

force themselves upon our remembrance. He who is so severe upon others for errors merely *SPECULATIVE*, has no reason to complain of the severity of those who censure him for what is much worse, errors in *PRACTICE*. But to quit this subject: Mr. Madan has produced a number of texts, which he supposes prove the truth of the thirty-nine articles. Others suppose just the contrary, and that they prove no such matter. Those who are acquainted with the controversial writings of the Arminians and the Calvinists, or the Socinians, Arians, and Trinitarians, will not find many new discoveries in Mr. Madan's pamphlet. Men of the most distinguished characters, for learning and probity, and a great part of whose lives have been spent in the study of the scriptures, have not supposed the texts, so often urged in support of the Calvinistic doctrines,

doctrines, to be by any means sufficient for the purpose. They conceive those texts to be evidently misunderstood. The late Dr. JORTIN, a man of genius and uncommon erudition, asserted, that Dr. WHITBY, in his famous treatise on the five points, had confuted the doctrines of Calvinism even to a demonstration. All that I mean hence to infer is, that it is not so clear as the Calvinists themselves imagine, that their doctrines are really grounded upon the Scriptures. To other men, of the greatest abilities and judgment, the contrary has appeared evident. And if none but those, who really believed the articles, had taken orders in the church of England, it would have been deprived of some of its greatest ornaments. Did, archbishop TILLOTSON believe the articles? Examine his writings, and you will be convinced, that there were other things
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in the articles and liturgy not agreeable to his sentiments, as well as the Athanasian creed, which he confessed he wished the church was WELL RID OF. Did Bishop PATRICK, Bishop WILKINS, Bishop HOADLY, Bishop SHERLOCK, Bishop BUTLER, Bishop LAVINGTON, Dr. WHICHCOTE, Dr. HAMMOND, Dr. CUDWORTH, Dr. SAMUEL CLARKE, Dr. SYKES, or Dr. STEBBING, not to mention innumerable others, really believe all the doctrines contained in the articles? Those who will be at the pains to compare the writings of these eminent prelates and divines of the church of England with the articles, will be convinced, that they did not. And it is grievous to observe the wretched shifts to which men, great and excellent in other respects, have been reduced, in order to justify their conduct in subscribing these articles. From all which I would
infer,

infer, that as good and worthy men of all parties have differed so much with respect to these controverted points, there ought in a national church, if such a church be necessary, to be a greater allowance for a latitude of opinion. It certainly must be highly prejudicial to the interests of religion, that the laity should have reason to suppose, that many of the clergy subscribe articles which they do not believe; and yet the fact is now too notorious to be denied. Their sermons and the thirty-nine articles are often in direct opposition. There is a material difference between a NATIONAL church, and a private religious society. If the established clergy of the kingdom must be burthened with human articles of faith, every principle of reason dictates, that they ought to be more COMPREHENSIVE than the present, and not
suited

suited to one sect or party only, and that by no means the most numerous.

HANM. Have you seen Mr. Samuel Roe's address to the public, and the petitioners, on the subject of the articles?

FRANKL. I have; and of all the defenders of subscription, he is the most admirable. This worthy vicar of Stotfield in Bedfordshire, asserts, that the scheme for obtaining redress in the matter of subscription, is "a diabolical, mischievous
 "machination, contrived, and now re-
 "vived by the enemies of religion, to
 "serve some jesuitical, methodistical,
 "schismatical, atrocious purposes." And he assures us, that the right of private judgment is "no Gospel, no Christian
 "principle;" and farther, that every person who doth assert the right of private judgment, must appear to be an enemy to the church; and that every one who presumes

to divest the church of this authority (of determining matters of faith) deserves not the name of a Christian. But we may say of Mr. Roe's remarks, what the late alderman Sawbridge is reported to have said in the house of commons relative to the articles: "There is no occasion to take any pains to expose them; reading them is sufficient." This zealous champion of the Church, the Rev. Mr. Samuel Roe, about two years ago, published a pamphlet, entitled "Enthusiasm detected;" in which he recommended it to the legislature, when to their wisdom it should seem meet, that they would make an example of Tabernacle preachers, by enacting a law to cut out their tongues; and also, by the same authority, to cut out the tongues of all field-teachers, and those who should preach in houses, barns, or elsewhere,

elsewhere, if they had not the sanction of APOSTOLICAL ordination and legal authority.

