

“ converted, that your sins may be blotted
 “ out ;” and concludes with telling them,
 “ that God had raised up his son Jesus,
 “ and sent him to bless” them, “ in turn-
 “ ing away every one of them from their
 “ iniquities ²¹.” And when Paul and Bar-
 nabas preached to the Lystrians, their words
 are, “ We preach unto you, that ye should
 “ turn from these vanities unto the living
 “ God, which made heaven and earth,
 “ and the sea, and all things that are
 “ therein : who in times past suffered all
 “ nations to walk in their own ways. Ne-
 “ vertheless, he left not himself without
 “ witness, in that he did good, and gave
 “ us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons,
 “ filling our hearts with food and glad-
 “ ness ²².” The natural ability of man to
 conform to the rules of religion appears
 here to be clearly implied ; and also his

²¹ Acts iii. 12—26.

²² Acts xiv. 15—17.

ability of discerning the existence and character of the Deity by the mere light of nature.

IN the account which St. Paul gives of himself to Felix the Roman governor, we find the following expressions: “ After the
 “ way which they (the Jews) call heresy,
 “ so worship I the God of my fathers, be-
 “ lieving all things which are written in
 “ the law and in the prophets. And have
 “ hope towards God, which they them-
 “ selves also allow, that there shall be a re-
 “ surrection of the dead, both of the just and
 “ unjust: and herein do I exercise myself,
 “ to have alway sa conscience void of of-
 “ fence towards God, and towards men²³.”

Nor when Felix sent for Paul, “ to hear
 “ him concerning the faith in Christ,” is he represented as saying any thing about the favourite doctrines of some modern systems

²³ Acts xxiv. 14—16.

of divinity; but is described as reasoning of “righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come.” And in St. Paul’s speech for himself, before king Agrippa and Festus, after reciting the manner of his miraculous conversion, he gives this account of the method in which he first preached Christianity. “I was not,” says the apostle, “disobedient unto the heavenly vision: “but shewed first unto them of Damascus, “and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the “coasts of Judea, and then to the Gen- “tiles, that they should repent, and turn “to God, and do works meet for repent- “ance²⁴.” Indeed, any man who reads the acts of the apostles, with any degree of attention and impartiality, must be perfectly convinced, that the doctrines which they taught, and those which have been since taught by some who have affected to be

²⁴ Acts xxvi 19, 20.

very close imitators of them, were totally different. And the account which is given in the Acts, of the conversion of Cornelius, the Roman centurion, to the Christian faith, is a strong evidence of the regard that is ever paid to sincere piety and virtue by the Almighty; and what little ground there is for the notion, that men cannot recommend themselves by their own actions to the favour of God. It is on the contrary plainly declared in this relation, that the PRAYERS and ALMS, the piety and benevolence, of a Roman officer, had so recommended him to the divine favour, that an angel was sent to him in order to occasion his conversion to Christianity. For the reason which the angel gave for his extraordinary appearance to him, was, “Thy
 “prayers and thine alms are come up for
 “a memorial before God²⁵.” This emi-

²⁵ Acts x. 4.

nent instance of the attention, and regard of
 the Divine Being, to real piety and virtue,
 wherever found, so struck the apostle Peter,
 who had imbibed the narrow notions of his
 countrymen, that the favour of God was
 confined to their nation, that “ he opened
 “ his mouth, and said, Of a truth I per-
 “ ceive, that God is no respecter of persons:
 “ but in every nation, he that feareth him,
 “ and worketh righteousness, is accepted
 “ with him.”

BUT it is from the epistles of St. Paul,
 as has been before observed, that some of
 the strongest proofs of the Calvinistical
 doctrines, and some others which have been
 founded upon them, are supposed to be
 drawn. It will not fall within the compass
 of this tract, to enter into a particular dis-
 cussion of all the passages in St. Paul's
 epistles, which are urged in support of these
 opinions; nor to give those more rational
 and

and consistent interpretations, which have been given by several excellent commentators of such passages. And, indeed, a proper attention to those parts of scripture, the meaning of which is more obvious and less controverted, and to the general tenour of the sacred writings, would carry more conviction with it, than any examination of particular texts. For when once men have been accustomed to read any particular parts of scripture in a certain sense, and to annex a certain set of ideas to such and such phrases, though perhaps totally foreign from the original meaning of the writer, they naturally consider every attempt to interpret any such passages, in a different sense from that in which they have been accustomed to understand them, as wresting and perverting them. But some general observations upon St. Paul's epistles, and some of the doctrines which are founded

upon a misunderstanding of them, may not here be improper.

