ability of the physician? Which of the two discovers the least pride and self conceit?

SIM. He undoubtedly who endeavours to follow the whole of the prescription. But your outward forms of religion are so much controverted, that—

VER. It will not follow that they are either right or wrong, frivolous or important. That a proposition has been the subject of much disputation is merely an accidental circumstance which argues neither its truth nor its falsehood, but only that men have had different apprehensions concerning it. Should this be deemed a sufficient reason for rejecting any thing in religion, we may reject the whole of it; and not only religion, but the first principles of reason and the testimony of our external senses; all which have been controverted. It is, therefore, a mere vulgar prejudice against the institutions of Christ, that they have been the subject of disputation. It is unworthy a man of sense to give over the search of
truth

truth or of excellence, merely because others have been unable to find it, or unwilling to acknowledge it. It is unworthy a man of candour to say that either persons or things should have no friends or adherents, only because they happen to have many enemies.

SIM. Though these outward observances might be highly proper in the infant state of the church, they seem now to be antiquated and of no more use. We who have the advantage of the New Testament, are to *worship God*, not with outward forms, but *in spirit and in truth*.

VER. The observances, indeed, of the Old Testament that respected the coming of Christ *to put a way sin by the sacrifice of himself* as a future event, are now no more necessary, when Christ the substance of them has actually appeared, and finished the work that was given him to do. But this does not hinder the other ordinances, which God hath appointed in his word, from being obligatory on the church till the end of time. We are indeed to worship God *in spirit*, without those carnal ordinances which were in use before the coming of Christ; *and in truth*, as having the substance and reality of the ancient figures clearly revealed to us; so that we may behold the glory of the Lord with open face, the veil of Mosaic institutions being drawn aside. But our freedom from the yoke of the ceremonial law, does not lessen our obligation to glorify God in our *bodies* as well as in our *spirits*, by a careful observance of the few positive institutions which our Lord has left us. The authority of a law-giver should not be the less but the more regarded, that it is exerted with gentleness and moderation. It is remarkable that the Lord hath connected his blessing with the external observance of his ordinances much in the same manner in the New Testament as he has done in the Old. He said in the Old Testament, *In all places where I record my name, I will come unto thee,*

thee, and I will bless thee: he says in the new, *Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.*

SIM. If we have the inward sentiments of true piety; if the love of God and universal good will to mankind reign in our hearts; the particular form of our religion will do us no prejudice with our heavenly Father, as the fashion of our clothes will do us none with men of good sense.

VER. Rather say, according as we have the true love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost; so will we be averse from giving our deliberate consent to the breach of one of God's commands, though the matter of it, like our first parents eating the forbidden fruit, may appear small and trivial to the eye of carnal sense and reason. If we sincerely love our fellow men, we must be grieved to see them rushing upon God's wrath and curse by their contempt of the least of his commands, and especially to see them casting off any of these institutions to which he has been pleased to annex his blessing.

THE Bible knows nothing of that heart-religion which does not manifest itself in suitable actions. It is vain for a person to pretend that he has the principle of faith, if he does not shew it by good works; that he loves his neighbour, if he neglect to relieve his necessities; that he believes with the heart unto righteousness, if he is no way concerned to make confession with the mouth unto salvation; that he loves Christ, if he is ashamed to keep the word of his patience; or, in fine, that he is willing to *stand with the Lamb on mount Zion, having his Father's name,* both in the heart and in the hand, if he still refuses to have it, *written in his forehead.*

BEWARE, then, Simplicius, of estimating the duty of obeying a divine command by the judgment that carnal sense and reason pass upon the matter of it:

it: if at any time, you are apt to lose sight of the importance of any scriptural duty, you need not, like the leprous nobleman of Assyria, when the prophet bade him go wash in Jordan, perplex yourself with much reasoning about the matter of such a duty: you need not apply to this or the other subtle casuist: you have free access to the infinite Lawgiver himself; go to him as your God and Father in Christ, and cry, that he would shew you his authority, his majesty, sovereignty, wisdom, holiness, love and faithfulness in such a precept; and you shall experience the truth of this word, *the meek will he guide in judgment, the meek will he teach his way.*

IV. THE *Waverers*. These profess to seek the truth, but they never find it. One may fitly address them in the words of Elijah to the people of Israel, *How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him.* Why are many at such a loss? Is it because the revelation which God hath given us is obscure and hard to be understood? By no means; for though there is enough in the scriptures to exercise the most elevated understanding, they are calculated in the best manner to instruct the meanest.—They have milk for babes, as well as meat for strong men. But the following are some of the causes or occasions of this wavering:

1. Men's conceit of their own wisdom. Wavering or doubting implies a consciousness of ignorance; how then doth it spring from self-conceit? When persons come to the study of the scriptures, full of themselves, with all their prejudices strong about them, it may well be said of them that hearing they do not hear, and seeing they do not perceive, and reading they do not learn. Only the humble and the simple-minded attain to certainty and establishment in divine truth, according to the scripture,

Matth. xi. 15. *At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to babes.* 1 Cor. iii. 18. *Let no man deceive himself: if any man seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool that he may be wise.*

2. Duplicity. James i. 8. *A double minded-man is unstable in all his ways.* The disorders of the heart will very much affect the exercise of the understanding; and we need not wonder if we are not certain of truths to which we have an aversion; or if we waver, where we have no inclination to be fixed.