HANM. Mr. Roe's zeal carries him to great lengths indeed. The reverend vicar is rather too hot for these lukewarm times; though he would doubtless have made a capital figure in the days of bishop Bonner. But, to leave this very zealous divine, I have an objection to mention against the application of the ecclesiastical petitioners, which has been thought to be very forcible. It is said, that the king cannot give the royal assent to any bill calculated to comply with their desires, without violating his coronation oath.

FRANKL. I know that this objection has been urged, and in particular by Mr. Toplady; but it appears to me to have little weight. It is said, that every king of Great Britain, since the Union, has

been obliged to swear at his coronation, That he would maintain and preserve inviolably the settlement of the Church of England, and the doctrine, worship, discipline, and government thereof, as by law established. Hence it is inferred, that the king must be perjured, if he gives his assent to any bill for making any alterations in the church. But surely this must be a gross mistake. The evident design of the legislature, by enjoining this oath upon the king, was to secure the church from any alterations being made by the regal prerogative. Whatever alterations may be made in the church by the two estates of parliament, in concurrence with the king, it is still the church of England, AS BY LAW ESTABLISHED. And if the king preserves the ecclesiastical constitution so far, as to avoid any illegal violations of it himself, and to prevent others from violating

lating

lating it; and makes no alterations in it by his own authority, but only by the desire of the lords and commons, in parliament assembled, he maintains the settlement of the church of England INVIOLABLY, as I apprehend, according to the full intent and meaning of the act. It may also be observed, that the king, in his oath relative to the civil constitution, swears to govern according to the laws and customs of the kingdom. But is it supposed, that he violates his oath, when he gives his assent to any bills for repealing laws which were in force at the time of his coronation? On the contrary, we know, that acts for repealing old laws are very common. And why should errors be perpetuated in the church any more than in the state? To imagine, that no alterations can be made in the church of England, as a national establishment, by the king and

both houses of parliament, if errors should be discovered in it, is to suppose its constitution more irrational than that of the church of Rome. And, indeed, such an idea is contrary to every just principle of government and legislation, and big with absurdity.

HANM. Whatever reason you may suppose there is for granting the design of the ecclesiastical petitioners, there seems now little room to expect that they will obtain any relief, as the house of commons have rejected their petition.

FRANKL. Their want of success will be no proof of any want of justice in their cause. I have no more faith in the infallibility of the house of commons, than I have in the infallibility of the articles and liturgy. But I must confess, that I wonder the less at the ill success of the petitioners, when I learn, that the first Lord of the
Treasury

Treasury was among the number of their opposers: he being an officer of state for whom the modern representatives of the people have a most reverential regard. However, to do justice to his lordship, he was somewhat unwilling, if we may believe the public papers, that it should be supposed he had affirmed the thirty-nine articles to be grounded upon scripture: which certainly implied a degree of modesty, and regard to truth, very commendable in a prime minister. And whatever doubts his lordship himself entertained of the truth of the articles, he might not think it prudent to encourage the same degree of unbelief in the clergy.

HANM. The rejection of the petition, by the house of commons, will be a great triumph to the warm advocates for subscription.

FRANKL. It probably will be so; but it will be the triumph of bigotry and worldly policy over truth and reason. I must, however, acknowledge, that I think Mr. Toplady, Mr. Madan, and Mr. Romaine, whose attachment to the Calvinistic doctrines is well known, are much more consistent in their zeal for the articles, than those gentlemen who are so strenuous in their defence, though they have long preached and written against the doctrines contained in them. Upon what principles they can vindicate their conduct, I cannot comprehend. But some men would defend any church, and any articles or creeds whatever, to which good benefices were annexed, of which they received the emoluments. Our immortal MILTON was so sensible of the hardship of subscription, that this consideration induced him to decline entering into holy orders, though

though he was educated and intended for a clergyman. His free, ingenuous spirit, could not endure the shackles of ecclesiastical authority. He loved religious as well as civil freedom. He informs us himself, that by the intentions of his parents and friends, he was destined from a child, and with his own inclinations, to the service of the church; “till coming (says he) to some maturity of years, and perceiving what tyranny had invaded it, that he who would take orders must subscribe SLAVE, and take an oath withal, which unless he took with a conscience that could retch, he must strait perjure or split his faith; I thought it better to prefer a blameless silence before the office of speaking bought and begun with servitude and forswearing.”

HANM. I am convinced, Mr. Frankland, that there is considerable force in many
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arguments which you have advanced ; and the affair of subscription, especially on its present footing, appears to me in a very different light from what it did before. And I should be glad to have some farther conversation with you upon the subject ; but at this time it must be deferred, as we shall soon be obliged, however unwillingly, to take leave of each other.