It should be remembered, in the perusal of these epistles, that they were written to particular churches, and persons, and on particular occasions; and that they had an immediate reference, in many places, to some contentions and disputes which had arisen in the primitive churches, and some of which were peculiar to the first ages of Christianity. For without a proper attention to the particular view and design of the apostle in writing each epistle, it will often be impossible to form any clear notion of his meaning. These circumstances, together with that obscurity which naturally attends epistolary writings of a remote age, must, in the very nature of the thing, render St. Paul's epistles more difficult to be understood than many other parts of the sacred writings.

IN the time of the apostles, it appears, that there were many of the Jews who had embraced Christianity, but who were nevertheless very much attached to the ceremonial law of Moses; and who laboured to prove, that it was necessary for the Gentiles, and all the professors of Christianity, to conform to the Mosaic rites²⁶. St. Paul, in his epistles, opposes the notions of these judaizing Christians; he teaches them, that all who believed in Christ, and embraced his religion, would receive the free remission of their past sins, without any conformity to these ceremonial rites. But from these declarations of the apostle, that they were admitted into the Christian church, and had received the remission of their sins, by virtue of their faith in Christ, and without any respect either to their observance, or non-observance, of the law of Moses,

²⁶ Acts xv. 1—29. xxi. 20—25.

the ceremonial part of which was entirely abolished by the Christian dispensation ; it has been inferred, that it was criminal for men to suppose that their own actions would contribute to, or be the occasion of, their final justification ; or that a conformity to the laws of religion and virtue, the practice even of real works of righteousness, would be a means of their obtaining eternal happiness : though it is the clear and express language of St. Paul himself, as well as of the other sacred writers, that eternal life would be the reward of those, and of those only, who “ by patient continuance in well-
 “ doing” fought “ for glory, and honour,
 “ and immortality.”

ALL the different texts in the epistles of St. Paul, which speak of faith as the cause of man's salvation, may be very rationally and consistently explained, and agreeably to the general tenor of the scriptures, without hav-
 ing

ing recourse to those unreasonable interpretations which are frequently put upon them. And it may be proper to observe, that there was, in the very nature of the thing, a particular reason why faith should have been inculcated with peculiar force in the first ages of Christianity. It was certainly essentially necessary, that at that time faith should be established as a first principle. Those to whom the gospel was first preached, must have been previously convinced of the divine mission and authority of Christ, before they could be expected to obey his laws. But in later ages, and to those who already acknowledged the mission and authority of Christ, the PRACTICE of the duties of Christianity seems the principal thing to be inculcated. Though it must be acknowledged, that exhortations to faith may notwithstanding be very pertinent and advantageous to professed Christians; for it
can

can scarcely be imagined, that so many professors of Christianity would be inattentive to the practice of its duties, if they were really and heartily convinced of the truth and importance of religion.

BUT there is another reason assigned in the New Testament, on which account men were required to believe, viz. that they might receive remission of sins. Men in their present state are surrounded with innumerable temptations, which render it morally impossible that they should be entirely free from sin; and the greatest part of mankind do, and in all ages of the world did, sin very frequently. “All have sinned,” says St. Paul, “and come short of the glory of God²⁷.” As all men, therefore, must have been conscious of having offended their Creator, in a greater or a less degree, and been therefore sensible, that they stood

²⁷ Romans iii. 23.

in need of mercy and forgiveness; but could not have any certain assurance of their being in a state of favour and acceptance with him; the Almighty thought proper to send Jesus Christ into the world, to die upon the cross, that all those who believed in him might receive remission of sins, and might consider his death as a proof of it. The death of Christ may therefore be considered as a memorial, and an evidence, to all mankind, of the placability of God. “We were reconciled to God by the death of his Son²⁸.” It was by faith in the death of Christ, that God thought proper, for infinitely wise reasons, to dispense his mercy to mankind. But it is not therefore to be supposed, that the death of Christ was a MOTIVE to induce God to the exercise of mercy. The all-gracious Parent of mankind, essentially good and merciful

²⁸ Romans v. 10.

in his own nature, needs no inducements to be merciful to his creatures. On the contrary, it is the language of scripture, that “God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish.”²⁹

BUT it is certain, that it could not have been the doctrine of St. Paul, that faith in Christ would of itself entitle men to eternal salvation, without the practice of holiness; because it is the plain and express language of St. Paul, and indeed of all the scriptures, that “without holiness no man shall see the Lord.” And it appears likewise equally clear, from St. Paul’s own epistles, that faith in Christ would not NECESSARILY produce that holiness, which was indispensably necessary to the completion of their salvation; and that the

²⁹ John iii. 16.