3. Want of experience of the spiritual favour and sanctifying efficacy of divine truth. By such experience, while persons have the most permanent convictions, their affections are engaged, and they are rooted and grounded in the love of the truth. How directly opposite to the character of which we speak, was that of the saints recorded in scripture! to whose taste the word was *sweeter than the honey dropping from the comb, and who esteemed it more than their necessary food.* If at any time they were tempted to waver, they set themselves, through the mercy of God upholding them, to resist the temptation: and whenever they felt any disposition to slacken their resistance, or to fall in with the temptation, they said, *This is mine infirmity:* Nor would they allow themselves any rest, till in the way of going to God's sanctuary and in the diligent use of appointed means, they were, through God's blessing, delivered, and brought to a thorough establishment in the very truth about which they had been tempted to waver. See remarkable examples of this in the 73d and 77th psalms. Whence was it that they were so resolute in holding fast the truth? The reason was, they had experienced the saving, sanctifying power of it in their
their

their hearts; they received it as the word of God that wrought in them effectually. It is owing to the want of this experience that wavering or doubting of the truth abounds so much in our day.

4. The neglecting to view divine truths as connected with the person of Christ; that most important connection, whence they derive all their saving efficacy. There is no part of revelation which is not, more or less directly, either concerning the wonderful constitution of the person of Christ, concerning the doing, suffering, and glory of his person, concerning the benefits to be enjoyed in union to his person, or in fine, concerning the duties by which we express our regard to his person, Eph. iv. 20, 21. *But ye have not so learned Christ; if so be, that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus.*

5. A great many occurrences or incidents are laid hold of as pretences for wavering: such as the disputes about matters of religion, the eminent men, and their plausible reasoning on both sides of a question, the adherents to opposite religious tenets being equally virtuous or equally immoral.

THE prevalence of this character in the reformed churches seems to be one principal cause of the present decline of religion in them, and indeed threatens their utter ruin. They not only shew no disposition to make any farther advances in reformation, but have lost all resolution to hold fast what they attained. Hence they allow in their communion such as are not ashamed to ridicule the leading principles of the reformation.

EUSTATHIUS and Polysephus were intimate friends. Their conversation often turned on religion. Eustathius, though daily lamenting that his proficiency in the knowledge of divine truth was so far from being answerable to the advantages he enjoyed, was firmly persuaded

persuaded of many doctrines which he had learned from the scriptures, and which he found the Holy Spirit made use of as the appointed means of our sanctification. Polysephus, on the contrary, having taken up many of his religious opinions from the conversation of the gay and the fashionable part of the world, was led to think that a certain knowledge of religion is unattainable, and that on this subject it is of small consequence what a person affirms or what he denies.

EUSTATHIUS and Polysephus happened one day to meet at the house of their common friend. They found that they had come from the same village, but by different roads. Upon which Polysephus took occasion to observe, That virtuous people, of different religious persuasions, would, in like manner meet in heaven at last.

Eus. Whatever idea you may have of the character of virtuous people, I am sure there are opinions that tend to lead us away both from holiness and from heaven. Errors are among those evil thoughts which proceeding out of the heart, defile the man. The apostle lays it down as the consequence of an error concerning the resurrection of the dead, *That our faith is vain, and we are still in our sins.* If the truth make us free from sin, then error must tend to bring or keep us under the power of it. Indeed, it is a principle of common sense, that we cannot shew any due regard to a character which we take to be something altogether different from what it really is. But what else is our obedience than the regard we shew to the God of salvation, as he is revealed in the scriptures of truth?

POL. I am often at a loss when I consider the fair pretences of the different parties which now divide the Christian world.

Eus. From the very beginning there were wolves in
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in sheeps cloathing that got into the flock of Christ, *not sparing it.* These occasioned divisions and offences even in the first ages of the Christian church. Many of these discovered themselves in broaching opinions which were a disgrace as well to reason as to Christianity: such were the Gnostics and the Manichees. Afterward, when the rulers of the world began to favour the Christian church, the dominion of some aspiring ecclesiastics grew up by degrees, till it had all the marks and characters of the *man of sin, and son of perdition, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he, as God, sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.* The greater part of what was called the Christian world submitting themselves to this dominion, the faithful few who endeavoured to adhere to the simplicity of the truth as it is in Jesus, were obliged to separate themselves from the majority. The world, therefore, called them sometimes Lollards, sometimes Wickliffites, sometimes Hussites; for it always reckoned them odious and contemptible. At last, by the instrumentality of Luther and other preachers of the everlasting gospel, *the tenth part of the city fell,* and that glorious event, the reformation from Popery, was brought about. Then whole provinces and kingdoms took the name of Protestants, and flocked to the banner of Christ's testimony against Popery. But even in these Protestant countries, the devil was at no loss for instruments to corrupt or to oppose the church of God. Protestant princes were led to gratify their ambition at the church's expence. The restraints that those princes put upon the consciences of their subjects, and the liberty they took to mould the Protestant churches to their taste and inclination, induced many of the faithful to maintain their Christian freedom, and the purity of gospel ordinances, by testifying against the
constitution