FRANKL. It is true ; and, therefore, I shall put a period to my observations upon this subject. I have not, my good friend, in the remarks which I have made, taken any notice of the imposition of the articles upon young students on their admission into the universities, or on their taking degrees ; or of the imposition of them on doctors of law and physic ; which are oppressions so palpably absurd, that it seems hardly necessary to take any pains to point out their impropriety. Nor have I entered
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into any particular examination of those doctrines and passages in the articles and liturgy, which I think the most exceptionable; as such a discussion would have led us into too large a field. At present, I have endeavoured, from more enlarged principles, to shew the propriety of the late application to parliament, for some relief in the matter of ecclesiastical subscription. And what weight there may have been in the arguments which I have offered, you must judge for yourself. I shall only add, that whatever secular purposes may be answered by assuming such a dominion over the faith of Christians, as the imposition of human creeds and articles of belief, it is to me extremely evident, that the cause of real religion can derive no advantages from it. Error, bigotry, and priestcraft, may require these supports; but truth and genuine Christianity
 disdain

disdain such artificial aids. I therefore conclude, that the gentlemen who have petitioned the parliament on this subject, whatever may be the final event of their endeavours, are not only in the strictest degree justifiable, but entitled to the applause of every consistent Protestant; of all those who prefer the pure light of revelation, to human impositions, and the traditions of men.



A R E-

A
R E V I E W
OF THE
GENUINE DOCTRINES
OF
CHRISTIANITY:

COMPREHENDING

R E M A R K S

ON SEVERAL PRINCIPAL

CALVINISTICAL DOCTRINES;

And some OBSERVATIONS on the Use of

REASON IN RELIGION,

ON

HUMAN NATURE,

AND ON

F R E E A G E N C Y.

[FIRST PUBLISHED IN THE YEAR 1763.]

P R E F A C E.

CONTROVERSIAL writing has been so multiplied in the Christian world, and frequently carried on in a manner so little agreeable to the genuine spirit of Christianity, that many sensible persons are apt to conceive a distaste against every production of that kind. But as religion is in itself the most important thing in the world, it is certainly of great importance that men should entertain just notions of
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it. And though matters of mere OPINION, as such, are not perhaps of great moment; yet any notions which have a tendency to prevent the PRACTICAL influence of religion on the minds of men, are unquestionably of very bad consequence; and are the more dangerous and prejudicial, when they are received as SACRED doctrines, and those who have imbibed them are afraid to examine them with freedom and impartiality.

It must be a subject of regret, to every man who is himself convinced of the important truths of the Christian revelation, who reverences its divine author, and is concerned for the promotion of the interests of his religion, as a scheme calculated in the most admirable manner to promote the cause of virtue, and the present and future happiness of mankind,

to

to observe the absurd and unamiable representations which are frequently given of this most excellent institution. It is often so inveloped in the absurdities of some of its mistaken professors, that scarcely any traces of its original simplicity and beauty are discernible. It must, however, be acknowledged with pleasure, that most of those absurd tenets, which have long contributed to disfigure and to obscure the original doctrines of the gospel, and which have been sheltered under the venerable name of ORTHODOXY, have for a considerable time past, by the most learned and inquisitive Christians of almost every denomination, been discarded as unscriptural, as well as irrational. Bigotry, and a slavish attachment to established systems, to creeds and articles of faith, the inventions and devices of men,

have given way to a rational and free inquiry into the real doctrines of the sacred writings themselves; by which means the Christian system has been better understood, and more rational and consistent sentiments have been established in a considerable part of the Christian world. But it is still much to be regretted, that notwithstanding these beneficial effects, which have been the natural result of freedom of inquiry, and the prevalence of more liberal sentiments, there are yet great numbers of pious and well-meaning Christians, who are very strongly attached to the absurd and contradictory tenets of CALVINISM.

As these doctrines appear in themselves, though they may not always produce their NATURAL effect, to be very unfavourable to the MORALITY of the gospel, and to the
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promotion of that real virtue and benevolence of heart, which it is the principal design of Christianity to inculcate and promote; as they must appear, upon an impartial examination, to be contrary to the general tenour and design of the sacred writings, however they may be fortified by imaginary proofs drawn from thence; and as the idea which they give of the Christian system is an absurd and unamiable one, and such as has a natural tendency to prejudice, and in fact frequently does prejudice, many against Christianity, and even against religion itself; every attempt to remove such opinions, and to establish juster sentiments of the religion of Jesus, must, if it has any effect, be serviceable to the Christian cause.