justification which he speaks of their receiving, by virtue of their faith in Christ, was not a final justification; nor did it, in itself, give them a right to eternal life. This will appear very plainly if we consider, that those very persons whom he addresses as CALLED, ENLIGHTENED, JUSTIFIED, RECONCILED TO GOD, and SAVED by faith in Christ, he frequently exhorts to a conformity to the commandments of Christ, and the laws of righteousness, assuring them, that without this they would have no inheritance in the kingdom of God. “ Be
 “ ye therefore,” says the apostle, “ fol-
 “ lowers of God as dear children:—for this
 “ ye know, that no whoremonger, nor
 “ unclean person, nor covetous man, who
 “ is an idolater, hath any inheritance in
 “ the kingdom of Christ, and of God:
 “ let no man deceive you with vain words;
 “ for because of these things cometh the
 “ wrath

“ wrath of God upon the children of dis-
 “ obedience ³⁰. Be not deceived : God is
 “ not mocked ; for whatsoever a man sow-
 “ eth, that shall he also reap. For he that
 “ soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh
 “ reap corruption ; but he that soweth to
 “ the spirit, shall of the spirit reap life
 “ everlasting ³¹.” From all which it is
 evident, that when the apostle speaks of
 their being saved by faith in Christ, his
 meaning is not, that it entitled them to eter-
 nal happiness ; but that they were thereby
 saved from the guilt of their past sins, and
 received into the favour of God, notwith-
 standing their former alienation from him ;
 that, on their faith in Christ, they re-
 ceived from the free grace, or mercy of
 God, the remission of their past sins, with-
 out their previously doing any thing to ob-
 tain such remission ; and that, if they af-

³⁰ Ephesians v. 1—6.

³¹ Galatians vi. 7—8.

terwards

terwards continued in a sincere endeavour to conform themselves to the laws of Christ, notwithstanding those imperfections which are always attendant on human obedience, they would finally be approved by him, and made partakers of that happiness which he has promised to all his true disciples. That St. Paul did not consider a real faith in Christ as necessarily in itself giving a right to eternal life, is very evident from his epistles; and it is observable, that speaking even of himself, (and of the reality and sincerity of his own faith he certainly could have no doubt) he says, “ I keep under
 “ my body, and bring it into subjection,
 “ lest that by any means, when I have
 “ preached to others, I myself should be a
 “ cast-away³² ;” in which the apostle manifestly speaks of his own salvation as **CON-**
DITIONAL, and as depending on the dif-

³² 1 Corinthians ix. 27.

charge of his duty, and his adherence to the laws of virtue. “ This single passage
 “ (says a noble and ingenious writer) is a
 “ full answer out of the mouth of St. Paul
 “ himself, to all the mistakes that have
 “ been made of his meaning, in some ob-
 “ scure expressions concerning grace, elec-
 “ tion, and justification³³.” It may also
 be observed, that Christ himself speaks of
 persons who had such a degree of faith in
 him, as to enable them to prophesy, and
 work miracles in his name, and who, he
 declares, would nevertheless be in the num-
 ber of those who would finally be rejected
 by him. “ Not every one that saith unto
 “ me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the
 “ kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth
 “ the will of my Father who is in heaven.
 “ Many will say to me in that day, Lord,

³³ Observations on the Conversion and Apostleship
 of St. Paul, p. 26.

“ Lord,

“ Lord, have we not prophesied in thy
 “ name? and in thy name cast out devils?
 “ and in thy name done many wonderful
 “ works? and then will I profess unto
 “ them, I never knew ye: depart from
 “ me ye that work iniquity³⁴.” We have
 also a text in the epistle to the Hebrews,
 which clearly supposes and expresses the
 possibility of men being finally condemned,
 notwithstanding their having a real faith,
 and being enlightened by the gospel, and
 even made partakers of the holy spirit.
 “ It is impossible for those who were once
 “ enlightened, and have tasted of the hea-
 “ venly gift, and were made partakers of
 “ the holy ghost, and have tasted of the
 “ good word of God, and the powers of
 “ the world to come; if they shall fall
 “ away, to renew them again to repen-
 “ tance³⁵.” And St. Paul, in the epistle

³⁴ Matthew vii. 21—23. ³⁵ Heb. vi. 4—6.