constitution of these churches, and, at last, by separating from them. The princes, impatient of being thwarted in their schemes by these dissenters, tried, at first, to suppress them by coercive methods; but finding the attempt utterly unsuccessful, they discovered that they would gain their political ends much better by toleration. Thus providence, at last, having granted to dissenters from national establishments, outward peace and prosperity, they became numerous, and in a great measure fashionable; they were *of the world* as well as *in it*. Then the minds of men took a new turn: formerly they acquired reputation and made their fortunes by paying their court to kings and to their ministers, and by conforming to the established religion; but now they attain the same worldly objects by other means more adapted to a cultivated state of society; by forming systems of theology, by address, by eloquence, by their pretensions to superior sanctity and wisdom. But a dutiful regard to God's word as our only rule is as plainly different from the levity, the vain curiosity, and the affected singularity which prevail with sectarists, as from the mean complaisance, the implicit faith and blind obedience with which the dictates of popes and princes, in matters of religion, have been received. The same divine authority condemns those *who heap up to themselves teachers having itching ears*, and those *who receive the mark of the beast*.

POL. When I see a set of people distinguished by the purity and simplicity of their manners, I am apt to think their principles not so bad as their enemies represent them.

EUS. I wish to disapprove as much as any one of exaggerating the faults or errors of others, as being a thing both uncharitable and unjust. But if you mean, that when we hear some sectarists applauded by all the world as exceedingly virtuous, we are merely

merely on that account to conclude that their opinions, however unscriptural we have reason to think them, are innocent and unblamable: I am afraid your test of religious principles will prove a very false one. In the first place, View them closer. What seems beautiful to the superficial eye, is often discovered by a severer scrutiny to be full of deformity. Enquire whether they have an impartial regard to the whole of God's law; to the first as well as to the second table of it; whether they be men of prayer as well as men of honour: whether they are spiritually minded: whether they are not much disposed to justify themselves and to despise others: whether they do not make more mention of their own righteousness than of Christ's: and whether they do not pay more attention to the devices of men than to the ordinances of God: Sins in these and the like respects, however much the world may make light of them, are peculiarly heinous in the sight of God. Indeed *what is highly esteemed among men, is an abomination to the Lord.* And then supposing there are many things in their outward deportment amiable or praise-worthy, should not these things be rather ascribed to the principle of honour, to the natural dictates of conscience, to some valuable truths which they still retain, than to their false and dangerous opinions.

POLY. But does not our Lord lay it down as the rule whereby we may know false teachers, *By their fruits ye shall know them?*

EUST. Yes, Polysephus: but then you must understand by these fruits whatever is contrary to the *power of godliness.* Though a doctrine may not *sensibly* lead us to such irregularities of outward conduct as may expose us to the censure of the world; yet if it has a native tendency to flatter our pride or unbelief, to make us lukewarm to the concerns of Christ's kingdom, to lessen our godly sorrow for sin, or our spiri-
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tual mindedness, we may be sure that such a doctrine is not from God. Our Lord having *cautioned* his disciples against those false teachers who, though inwardly *ravelling wolves*, would come to them *in sheep's clothing*; adds, *Ye shall know them by their fruits*: that is, they will discover themselves to spiritual discerners (who can well distinguish the voice of Christ from that of strangers) by their proper fruits; by their *instructions that cause to err from the words of knowledge*; by their influence and example tending to corrupt the church, and to divide her members from the testimony of Christ, and from one another in him; and in fine, by their words and actions being habitually contrary to the law and the testimony. We are not, however, to conclude that these false teachers will always be reputed immoral in their lives: On the contrary their coming *in sheep's clothing* intimates that the smoothness of their external behaviour would procure them a favourable reception wherever they go. The truth is, the whole of God's law is evidently designed to promote the happiness of men; and though they are so much blinded by the corruption of nature as not to see this tendency in many parts of the law, in those especially which are more spiritual and refined; yet they can observe so much of it in other parts of the law; as leads, from a selfish principle, to study some conformity to it in their outward conduct. Now, false teachers may carry their morality thus far (which is all that is necessary to gain the applause of the world) consistently enough with their attempts against the parity of the truths and ordinances of Christ. Hence we hear so many encomiums on some despisers, opposers, and blasphemers of the institutions of Christ in our day.

POLY. You should not give people uncharitable names. When persons become positive as to the truth of
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of their religious opinions, they pass the harshest censures on such as cannot see things in the same light. In my mind, uncertainty with moderation is better than such ungoverned zeal.

EUST. Uncharitableness, I think, may be defined, the hatred of our neighbour, or at least, the want of due love to him, manifested in a disposition to condemn him without sufficient evidence of guilt, or to put a bad construction on what may admit of a good one. But it is no hatred of our brother, but an instance of real friendship, to inform him of any thing that is wrong in his principles or practice, giving him such a representation of it as tends to bring him to a proper sense of its sinful nature and pernicious consequences. It would no doubt, be uncharitable to charge one with erroneous opinions without sufficient evidence, from his own confession or otherwise, of his holding them. But if the opinions that one proclaims and glories in, are plainly unscriptural, it is our duty, it is true charity to reprove him and warn others by declaring such opinions to be, what they really are, unscriptural.

POLY. But it may be, he is in the right, and your own opinions, not his, are unscriptural.