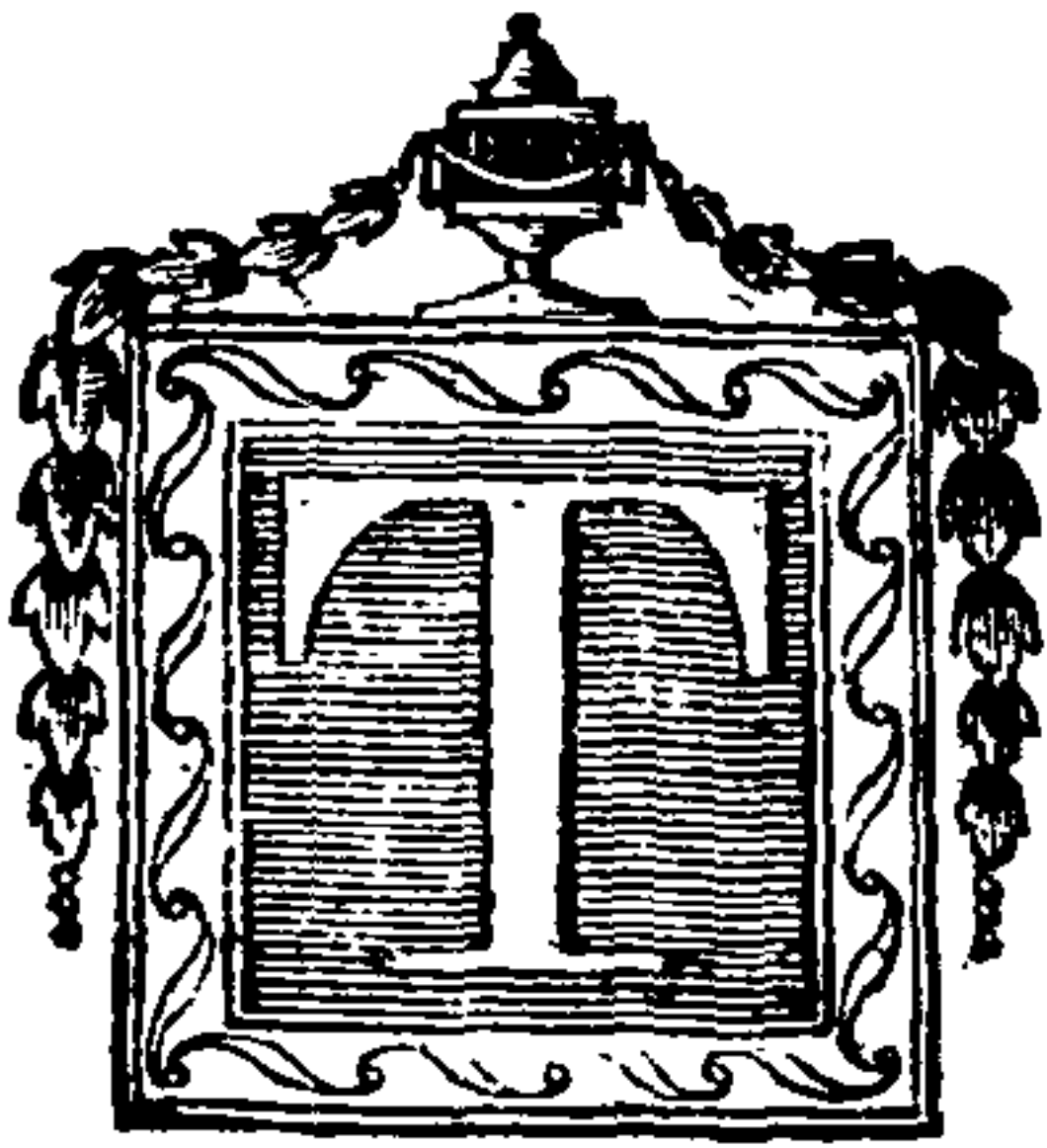
To obviate, therefore, some of those prejudices, which are entertained by the per-

sons who favour Calvinistical principles, against those more rational and consistent ideas of the Christian religion, which the free exercise of reason, and the unprejudiced study of the sacred writings, naturally suggest; and to give a flight sketch of that admirable system, as it is really delineated in the books of the New Testament, is the design of this tract. And it may be presumed, that an endeavour to promote such sentiments in religion, as are honourable to the supreme Creator, and agreeable to the dictates of reason as well as of revelation, though imperfect in itself, will be favourably received by the Intelligent and the Candid; by all those who are sincerely attached to the real interests of genuine Christianity.