to the Colossians, says, “ You that were
 “ sometime alienated, and enemies in your
 “ mind by wicked works, yet now hath
 “ he reconciled, in the body of his flesh
 “ through death, to preserve you holy and
 “ unblameable, and unreprieveable in his
 “ sight: if ye continue in the faith grounded
 “ and settled, and be not moved away
 “ from the hope of the gospel ³⁶.” Plainly
 teaching them, that their reconciliation to
 God by faith in Christ, would not issue in
 their final salvation, unless they continued
 steadfast in their obedience to the laws of
 Christ; and that, notwithstanding their pre-
 sent reconciliation to God, by faith in
 Christ, their final salvation was CONDI-
 TIONAL. It is not, however, to be sup-
 posed, that the professors of Christianity
 were to be entirely free from sin, in order
 to ensure their final salvation. Man is fur-

³⁶ Colossians i. 21—23.

rounded with such innumerable temptations, that some degree of moral imperfection is always attendant on humanity. And whilst we sincerely endeavour to do the will of God, our involuntary and unallowed imperfections will be forgiven by our merciful Creator. “ If any man sin, “ we have an advocate with the Father, “ Jesus Christ the righteous ³⁷.” But we must endeavour, sincerely and uniformly, to obey the will of God; that must be the prevailing turn and bias of our minds; and without such a sincere conformity to the laws of our Creator, we have not the least reason to expect his final approbation, or to be made partakers of that felicity which he has promised to bestow upon the righteous.

THE phrase, BEING SAVED BY FAITH, may be very rationally explained, even

³⁷ 1 John ii. 1.

when it refers to man's final salvation; though the phrase is certainly frequently used in a different sense. For those who by a firm belief in the doctrines which Christ taught, of a future state of retribution, &c. are induced to refrain from, and to avoid, the practice of vice, and to conform to, and regulate their lives by the laws of piety and virtue, may, with the strictest propriety of speech, be said to be **SAVED BY FAITH**. Because though they are not saved on account of their faith; yet as their faith is the motive that induces them to regulate their lives by the rules of religion, they may very properly be said to be saved by faith.

It must be acknowledged, that those who adhere to the Calvinistical doctrines of justification, election, &c. do nevertheless admit the necessity of holiness, as supposing that faith will necessarily produce
it.

it. But it appears even from the New Testament, that men may really have faith who do not act in conformity to it; and, perhaps, observation on many characters in real life would afford sufficient evidence of the POSSIBILITY of it. And though these notions may be, and certainly frequently are, entertained by persons who are sincerely virtuous; yet to teach men, that they are incapable by their own natural powers, of so far conforming to the laws of righteousness as to attain the favour of God, must naturally slacken their endeavours after it. And to teach them, that their own actions can in no degree recommend them to the divine favour, and that they are not to expect any reward hereafter, on account of any thing which they themselves can do, is certainly depriving men of the strongest MOTIVES to a life of piety and virtue; and appears to be, in a very great degree, sub-

verting the grand design of the Christian revelation.

BUT amongst all the absurd doctrines, which have been pretended to be founded on St. Paul's epistles, there does not appear to have been any so totally repugnant to every idea of the moral character of God, and against which every sentiment of humanity so strongly revolts, as that of predestination. St. Paul has shewn, that God has elected or chosen some particular nations, and collective bodies of men, to enjoy some eminent religious advantages; as the Jews the Mosaic dispensation, and the Gentiles the Christian; which they were favoured with not on account of their respective merits, but entirely because it was the will and pleasure of the Divine Being that it should be so³⁸: and which peculiar advantages he certainly might confer, con-

³⁸ Vid. Romans chap. viii. ix. x. xi.

fistently

sistently with the most perfect justice, on whatsoever nations, or bodies of people, his infinite wisdom should see fit. But from a total misunderstanding of the nature of the election, of which the apostle was speaking, he has been thought to mean, that God had arbitrarily elected a certain number of individuals to future happiness, to whom the means of salvation were given; whilst the rest were reprobated, and consigned over to eternal misery. And all that is alleged, in vindication of the moral character of the Deity, which so much suffers in this shocking representation of the divine conduct, is, that mankind incurred this sentence in consequence of Adam's transgression; by which he, and all his posterity, became objects of the divine wrath, and were subjected to everlasting misery: though the scriptures nowhere represent any thing but death being entailed on mankind in

consequence of the fall. Thus the whole human race are said to have been JUSTLY made subject to eternal misery, for an action committed many ages before the greater part of them existed; though it is the uniform doctrine of the scriptures, that men are punished only for their own works. It is said to have been the doctrine of some of the predestinarian writers, that
 “ God of his own pleasure, antecedent to
 “ all sin in the creature, original or actual,
 “ did agree to glorify his sovereignty and
 “ justice, in the eternal rejection and dam-
 “ nation of the greatest part of mankind,
 “ as the end; and in their unavoidable sin
 “ and impenitency, as the means.”