EUST. Then I am chargeable with rashness and mistake. But I speak of the connection between a certain knowledge of our brother's error, and the duty of testifying against it. In which case, our testimony and admonition may, through the Lord's blessing, *turn one from the error of his way, and save his soul from death.*

It would be very absurd for one who had neglected to give his friend good council in a case where it was plainly necessary, to justify the neglect by the general principle, that there is a possibility of mistaking the nature and consequences of human actions. It is equally unreasonable to neglect declaring the

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truth,

truth, or warning others against error, for this general reason, that we may be wrong in our views of both. Indeed, if this reasoning, *that because men may be and frequently are mistaken, we must not suppose ourselves to be certain of any thing in particular, nor act as if we were so*, be once admitted: then our acquaintance with history, and even our knowledge of the common affairs of life, whether acquired by our own experience, or by the testimony of others, will be of little or no use.

POLY. But does not too much confidence of the truth of our opinions hinder us from an impartial examination of them. A little scepticism seems more favourable to free inquiry.

EUST. Yes, Polysephus; there is a rational scepticism which is highly commendable; for never will we be sensible where evidence is, unless we be sensible where it is not. If we doubt of a proposition, we should have a reason for doubting of it. That reason being entirely removed, we cannot rationally doubt any longer: we are certain of it. That certainty, being sincere, not pretended; being real not imaginary; instead of being shaken by the freest enquiry is more firmly established.

WITH respect to opinions in general, certainty is the end we aim at in our enquiries concerning them. But surely it is unreasonable to suppose that a partial attainment of our end will discourage us from using the means. Success will rather animate our endeavours. It is well known, that there is nothing in mathematical science that so much engages persons to prosecute it, as the certainty with which it is attended.

CHRISTIANS, indeed, are often anxious to avoid the hearing of false teachers or the reading of erroneous books; but this does not proceed from an unwillingness to have their principles thoroughly examined:

mined: these they know will endure the severest scrutiny: But knowing they have a depraved nature susceptible of wrong impressions, they are justly afraid of having the affections alienated from the truth; the affections which would bias the understanding, and hinder it from discerning the evidence of divine truth. The evidence of divine truth, they know, cannot be overturned, but then they may lose sight of it. Thus a mathematician's fear that he may forget the demonstration of a proposition in Euclid, is very different from a fear that the demonstration itself may prove a sophism.

POLY. Enthusiasts pretend a great deal of certainty with regard to what all but themselves see to be extravagant fancies.

EUST. In my mind it is for want of that satisfaction which the certainty of divine truth affords, that persons are led to take up with vain imaginations, and become enthusiasts. Hence a solid and full persuasion of the truth as it is in Jesus, is the only never-failing preservative against enthusiasm.

If a proposition is evidently founded on some plain text, and is agreeable to the general tenor of scripture; if its tendency is the same with that of the gracious revelation which God hath bestowed on us, to give all glory to God, and to exclude the boasting of the creature; the truth of such a proposition, where the authority of the scripture is duly regarded, cannot reasonably be called in question. But whatever use an enthusiast seems to make of the letter and sometimes of the doctrine of scripture, his assent to any proposition is chiefly influenced by some favourite but ungrounded imagination, to which he thinks it agreeable; by the strong impressions that it makes upon him; by the hopes and the joys which it inspires. An enthusiast cannot bring himself to examine impartially the opinions on which his hopes and
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joys are founded, for this plain reason; that it is for the sake of his hopes and joys that he entertains those opinions*. On the contrary, the Christian is anxious to know whether his opinions be according to the scriptures, because it is on account of their agreeableness to the scriptures that he holds them. Besides the enthusiast is wholly intent upon some particular part of religion to the neglect of other parts†: and what he thus doats on is most commonly some imagination or invention of his own: But the Christian's believing adherence to any truth or duty of God's word, instead of leading him, like the enthusiast's fond attachment, to neglect other truths or duties, never fails to encrease his uniform and universal regard for them.

POLY. If I prosecute my enquiries, I am afraid I shall be continually changing my religious persuasion; on the other hand, it is dangerous to continue in an error.

EUST. Go on, by all means, Polysephus, in your enquiries. As you advance, the truths you already know will be known more perfectly: every step you take will throw new light upon them; every difficulty or objection, when removed, will strengthen your conviction. Every prejudice and every error you get rid of, will contribute to your establishment in the truth. Only let your enquiries be directed by the scripture, influenced by the love of the truth as it is in Jesus, and accompanied with earnest prayers to God, saying, *What I know not teach thou me.*
 Distrusting

* When the heathen philosopher said, "That if the belief of the soul's immortality was a delusion, it was so agreeable a one that he wished to continue in it;" he spoke like an enthusiast.

† This is a remarkable trait in the character of an enthusiast: If he is much in devotional exercises, he makes little account of the duty that he owes to his neighbour. He talks much of his transporting joy, while he discovers little concern for the body of sin.

Distrusting yourself, look up to God for the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ. Yes, Polysephus, push your enquiries as far as the means and opportunities afforded by Providence permit you. Shake off the restraints of custom, of authority, whether antient, or modern. Pay no regard to names or parties. Receive the truth wherever you can find it. As in practice Christians ought to fear nothing but sin; so in matters of faith they should fear nothing but error.