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A
R E V I E W
OF THE
GENUINE DOCTRINES
OF
CHRISTIANITY.



THE diversity of sentiment which has appeared in the Christian world, with respect to many important points of Christian doctrine, must be a matter of considerable surprize to a speculative observer. It would be natural

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tural to imagine, that in a Divine Revelation, intended to lead mankind to the knowledge of those divine truths, which are necessary to their salvation, those truths would be there laid down with such a degree of precision and perspicuity, that no man of moderate understanding, who was sincerely desirous of knowing the truth, could possibly mistake it. But natural and reasonable as this supposition may be, the fact certainly is, that very different representations of the Christian religion are given, by persons who appear equally sincere in their intentions.

As there does not, however, appear to be any such real obscurity in the revelation itself, when fairly and candidly examined, at least with respect to the general aim and design of it, this diversity of opinion concerning it must be attributed to other causes. And it appears very evident, that a much
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greater uniformity of opinion, with respect at least to the more important and essential parts of religion, would have taken place in the Christian world, had men freely exercised their own reason in inquiring after truth, and discovering the real doctrines of revelation; and had not been induced to hood-wink their understandings, and receive as the dictates of infallible truth, whatever some particular zealous and overbearing men, who have become heads and leaders of sects and parties, have thought proper to declare were the only true and orthodox doctrines of scripture. Articles of faith, creeds, &c. may, perhaps, justly be considered as having hindered, in a very considerable degree, the advancement of just notions of the doctrines of the gospel; as by them the mistakes of some particular men have been handed down as sacred doctrines, and by that means the timely recti-

fication of such errors has been in a great degree prevented. By the increase of creeds and articles of faith, systems of divinity have been formed, and by them the scriptures have been interpreted. Instead of thoroughly and impartially examining what appeared to be the genuine doctrine of the scriptures, men have brought their own prejudices and pre-conceived notions with them; and, at all events, the scriptures must be made to tally with these notions, however contrary they might be to the real meaning of the sacred writings, or however absurd and inconsistent in themselves. Mistaken and false interpretations of some of the more difficult and obscure parts of the sacred writings, have been adopted as essential parts of the doctrine of the gospel; and though perhaps contrary to some of its most fundamental principles, when rightly understood, yet the reception of some of these

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these notions has been considered as the only true criterion of soundness and of orthodoxy. These tenets have been received by many with such implicit assent, that they have considered it as impious to disbelieve, or even to doubt the truth of them : and, indeed, when once any set of opinions can be brought to be considered in this light, little argument will be sufficient for their support ; superstition, or a too timorous piety, will, with the majority, fortify them against all the force of reason and of argument. Had not, by means of this kind, a veil of obscurity been thrown over the most simple, intelligible, and rational of all religions, those heats, animosities, and religious contentions, with which ecclesiastical history is disgraced, could not possibly have subsisted in the Christian world ; and probably the present distinction of sects and parties

parties would have been in a great degree extinct.

As it appears that it was the want of the free exercise of reason, which has been the principal occasion of the absurd and mistaken representations which have been given of Christianity; and as it is a notion still entertained by those who adhere to the doctrines in this tract more particularly opposed, that mere human reason, (or, as it is sometimes emphatically called, **CARNAL** reason) is not an adequate judge of religious matters; and that men are not capable, by the use of their natural faculties and powers, of having just conceptions of those divine truths which are the objects of revelation, nor of understanding revelation itself, I shall offer a few remarks upon that subject.

It is indeed no easy matter to reason successfully with those, by whom the de-
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cisions of reason are not admitted. But it may be observed, that however ready such persons are to appeal from the determinations of reason, when they make against themselves, they are nevertheless willing to retain it in their service, as long as it can be employed with any degree of success on their own side. They will employ reason, as long as they are able, in defence of their own tenets; but when they find that they are no longer defensible on any rational principles, they then reject the authority of reason. In conformity to an observation somewhere made, reason is against them, and therefore they, in their turn, are against reason.

THAT the use of reason in religion should have been opposed, by the patrons and adherents of papal tyranny and superstition, is not at all wonderful. If ignorance cannot justly be said to be the mother of devotion,
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it is nevertheless the most suitable nurse for superstition, bigotry, and implicit faith. It was therefore natural for those in the interest of the Roman see, to oppose with all their might the exercise of reason, as the most dangerous enemy of their ecclesiastical usurpation. But that Protestants, whose religion appears to be founded on the use of reason, should nevertheless refuse to acknowledge the propriety of appeals to it in the determination of religious controversies, is not easy to be accounted for.