REASON, revelation, and universal nature, proclaim this truth, that GOD IS GOOD TO ALL, AND THAT HIS TENDER MERCIES ARE OVER ALL HIS WORKS: but in what possible manner can we reconcile this
 with

with these doctrines? with the supposition, that he has devoted, by an irreverfible decree, millions of his creatures to endless misery, without even having given them a poffibility of avoiding it? It is indeed amazing, that fuch a doctrine, fo totally repugnant to every idea, not only of goodnefs and of mercy, but even of equity and of juftice, fhould ever have been confidered as a part of that divine religion, which the Father of mercies, the God of love, has instituted as his laft and moft merciful difpenfation to the fons of men.

NOTWITHSTANDING the abfurd and erroneous interpretations, which have been given of fome parts of St. Paul's writings, they are in themfelves perfectly rational and confiftent; and entirely agreeable to the doctrine of Chrift and the other apoftles. It is only when fome particular detached paffages of his epiftles, are interpreted
with-

without a proper regard to the peculiar circumstances which attended his writing them, and to the whole scope of his reasoning, that he appears to differ from them. This apostle, in all his epistles, inculcates the uniform practice of virtue with great force and energy. And the account, which he gives of the future judgment, perfectly agrees with that given in the gospels.

“ The judgment of God is according to
 “ truth :—who will render to every man
 “ according to his deeds: to them who by
 “ patient continuance in well-doing, seek
 “ for glory, and honour, and immortality,
 “ eternal life: but unto them that are con-
 “ tentious, and do not obey the truth,
 “ but obey unrighteousness, indignation
 “ and wrath; tribulation and anguish upon
 “ every soul of man that doeth evil;—but
 “ glory, honour, and peace, to every man
 “ that

“ that worketh good : for there is no respect of persons with God³⁹.”

THE epistles of the other apostles are attended with less difficulty. That of St. James is almost entirely composed of instructions, for the regulation of the Christian conversation of those to whom his epistle is written. This apostle inculcates very forcibly the necessity of PRACTICAL religion ; and cautions them against imagining, that faith alone was sufficient for their final salvation. “ Be ye,” says he, “ doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves :—What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and hath not works, can faith save him ?—By works a man is justified, and not by faith only⁴⁰.”

And the same apostle represents the practice of benevolence, and personal holiness,

³⁹ Romans ii. 2—11. ⁴⁰ James i. 22. and ii. 14—24.

as the sum of religion. “ Pure religion
 “ and undefiled before God and the Father,
 “ is this, to visit the fatherless and widows
 “ in their affliction; and to keep himself
 “ unspotted from the world.”

THE two general epistles of St. Peter are likewise composed of persuasives to personal virtue, urged chiefly from the consideration of the future judgment; together with some exhortations to steadfastness under those trials, to which the first Christians were more peculiarly exposed. And, agreeably to the representations which have been before given of the design of the gospel, this apostle declares the intention of it to be, **TO CALL THEM TO GLORY AND VIRTUE:** and that by the gospel-dispensation “ are
 “ given to us exceeding great and precious
 “ promises; that by these we might be
 “ made partakers of the divine nature, hav-

“ James i. 27.

“ ing

“ing escaped the corruption that is in the
 “world through lust.” And, in order to
 point out to them in what the excellency
 of the knowledge of Christ consisted, after
 having exhorted them to faith, virtue, tem-
 perance, patience, godliness, brotherly kind-
 nefs, and charity; he adds, “for if these
 “things be in you, and abound, they make
 “you that ye shall neither be barren, nor
 “unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord
 “Jesus Christ⁴².” The following verse is
 also remarkable, and seems to corroborate
 the interpretation that has been before given,
 with respect to some passages in St. Paul’s
 epistles, viz. that the justification by faith,
 of which that apostle speaks, was not an ab-
 solute and final justification, but only a re-
 mission of the sins of their past lives, pre-
 vious to their conversion to Christianity.
 “He,” says the apostle, “that lacketh
 “these things is blind, and cannot see afar

⁴² 2 Peter i. 8.

“ off,

“ off, and hath forgotten that he was
 “ purged from his OLD sins.” And the
 following expressions of the apostle clearly
 intimate, that their faith in Christ would
 not of itself ensure their final salvation;
 and that it must be their own personal ad-
 herence to piety and virtue, which must
 finally complete it. “ Give diligence to
 “ make your calling and election sure:
 “ for if ye do these things ye shall never
 “ fall: for so an entrance shall be mi-
 “ nistered unto you abundantly into the
 “ everlasting kingdom of our Lord and
 “ Saviour Jesus Christ⁴¹.”