POLY. The reasoning of one party seems very plausible, till another party comes and exposes the vanity of it.

EUST. What conclusion do you draw from that? That a pearl is no better than a glass toy, or a piece of pure gold than a counterfeit? I have read a story of two Knights who met at a pillar which had the same inscription on two sides: "Sure," said the one Knight, as he read it on the side next him, "he must have been a gallant hero, and defender of innocence, who is the subject of this golden inscription." "No doubt," said the other, reading it on the opposite side; "but I beg leave to correct a mistake; the inscription is in silver." They maintained their several assertions with inflexible perseverance, till each of them thought himself bound by all the laws of honour and of knighthood, to lift his arms against so unreasonable an opponent. They were preparing for the combat, when an honest traveller happening to pass that way, enquired the cause. Both parties being heard, the traveller desired them only to observe, that on the one side of the pillar the inscription was in gold; on the other it was in silver. Thus partial views may occasion many controversies; in which case persons may be blameable for inattention, for sloth and negligence, for rashness in asserting more than they know, and in supposing they are acquainted

acquainted with the whole of the subject, while they are acquainted only with a part. But how much more blameable or rather criminal is the artful Sophister, who is resolved to try all methods, fair and unfair, to maintain some pre-conceived opinion or the peculiarities of his party. In the first place, he states the question in so ambiguous a manner that the reader or hearer is apt to confound it with something quite distinct from it. In the next place, he tries to connect his darling tenet with some popular topic on which he expatiates a great deal, in order both to catch the attention of the public, and to prevent the weakness of his arguments from being observed. Then he addresses the passions and prejudices of his readers or hearers, which he knows are much more attended to by the bulk of mankind, than candid reasoning. If any difficulty occur, he neglects it, misrepresents it, or treats it with contempt. If he is writing or speaking against any particular opponent, he never scruples to pervert his words to a meaning the farthest imaginable from what was plainly intended. He neglects that part of his opponent's reasoning on which he knows the greatest stress is laid; and imputes to him consequences which are drawn, not from his declared principles, but from an invidious construction of them, or from unguarded and unconnected expressions. These, not to mention many grosser methods, such as lies, calumny and detraction, are to be held in abhorrence by every honest man, as well as by every sincere enquirer after truth.

THE sincere and modest enquirer after truth! Where is he to be found, who is in love with truth for its own sake; especially with divine truth for the sake of its infinitely glorious Revealer: who labours to separate from the subject of his enquiry whatever does not belong to it, that his conceptions of it may
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be clear and distinct: who wants to mark precisely where knowledge and certainty end, where ignorance and conjecture begin: who is willing to receive instruction from every quarter, from the learned and the unlearned, from friends and foes: who rejoices whenever truth is victorious, though he should himself be vanquished: who is critical, but too enlarged and elevated in his views to be nice; modest without timidity, and bold without insolence?

IN fine, Polysephus, the maxims of politicians may be discovered to be false, and the theories of philosophers to be chimerical; but the truths of the Bible and the peculiar doctrines of Christianity will only become more illustrious for every attempt against them; and they shall continue to shine with increasing splendor, till he who is THE TRUTH, shall himself appear to the everlasting confusion of all his enemies.

POLY. I have a great aversion to the character of your *witnesses*. They are generally fierce bigots: morose and gloomy in their manner of living, they affect to abhor every gaiety and every polite amusement. At the same time, they are often deficient in that purity of morals, which alone can compensate for their sour and unsociable humour.

EUST. What is this hateful thing you call a Bigot? Is it one who is positive in his opinion, without reason? Then a witness for the truth as it is in Jesus is no bigot: because he has the weightiest of all reasons for what he adheres to, even the authority of God's word. Is it one who contends for trifles, as if they were matters of the utmost importance? Then the faithful witness for the truths of Christ is no bigot: because we never can prize those truths too much; we are to buy them and not to sell them. Compared to them, all those transitory advantages for which politicians debate and armies engage, are
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but the toys of children. Is it one who is excessively zealous for some favourite point which he reckons truth, while he disregards other things of equal or greater consequence? Then the witness of Christ is no bigot; for he has an universal regard to the doctrines and the commands of Christ: the authority of Christ engages him to esteem them all. Is it one disposed to propagate his religious tenets by fire and sword? Then the witness of Christ is no bigot: Knowing that *the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God*, he endeavours to *shew out of a good conversation, his works in meekness of wisdom*. His chief aim is to be like the Lord Jesus who is *meek and lowly in heart*. *The weapons of his warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds*. If he is called to an account for his religious principles, *he is ready to give a reason of the hope that is in him with meekness and fear*. Is it one who hates any farther discoveries of the truth, and despises the means of better information? Then the witness of Christ is by no means a bigot: He is one who loves the light: he wants to learn more and more of him who is the great Revealer of secrets. He desires, like Mary, to sit at his feet and hear his words. Instead of being proud of his wisdom, he acknowledges himself a fool, and comes to Christ that he may be made truly wise.

WITH respect to what you say about moroseness, it is far from belonging to the character of a witness of Christ as it is delineated in the Bible; which is the only view in which we plead for that character. It is a maxim with such a one, that *a merry heart doth good like a medicine*. He knows that *the ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace*. He has a conscientious regard to the precept, *rejoice evermore*.