COULD we be infallibly certain, that any doctrine was revealed, and any action or actions commanded by the supreme Creator himself; it would undoubtedly be our duty to assent to the one, and to obey the other, whether we could discern their probability and fitness, or not. Reason itself would dictate this. The Deity can neither be himself mistaken, nor can he deceive his creatures;

creatures ; and his wisdom and his goodness render it impossible, that he should command any thing that is not fit and proper. Therefore, whatever we certainly know to be taught or commanded by Him, reason itself would teach us to believe and to obey. To object against any part of the known will of God, because we do not discern its reasonableness, would be both absurd and impious. But surely there can be no impiety in examining, whether what is offered to us as a divine revelation, really be so or not ; much less in examining what are, and what are not, the real doctrines of revelation itself. We have otherwise no security against any species of delusion and imposture : but at Constantinople we must receive implicitly the doctrines of the Koran, and at Rome we must believe Transubstantiation.

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THE warmest friends to Christianity need not be under any apprehension, that this will sustain any detriment by the freest examination, provided it be a candid and a fair one. The uncorrupted religion of Jesus will approve itself to the understanding of every impartial and reasonable man. It is enthusiasm, bigotry, and superstition alone, that are endangered by the appeal to reason; and it is forbidden only in those erroneous theological systems, the patrons of which are conscious that their schemes will not stand the test of reason; and therefore they are reduced to the necessity of employing this subterfuge to evade its force. Truth itself fears no scrutiny. It is the direction of the great apostle of the Gentiles, to **PROVE ALL THINGS, and HOLD FAST THAT ONLY WHICH IS GOOD** ¹. He directed those to whom he preached, to **JUDGE** what he said;

¹ 1 Thess. v. 21.

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and desired no other assent to his doctrines, than what their own unbiassed reason led them to. And he commends the Bereans in very strong terms, because they were free inquirers: they believed not the apostles themselves implicitly, but SEARCHED THE SCRIPTURES WHETHER THOSE THINGS WERE SO².

It is easy to prove, by many passages, that the scriptures are very far from giving any countenance to a rejection of reason. We find, on the contrary, both in the Old and in the New Testament, frequent appeals to the reason and understanding of mankind. God himself is represented in several places as reasoning with his creatures³. Christ often appeals to the understandings of those who heard him⁴. St.

² Acts xvii. 11. ³ Particularly in Isaiah ch. v. 3. xxviii. 23—26. Ezek. xviii. 24—32. and Micah vi. 2, 3. ⁴ Mark viii. 17—21. John viii. 46.

Paul is represented as REASONING with Felix the Roman gove nor concerning the faith in Christ ⁵. The same apostle reasons with king Agrippa ⁶, with the Athenian philosophers ⁷, and with the Jews ⁸. And that an ability of understanding the scriptures, is not confined to those who in some supernatural manner have their minds prepared for the reception of divine truths, or by some divine irradiation are already initiated into the knowledge of them, is evident from our Saviour's own words, who directs even the unbelieving Jews to SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES ⁹; which it cannot be supposed he would have done, had they not been naturally capable of understanding them. And indeed of what use can that revelation be, which requires another revelation to explain it? In truth, the least reflection must

⁵ Acts xxiv. 24, 25. ⁶ Acts xxvi. 8. ⁷ Acts xvii.

16—31. ⁸ Acts xvii. 2, 3. ⁹ John v. 39.

convince

convince us, of the necessity of our exercising our reason in reading the scriptures. For there are many passages in the sacred writings, which, were we to understand them literally, would be either unintelligible or false. Here then we naturally employ our reason, as we do in all other writings, to discover the real meaning of the writer. We are obliged of necessity thus to exercise our reason, if we would in any tolerable degree understand the scriptures, or indeed any thing else. Why then are we forbidden to use our reason freely in religious inquiries? In fact, the notion, that reason is not a proper guide in religious matters, is so egregiously absurd, that any man, but one who through the prejudice of education, or something of a similar nature, has espoused this strange dogma, must be amazed that there should be any necessity of confuting it.