THE practice of righteousness is insisted
 on, as the essence of religion, with great
 force by the apostle John. “ Little chil-
 “ dren, let no man deceive you: he that
 “ doeth righteousness is righteous, even
 “ as he (God) is righteous.—If we say

⁴¹ 2 Peter i. 10, 11.

“ that

“ that we have fellowship with him, and
 “ walk in darknes, we lie, and do not
 “ the truth : but if we walk in the light,
 “ as he is in the light, we have fellowship
 “ one with another, and the blood of Jesus
 “ Christ his son cleanseth us from all sin :
 “ —Herein do we know that we know
 “ him, if we keep his commandments.
 “ He that saith, I know him, and keepeth
 “ not his commandments, is a liar, and
 “ the truth is not in him. But who so
 “ keepeth his word, in him verily is the
 “ love of God perfected ; hereby know we
 “ that we are in him.—If ye know that he
 “ is righteous, ye know that every one that
 “ doeth righteousness, is born of him. In
 “ this the children of God are manifest,
 “ and the children of the devil : who so-
 “ ever doeth not righteousness, is not of
 “ God : neither he that loveth not his
 “ brother.” St. John never intimates, that
 the

the best actions of men were in the sight of God of no account, and as “filthy rags;” but, on the contrary, asserts, that their keeping his commandments is a motive to the Deity to confer blessings on them; and that conscious integrity is a reasonable cause to excite confidence in us towards God. “Beloved, if our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.” The practice of benevolence, and the exercise of the social affections, are repeatedly and very strongly inculcated by him, as essential to the Christian character; and as the only proper criterion of our love to God. “Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God,

“ God,

“ God, for God is love.—Whofo hath this
 “ world’s good, and feeth his brother have
 “ need, and fhutteth up his bowels of
 “ compaffion from him, how dwelleth the
 “ love of God in him? My little children,
 “ let us not love in word, neither in
 “ tongue, but in deed, and in truth ⁴⁴.”

In the book of Revelations, we find
 the neceffity of keeping the command-
 ments of God, in order to attain eternal
 life, clearly pointed out. “ Behold, I come
 “ quickly, and my reward is with me, to
 “ give every man according as his work
 “ fhall be.—Blessed are they that do his
 “ commandments, that they may have
 “ right to the tree of life, and may enter
 “ in through the gates into the city ⁴⁵.
 “ Here is the patience of the faints: here
 “ are they that keep the commandments
 “ of God, and the faith of Jesus.—Blessed

⁴⁴ 1 John ii, iii, iv.

⁴⁵ Revelations xxii. 12—14.

“ are the dead which die in the Lord,
 “ from henceforth : yea, saith the Spirit,
 “ that they may rest from their labours ;
 “ and their works do follow them ⁴⁶.”

And the following is the representation which is given, in this book, of the future judgment. “ I saw the dead, small and
 “ great, stand before God ; and the books
 “ were opened : and another book was
 “ opened, which is the book of life : and
 “ the dead were judged out of those things
 “ which were written in the books, ac-
 “ cording to their works. And the sea
 “ gave up the dead which were in it ; and
 “ death and hell delivered up the dead
 “ which were in them : and they were
 “ judged every man according to their
 “ works ⁴⁷.”

Thus it appears to be the design of the New Testament, throughout every part of

⁴⁶ Revelations xiv. 12, 13. ⁴⁷ Revelations xx. 12, 13.

it, to excite men to the uniform practice of piety and virtue. It appears, that “the
 “ grace of God,” which “ hath appeared
 “ unto all men” in the gospel dispensation, was intended to teach them, that “ deny-
 “ ing ungodliness, and worldly lusts, they
 “ should live soberly, righteously, and pi-
 “ ously in the present world⁴⁸.” In which it perfectly coincides with those innumera-
 ble exhortations to the practice of righteous-
 ness, which occur in the Old Testament. And to this the doctrine of a future state of retribution is strongly pressed and in-
 culcated as the principal motive. Other motives are occasionally spoken of, but this appears to be the great leading principle of the Christian revelation. The notions en-
 tertained by the heathens of a future state appear to have been attended with much doubt and uncertainty: some of them ap-

⁴⁸ Titus ii. 11, 12.