IT is true, that, though they have a relish for the enjoyments

enjoyments of life, they are careful about two things: In the first place that they be lawful; that they be neither sinful in themselves, nor incentives to any thing sinful. Hence they abstain from many fashionable amusements; such as, games of chance, theatrical entertainments, promiscuous dancings, and the like. Whoever has read the apologies of the primitive Christians, must know that their testimony against these things was much the same with that of the witnesses of Christ at this day †.

In the next place, They do not place their happiness in outward enjoyments or possessions. *The Lord is their refuge and portion in the land of the living.* Hence it ill becomes them to be elated with worldly prosperity, or much cast down with worldly losses and disappointments. But what though they have no taste for the riotous excess of the sons of dissipation? They endeavour after evenness of temper, solid peace of mind, and the possession of themselves, in the only way in which these blessings can ever be obtained; in the only way that God hath appointed; that is, by a believing improvement of Christ for all the purposes of wisdom, righteousness, sanctification

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† The reproaches that are now cast upon the witnesses of Christ, are much the same that the Heathens used to throw out against the primitive Christians. Vos vero, says Cæcilius, pleading the cause of heathenism in the Octavius of Minutius Felix, *suspensi atque solliciti, honestis voluptatibus abstinete: non spectacula visitis, non pompis interestis; convivia publica absque vobis;—pallidi, trepidi estis.*

The same elegant author, vindicating the Christians on this head, represents the public shows of his time in a manner that will apply very well to those of our own. *Nos igitur qui moribus et pudore censemur, merito malis voluptatibus et pompis vestris et spectaculis adstinemus, quorum—noxia blandimenta damnamus. Nunc enim mimus vel exponit adulteria, vel monstrat: nunc enervis histrio amorem, dum fingit, infligit. Idem femulatis doloribus, lacrymas vestras vanis gestibus et nutibus provocat.*

and redemption; by rejoicing in Christ Jesus, having no confidence in the flesh.

On the one hand, our Lord Christ regards the world as his enemy in its prevailing customs, its favourite pleasures and pursuits; and therefore says to his followers, *Be ye not conformed to the world.* On the other hand, the men of the world, full of enmity against him, avoid the acquaintance of his professed followers; and are prone to condemn, without knowing them. It is true, though the view they have taken of them has been distant and superficial, yet they have observed two things with regard to them: *one* is, their professed relation to Christ: *the other* is, the contrariety of their taste, of their sentiments, and of the general tenor of their conduct, to their own. These two things are enough to make the world hate them.

As to what is really immoral in the conversation of some professed witnesses for the truth, I have no apology to offer: it must be acknowledged and lamented with shame and confusion of face. One thing however is obvious, that it is wrong to draw a conclusion from such particular instances against the character in general of witnesses for Christ; since those instances are plainly deviations from the character; and since it is unjust to impute the faults of some individuals to the whole body with which they stand connected. Though the offences of those professing a strict adherence to the truths of Christ are numerous and heinous, and deeply aggravated; as depraved nature is the same in them as in others; as the devil and the world, from the mortal hatred they bear them, are sure to reserve for them, the most violent assaults or the most refined and subtle methods of temptation; and as their irregularities contrasted with the spotless purity of their evangelical profession, appear so much the more glaring and enormous:

normous: yet after all, we have reason to think the charges that the world brings against them would be considerably diminished, were we to deduct whatever has been added to their real offences by calumny and slander; whatever, in the case of others, men would ascribe to the unavoidable weakness of human nature; whatever exaggerating representations some have given of particular faults in order to bring down to their level a character which, their conscience testifies, is, in general, superior to their own.

THE truth is, all the evil with which the men of the world reproach the witnesses of Jesus, is little to what they see in themselves. They know the plague of their own heart: they readily acknowledge themselves the chief of sinners. Were you to compliment them on their piety and virtue, they would reject the fulsome flattery: "We are only poor sinners," would they say; "and as no *outcasts ready to perish* where ever in greater need of salvation, we seek it through our Lord Jesus Christ: and our quarrel with the world is this, that they neglect the great salvation, and refuse to give God the glory of it."—Whence is the sorrow which the world ignorantly calls melancholy and moroseness? Why are they so oft in the house of mourning, and walk softly all their years in the bitterness of their soul? Why is there a mixture of sadness in all their joy? And why rises the sigh from the bottom of their heart even in the moment of transporting joy? The true reason is, they groan under the burden of a depraved nature: its deceitful workings and deplorable effects are matter of hourly lamentation.

POLY. Uncertainty as to religious opinions seems to do little harm.

EUSR. It is dishonourable to God: it reflects upon that revelation which he hath given us, as if it were so obscure and doubtful as to be unfit to answer

swer its end. Nay, if we do not believe God's record, that is, if we are not certain of it, the apostle John assures us, we *make the God of truth a liar*. We can have no experience of the sweetness or saving efficacy of divine truth, unless we are assured of it. While you willingly or indolently harbour any uncertainty of divine truth, you are apt to give it up altogether: you are an easy prey to every seducer. You must stand upon sure ground, if you would not be drawn away with the error of the wicked.