HAVING in some degree, it is presumed, established this principle, that we may with safety and propriety take reason as our guide, in an examination of what are the genuine doctrines of the gospel ; I shall, after a few previous observations, proceed to that inquiry, in that method which appears the most natural and rational. And this certainly must be, to inquire what were the doctrines which Christ himself principally inculcated upon his followers and disciples ; and what it was that his apostles appear chiefly to have inculcated upon those to whom they preached. For it would be very irrational, however frequently that method may have been taken, to explain those more intelligible parts of the New Testament, the meaning of which is so obvious that it strikes at the first view, by such as are metaphorical and obscure, and capable of different interpretations. But it
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is observable, that those who have imbibed the most absurd and inconsistent notions of Christianity, are particularly fond of St. Paul's epistles; and read and quote them much oftner, than they do the gospels, and other less controverted parts of scripture. The reason of which appears to be, that these, as being in some places somewhat difficult and obscure, are better calculated to be so explained as to countenance any favourite doctrine, than those parts of scripture which are more plain, and less capable of perversion. Some such use appears to have been made of St. Paul's epistles, even in the most early ages of Christianity. For St. Peter observes, that there were, in St. Paul's epistles, **SOME THINGS HARD TO BE UNDERSTOOD, WHICH those that were UNLEARNED AND UNSTABLE WRESTED, even in his time, TO THEIR OWN DESTRUCTION** ¹⁰.

¹⁰ 2 Peter iii. 15, 16.

IN profane authors we always make use of those parts, the meaning of which is clear and evident, to explain and illustrate those which are dark and obscure. And it is certain, that no just reason can be assigned, why this most rational method should not be taken with the scriptures.

IN my intended review of the doctrines of the New Testament, I shall begin with our Lord's sermon on the mount, the longest and most considerable discourse that we have recorded as preached by him. We find it composed chiefly of moral precepts, and directions for the regulation of the conduct of his disciples; of exhortations to peaceableness, purity, forgiveness of injuries, candour in judging of others, resignation to the providence of God, and the practice of justice and equity, and of that extensive benevolence, which comprehended in it the love even of their enemies. Our
 Lord

Lord inculcates the practice of these virtues on his disciples with peculiar emphasis and force, as the only thing that could commend them to his favour, and on which they could place any rational dependance. “Whosoever,” says he, “heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house upon a rock; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell not, for it was founded on a rock.” It is with these words that this discourse of our Saviour ends; in the whole of which his design manifestly is, to lead them to the sincere PRACTICE of piety and virtue; and to a greater degree of it than was then generally practised by the Jewish scribes and Pharisees. For our Lord tells them, “Except your righteousness shall

” Matt. vii. 24, 25.

“ exceed the righteousness of the Scribes
 “ and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter
 “ into the kingdom of heaven ¹².”

THERE is not the least ground for the far-fetched interpretation that is sometimes given to the last-quoted text, viz. that the righteousness there spoken of, as necessary to qualify them for entering into the kingdom of heaven, was the righteousness of Christ imputed to them. Our Lord is evidently exhorting them to PERSONAL righteousness; for he is throughout his whole discourse inculcating virtues which they themselves were to practise. His meaning evidently is, that if they would gain the favour of God, and attain eternal life, they must not content themselves with a formal observance of the external duties of religion, and with appearing to men to be religious, as the scribes and Pharisees, and hypocrites,

¹² Matt. v. 20.

of whom he was speaking, did; but that they must regulate their lives by the rules of religion and virtue, not in appearance only, but in reality, in sincerity and singleness of heart.

WE find our Lord, in the other parts of the gospels, enforcing the love of God and our neighbour, as the sum and substance of religion. And he in particular represents the practice of benevolence, and the exercise of the social affections, as the distinguishing characteristics of the professors of his religion. “By this shall all men know that ye
 “are my disciples, if ye have love one to
 “another”¹³.” And he represents the keeping of his commandments, as the proper criterion by which they might judge of their love to him. “He that hath my com-
 “mandments, and keepeth them, he it is
 “that loveth me”¹⁴.”

¹³ John xiii. 35.

¹⁴ John xiv. 21.

AN incident of our Lord's life is recorded, in which he has pointed out, in a very strong and beautiful manner, that nothing but doing the will of God would be a recommendation to his favour. It is said that, in the midst of one of his discourses, " while he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to see him. Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without desiring to speak with thee. But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand towards his disciples, and said, Behold my mother, and my brethren. For whosoever shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother ¹⁵." Giving them to

¹⁵ Matt. xii. 46—50.

understand, in a most expressive manner, that they were more allied to him by the practice of piety and virtue, than by any other relation. This is what he appears to have taken every opportunity to inculcate; for we are also told, that when “a certain woman—lift up her voice, and said unto him, Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked;— he said, Yea, rather blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it¹⁶.” And in his pathetic exhortation to his disciples, a little before his crucifixion, recorded in the latter part of St. John’s gospel, he with great earnestness repeatedly exhorts them to persevere in keeping his commandments, as the only proper test of their love to him.