pear to have considered it only as a poetic fiction; and some of their best writers, in speaking of it, do it in a manner that shews they rather WISHED for it, than really expected or believed it: and even the Jews themselves appear to have been much in the dark concerning it. It is only by the gospel, that LIFE AND IMMORTALITY have been clearly BROUGHT TO LIGHT⁴⁹; and the doctrine of a future state of retribution plainly revealed. And it certainly is a motive, that, of all others, may rationally be supposed to act the most forcibly upon mankind. For surrounded as man is, in his present state, with innumerable temptations, tending to withdraw him from an adherence to his duty, perhaps there is no other that can, through the general tenour of life, be supposed to actuate him with sufficient force. When a man is abstracted from the temp-

⁴⁹ 2 Timothy i. 10.

tations of the world, and in his closet, the motives to virtue, which may be drawn from the nature and fitness of things, and the beauty and amiableness of virtue, may operate with considerable strength upon the mind; but, even upon the best minds, it may reasonably be supposed, that, in an hour of severe temptation, the firm belief of a future state must have a much greater effect. And these more refined motives to virtue would perhaps be found to operate but faintly at any time upon the bulk of mankind; for whom it was undoubtedly necessary, that a divine revelation should be adapted. And it is acknowledged, even by lord Shaftesbury, that “this may be
 “said as to the support which this belief
 “of a future reward and punishment may
 “prove to virtue; that as it is capable of
 “raising men to virtue, who were at first
 “in a manner strangers to it; so where

“ men are already in a virtuous course, it
 “ may prove that which alone can save
 “ them from falling off, from the virtue
 “ they possess, into a licentious and vicious
 “ practice.”

NEITHER does the notion of men being
 excited to virtue, from the consideration of
 a future state of retribution, necessarily sup-
 pose them actuated merely by hope or fear,
 and the less ingenuous affections of the
 human mind. For, as the same noble writer
 observes, “ if by the thoughts of future re-
 “ ward, or what regards another state, be
 “ understood the love and desire of vir-
 “ tuous enjoyment, or of the very practice
 “ and exercise of virtue in another life;
 “ the expectation or hope of this, must not
 “ only be a great encouragement to virtue;
 “ but it appears plainly, that the very fol-
 “ lowing of virtue, in hope to attain that

” Inquiry concerning Virtue, B. i. Sect. 3.

“ supreme

“supreme happiness which consists in the
 “perfection of it, is of itself a degree of
 “virtue, and a proof of the sincere love
 “we have for it”^s.”

As the ideas of human nature, which are suggested by the Calvinistical opinions, appear dishonourable both to man, and to his great Creator; and as the doctrine of man's free agency appears to be a matter of very considerable importance, and without admitting which it seems impossible to form any consistent ideas of religion, I shall make a few remarks upon those subjects.

THERE have been many, who seem to have thought, that they could in no way better evidence their own piety, than by degrading and vilifying human nature. It is not easy to conceive, that it could ever have been the dictate of reason, that there was any piety in any thing of this kind; or

^s Ibid.

that it was honouring God to speak dishonourably of his creatures. For reason would rather have dictated, that it was doing more honour to the Almighty Author of nature, to form more favourable ideas of that, which, in its present state, whatever its imperfections may be, is indisputably the noblest part of the visible creation.

It is very evident, that the bulk of mankind are not virtuous; but it does by no means thence follow, that they are depraved and impotent creatures, naturally prone to wickedness, and incapable of what is good and virtuous. Even amongst the most dissolute part of the human race, amongst those who indulge themselves in the practice of vice with the least scruple, there are discoverable, by a candid observer, many evidences of latent virtue; and actions really virtuous are frequently performed by those, whose general character

will

will not bear a strict scrutiny. And, indeed, the actual existence of vice amongst mankind, is no proof of their being under any invincible propensity to it. For, if we suppose men free creatures, capable either of acting well or of acting ill; and as being in a state of probation, in which they have many temptations to act contrary to the dictates of reason and of conscience; it will account for the existence of moral evil in the world, without the necessity of supposing, that they are by any inherent corruption of their nature biased towards wickedness.

THERE are many particulars observable in human nature, which are very unfavourable to the notion of man being naturally a wicked creature. It may be observed, that innocence is generally considered as one of the characteristics of childhood and youth; and that openness of heart, candour, benevo-

benevolence, and the social affections, appear to operate more, and the contrary dispositions less, in early life than at a later period; which seems to militate strongly against the notion of man being naturally prone to wickedness. And, perhaps, whenever dispositions of a different kind appear to prevail in childhood and youth, the whole of it may be attributed to ill example, or to the want of a virtuous education. Children, naturally imitative, are fond of doing those things which they see done by others; their actions are therefore very much regulated by the conduct and behaviour of those about them. And we may rationally account for such perverseness and forwardness of behaviour, as may be sometimes discoverable in children, without having recourse to the supposition of their being naturally biased towards vice. For, as they have in them the seeds of those

appetites

appetites and passions, which, however innocent in themselves, are vicious when not restrained within their proper bounds; it is easy to conceive, that if they have ill examples set before them, and are suffered, while their judgment is weak and unformed, to let these natural appetites and passions take a wrong direction, those very children may be forward and vicious, who, with judicious culture, might have been tractable and virtuous⁵².