THERE seems to be no religious duty or spiritual exercise but what is hindered by wavering. One who allows himself in it, cannot read or hear the word with profit, because he does not mix it with faith; that is, with a full persuasion of the truth, Heb. iv. 2. He cannot pray, acceptably, for we are *to abstain from faith nothing wavering; for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed*, James i. 6. He cannot receive the sacraments aright; because the very end of them is to confirm our faith, and deliver us from wavering. Finally, if we would hold fast our profession, we must study to get free from wavering, Heb. x. 23.

POSEY. I am discouraged by the levity of my temper which disposes me much to wavering, and by the difficulties which must be surmounted before one comes at the certain knowledge of divine truths.

EUST. You should, therefore, despair of attaining the saving knowledge of divine truth by your own endeavours merely. Come to Christ who is *the great prophet whom the Lord our God hath raised up unto us*. Look to him for all that effectual teaching which is imported in such promises as these; *They shall be all taught of God; They shall all know me from the least even to the greatest; I will teach thee to profit*. Trust in him as the Wonderful Counsellor for the accomplishment

complishment of these promises, and you shall not be disappointed nor ashamed.

Be not offended at the manner of Christ's school. The first lesson you have to learn is very humbling and mortifying to proud nature; it is concerning your own ignorance and unworthiness. And then he teaches much by experience: he may probably bring you through fire and water in order to teach you some important lesson thoroughly. As he led the Israelites forty years in the wilderness and humbled them, that they might know what was in the heart, and might learn that *man liveth not by bread alone, but by every word proceeding out of the mouth of the Lord*, Deut. viii. 2. 3. Be not discouraged, however; the more you know of the Lord's way of teaching, you will see the more of his wisdom, his kindness and condescension in it. They are but strangers to him, who think him an austere or hard master.

Be much in prayer. *If any man lack wisdom, let him ask it of God, who giveth to all liberally and upbraideth none; and it shall be given him.* Ask the Spirit, Luke xi. 13. He is our guide into divine truth. Look to the Lord that he may establish and keep you. It is grace that establishes the heart, Heb. xiii.

V. The *sincere but desponding Christian*. Persons of this character love Christ, and have communion with him in his ordinances. Hence the good of the church, which is his body, is the chief object of their concern. But on taking a survey of the present state of religion, they are apt to indulge themselves in such a plaintive strain as the following.

“ALAS,” says one of them, “the work of Christ
 “in my soul seems to make no progress. I am very
 “much under the feet of my enemies. The Lord
 “is dishonoured: I have little or no strength for
 “spiritual

“ spiritual exercises, for the mortification of sin, or
 “ for walking in new ways of life. It is long since I
 “ had any comfortable experience of the Lord lift-
 “ ing up the light of his countenance upon me; and
 “ now I am apt to call in question the reality of for-
 “ mer experiences. Still I desire to wait on him in
 “ his ordinances; but I generally find he has *with-*
 “ *drawn himself.* Such being my own case, I need
 “ the less wonder at the mournful things in the pub-
 “ lic state of religion. Yet I must lament these things;
 “ I dare say, I cannot seek or expect my own deli-
 “ verance, but in the way of seeking and expecting
 “ the deliverance of the church of God. The great
 “ things that God wrought for his church are for-
 “ gotten, immorality and profaneness awfully abound,
 “ public ordinances are sadly neglected. Besides,
 “ men are forming to themselves new schemes of re-
 “ ligion, with fair and plausible pretences. And they
 “ seem to prosper in their way; while many serious
 “ Christians are drawn over to their side. Our Lord
 “ does not now plead his cause by giving such re-
 “ markable checks to the opposers of his work, or
 “ such remarkable countenance to the professed friends
 “ of it, as he was wont to do in former times. Alas!
 “ these professed friends are grown too much like
 “ the church of Laodicea, lukewarm, neither cold
 “ nor hot; and therefore our Lord threatens to spue
 “ them out of his mouth. Nay, he seems to have
 “ begun the execution of his threatening in the aw-
 “ ful spiritual judgments that abound among us.
 “ There is a great restraint of the Holy Spirit; and
 “ we are under a great prevalence of atheism, un-
 “ belief, carnality, and sinful conformity to the world.
 “ The glory is departed from our Israel.”

THIS, to be sure, is a most deplorable case; and
 he must have a heart void of sensibility to all that
 regards the glory of God, or the welfare of his church,
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who is not affected with it. But still an unbelieving despondency is quite unjustifiable. We are indispensably bound to *judge him faithful who hath promised*, even when providence wears the gloomiest aspect, and appears the most to contradict the promise. Like Abraham, *against hope* we are to believe in hope. We must endeavour to do so, as we would not wish to be chargeable with the crime of *making the God of truth a liar*. It was the approved exercise of all the saints recorded in scripture, particularly of that illustrious group of them in the eleventh of the epistle to the Hebrews, to trust the divine word in opposition to all appearances. Two things are always at the bottom of this desponding frame of spirit.

THE first is, a disposition to think of the church, as if it were to be supported and advanced by the same worldly means that are used to support and advance a civil society, and that without those external supports, it must be ruined. On the contrary, we are to consider the church as a building, the carrying on of which is in Christ's hands; for he *shall build the temple of the Lord, and shall bear the glory*: We are to consider it as the fruit of the travail of his soul; the production and gathering of which cannot possibly fail, being altogether the work of the wisdom, power, mercy and faithfulness of God: We are to consider it as the body of Christ, which by his infinite care and love, is in as perfect safety (so faith beholds it) amidst all his enemies on earth, as the human nature of his wonderful person, far, far as it is beyond their reach in heaven.