It is also very evident, that, in the representations which Christ gives of the fu-

¹⁶ Luke xi. 27, 28.

ture

ture world, he always describes their final state as determined by their own moral character. “ In the end of the world the
 “ Son of man shall send forth his angels,
 “ and they shall gather out of his kingdom
 “ all things that offend, and them which
 “ do iniquity, and shall cast them into a
 “ furnace of fire:—Then shall the righteous
 “ shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of
 “ their Father¹⁷.” In another place: “ At
 “ the end of the world, the angels shall
 “ come forth, and sever the wicked from
 “ among the just; and shall cast them into
 “ a furnace of fire¹⁸.” Again, “ The
 “ Son of man shall come in the glory of
 “ his Father, with his angels; and then
 “ he shall reward every man according to
 “ his works¹⁹.” If the final state of man-
 kind were to be determined, agreeably to

¹⁷ Matt. xiii. 40—43.

¹⁸ Matt. xiii. 49, 50.

¹⁹ Matt. xvi. 27.

the tenets of some Christians, by a mere arbitrary election of some favoured individuals to eternal life, without any respect to their OWN PERSONAL merits, whilst the remainder of the human race were suffered to perish; or, if it had been determined by the warmth and fervency with which they had relied on the merits or righteousness of Christ; it would be very extraordinary, if this were the true state of the case, that these representations of Christ, as well as those of the apostles in the other parts of the New Testament, should concur in declaring, that, in the future world, men would be rewarded or punished ACCORDING TO THEIR WORKS.

IF we take a view of all our Saviour's discourses, parables, and public instructions, it will appear plainly, that the general tendency of them is, to inculcate upon his disciples and followers, the sincere practice
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of piety, humility, benevolence, and the most exalted virtue; and to enforce this by imprinting deeply in their minds the doctrine of a future state of rewards and punishments; and by forcibly pointing out the wisdom of sacrificing our temporal to our eternal interests, whenever they come in competition with each other. And with these ideas of the design of the Christian religion, we shall find the representations given of it by the apostles, in other parts of the New Testament, perfectly to coincide.

WE are very far from finding, in the accounts which are given, in the acts of the apostles, of the discourses made by the apostles in the promulgation of Christianity, any of those unintelligible and irrational doctrines which have been taught in later times. Their discourses are intelligible, consistent, and repugnant to no principle of reason. Of this, St. Paul's oration to
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the Athenians is a striking instance²⁰. After having censured their idolatry and superstition, he proceeds to preach to them the true God, the Creator of the world; and to give them juster sentiments of him than they then appeared to entertain. He shews the absurdity of considering God as confined to temples, or as a local deity; and teaches them, that God was not to be worshipped by men, as though he needed any thing of them; because it was from him that they received LIFE, AND BREATH, AND ALL THINGS. He represents the Deity, not as a God of a particular country or people, but as the God and Father of the whole human race; and thence infers the absurdity of representing him by any image. Having established these first principles of natural religion, he goes on to preach to them some of the more peculiar doctrines

²⁰ Acts xvii. 22—31.

of the Christian revelation. “ The times
 “ of this ignorance” he says, (speaking of
 the superstition and idolatry which had pre-
 vailed among mankind) “ God winked at;
 “ but now commandeth all men every
 “ where to repent: because he hath ap-
 “ pointed a day in which he will judge
 “ the world in righteousness, by that man
 “ whom he hath ordained; whereof he
 “ hath given assurance unto all men, in
 “ that he hath raised him from the dead.”

We find a striking difference between the
 method here taken by this great apostle,
 and that which has been since taken by
 many modern preachers of the gospel. The
 apostle establishes revelation on the foun-
 dations of natural religion. He urges them
 to repentance, as that which it was the end
 and design of Christianity to promote; and,
 as a motive to it, preaches to them the doc-
 trine of a future state of retribution; in
 which

which Jesus was to preside as the supreme judge: and, for a proof of his divine mission and authority, he urges his resurrection from the dead. Not a single word is said by him of the natural incapacity of men to do any thing which could recommend them to God; nor does he once tell them, that a reliance on the merits or righteousness of Christ would be sufficient for their salvation: Which, if they had really been such capital and essential doctrines of Christ's religion, as they have since been represented to be, he certainly, when he was thus preaching the gospel, could not possibly have omitted.

WHEN St. Peter preached to the Jews, after having healed a lame man in the temple, and represented that miracle, which he declared to have been done by the power of Christ, as a proof of his divine mission; he adds, "Repent ye therefore, and be
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