It

⁵² It is too apparent, that the important business of education, particularly with respect to piety and morals, is in general very much neglected. Instead of instilling deeply into the minds of youth, their dependence on, and obligations to the Deity, and thoroughly grounding them in the sentiments and the principles of virtue, which are the most important points of a right education, their parents and preceptors are generally content with giving them a very slight and superficial view of these most important subjects; whilst a much greater attention and regard is paid merely to forming
their

It has often been observed, that the first advances to vice are made with reluctance; and that it is never practised without compunction, till men have hardened themselves by long habit to the practice of it: which seems to be an evidence, that wickedness is so far from being natural to man, that the practice of it is a rebellion against the first dictates of his nature. It is likewise certain, that it is natural to men to applaud and admire virtue in others, as well as to approve it in themselves. Sentiments of compassion, of benevolence, and of social affection, are certainly natural to the human mind. And it may be affirmed farther, that sentiments of piety, the love their exterior behaviour. As the happiness and stability of any nation depends so much on the virtue of its individuals; and as that very much depends on the method of education that prevails; this is a point that deserves the attention of all the friends to religion, virtue, and their country.

and

and reverence of the Deity, are natural to human nature, when amiable and just ideas of him have been instilled and are imbibed. Instances of disinterested generosity and goodness excite gratitude and affection to the benefactor, by whom such services are bestowed, and such goodness displayed. These are the natural feelings and sentiments of humanity. And such sentiments naturally arise with respect to the Deity, when he is exhibited to the mind in a proper light.

THE doctrine of man having lost his natural ability to practise virtue, and aptitude to religion, by the fall, appears to have no real foundation in the scriptures. They only represent man as subject to temporal death by the fall, and not as thereby becoming incapable of religion, and prone only to the practice of vice and impiety. And Christ himself does not seem by any means

means to have countenanced these unfavourable ideas of human nature. For we are told, that when his disciples inquired of him, who was the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, he called a little child to him, and set him in the midst of them, and said unto them, “Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”⁵³ And when his disciples rebuked those who brought young children to him, he was much displeased; and said, “Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.” Now can it be supposed, that Christ would have told his disciples, that in order to enter the kingdom of heaven they must become **AS LITTLE CHILDREN**, and that **OF SUCH** that kingdom consisted, if he had known them

⁵³ Matthew xviii. 1—4.

to be naturally polluted, and necessarily prone to wickedness? Must we not rather infer from these texts, that Christ considered young children as innocent, harmless, and teachable; and, therefore, proper emblems of that mild, peaceable, innocent, and humble disposition, which became the disciples of the blessed Jesus?

THERE is no just reason for imagining, that those appetites and passions, which are found in human nature, and which, when not properly restrained and regulated, are the cause of sin, are any consequence of the corruption of human nature. They do on the contrary appear, when under proper restraints, to be very useful to mankind. And, indeed, exclusively of this, something of this kind appears to be necessary to any creature while in a state of probation: for, without something within themselves, which might in some degree prompt

or

or excite them to a compliance with external temptations, they could not be considered as in a state of trial.

THE favourers of the Calvinistical opinions appear to have thought, that representing man as a weak, and naturally wicked creature, tended to promote humility, and to advance and raise our ideas of the grace and goodness of God in the gospel dispensation. Every attempt, therefore, to give more favourable representations of man's natural dispositions and ability, they consider as having a tendency to derogate from the grace of God, and to diminish the glory of the gospel. And, perhaps, could they be convinced, that the contrary opinions had not this tendency, they might be induced to examine them with more candour, and to inquire with less prejudice and prepossession, how far their own opinions are really founded on the scriptures.

It seems to have been thought, that to assert that man possesses, by the constitution of his nature, at least in his present state, an aptitude and ability to act virtuously, is raising him at the expence of his Maker, and making him independent on his Creator. But this is totally mistaking the point. The warmest advocates for human nature, cannot be supposed to form any ideas of man possessing any abilities or powers independent of his Maker, which he did not originally derive from him; and for the continuance of which, as well as for his existence itself, he does not absolutely depend upon his pleasure. The question therefore is not, whether man can act virtuously independently of the Almighty; (for in a certain sense we can do nothing without him; i. e. without his permission, and without his having originally given us suitable faculties and powers); but