THE other thing is rashness in determining, that the Lord is not at all accomplishing his promise, because he is not doing so to our carnal apprehensions and limited views. Jacob was in this unbelieving haste when he said, *All these things are against me*. What political sagacity could have discerned the
advancement

advancement of Joseph in his state of slavery and imprisonment? Who would have thought that God was accomplishing the most glorious of all his works in humiliation and sufferings of Christ, in the reproaches, the temptations, the mocking, scourging, buffeting, crowning with thorns, the wrath of God, and the cursed death which he endured?

As these desponding apprehensions have a tendency to relax our endeavours for the advancement of Christ's kingdom; so they are too often used as a pretext or excuse for the neglect of such endeavours. The language of spiritual sloth is like that of one who came to the ruler of the synagogue from his house; *Thy daughter is dead, trouble not the Master.*

It is indeed our duty to mourn for the grounds of the Lord's controversy with us. But unbelieving despondency unfits us for the exercise; since it hardens the heart by leading us to entertain dishonourable suspicions of God as if he would not, or could not accomplish his promise. Unbelieving despondency is only grieved for the Lord's righteous procedure against a sinning people; but gospel-humiliation is a kindly sorrow of heart for the sin and rebellion which have been the cause of such awful procedure. Unbelieving despondency leads us to murmur at the ways of God, and to excuse our own conduct; on the contrary, true humiliation of soul leads us to justify God and condemn ourselves. This despondency, therefore, however it may put on the mask of humility, is, at bottom, the most intolerable pride and rebellion.

So much with regard to the spirit of despondency in general; we may now consider some of the particulars complained of.

In reply to all these particulars we may observe, that it is the Lord's usual way to suffer his work, both in persons and in churches, to be brought very low,
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even to the very brink of utter destruction, at least in their apprehension, that his revival of it may be the more conspicuous; that he may appear in his glory. Another reason why he suffers it to be so, is, that his people, deprived of all carnal means and of every sensible support, may be shut up to a single dependence on the God of their salvation, on that unseen hand that hath wrought such wonders, and is ever working for the church's deliverance. In the promise, the tribulation of the church is infallibly connected with her deliverance; and the apparent extreme of the former with the most glorious instances of the latter; a connection which, if believed and duly improved, would give us *meat out of the eater, and sweetness out of the strong.*

WE need not wonder that very fair and plausible schemes are formed in opposition to the testimony of Christ; and some of the Lord's people themselves are led away by them, as the apostle Peter was oftener than once, to oppose the work of God. Many and various are the devices of Satan: He leads the men of the world to an open and direct opposition to the cause of Christ; but he has more refined methods of drawing even the godly to oppose it in some respect or another. The Lord himself permits it to be so, that the church may see the necessity of having a single regard to the law and the testimony; to shew her members that they are not to call any man master in the matters of God, however great his usefulness or his attainments in godliness; to incite Christians to more diligence in studying the testimony of Christ; for as many of the properties of gold are discovered by comparing it with such metals as are likest it in appearance; so we may attain a more accurate knowledge of the cause of Christ, or the word of his patience, by comparing it with the schemes of religion which bear the nearest resemblance to it.

In fine, the Lord permits it to be so in order to shew Christians what hazard they run, while in this world, of being corrupted both in principle and practice. The most eminent saint may soon be led astray, if he grow careless and unwatchful.

WE have great cause to lament the abounding of spiritual judgments; these are far more unequivocal evidences of God's wrath against a people than any outward calamities. Few, indeed, have any sight or sense of them; but they are only so much the more fatal. Well may we wish, with the prophet, that *our head were waters, and our eyes a fountain of tears*, to mourn the sore spiritual judgments that lie upon this generation. Only in such exercise, we should guard against two errors. One is charging God foolishly, as if he were to be blamed for these judgments: the procuring cause of all the hidings of his face, of our unprofitable attendance on ordinances, of our hearts being hardened from his fear, and of our being left to err from his way, is wholly with ourselves, not with God: For he says to us, *The Lord is with you, while ye are with him: and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you.* We have ourselves only to blame for the restraint of the Holy Spirit, Micah ii. 7. *O thou that art named the House of Jacob, is the Spirit of the Lord straitened? Are these his doings? Do not my words good to him that walketh uprightly?* The other error which we should study to avoid, is, unthankfulness for what kindness the Lord still continues to shew his people. We have his word and ordinances; and we may well believe they have their effects, however little observed: for *wherever he makes his name be recorded, he will come unto his people, and bless them.* While he favours us with the pure preaching of the word and the administration of his ordinances, some will be born in Zion; some will be edified; Christians may

may want a very comfortable sense of the Lord's presence, but still his hand will lead them and support them. Perhaps indeed they know it not now; but they shall know it hereafter. O how much reason have believers to be thankful for what light and conviction, for what strength, refreshment and establishment the Lord affords them by means of his word, even while they are saying, *Verily, thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour!*

F I N I S.