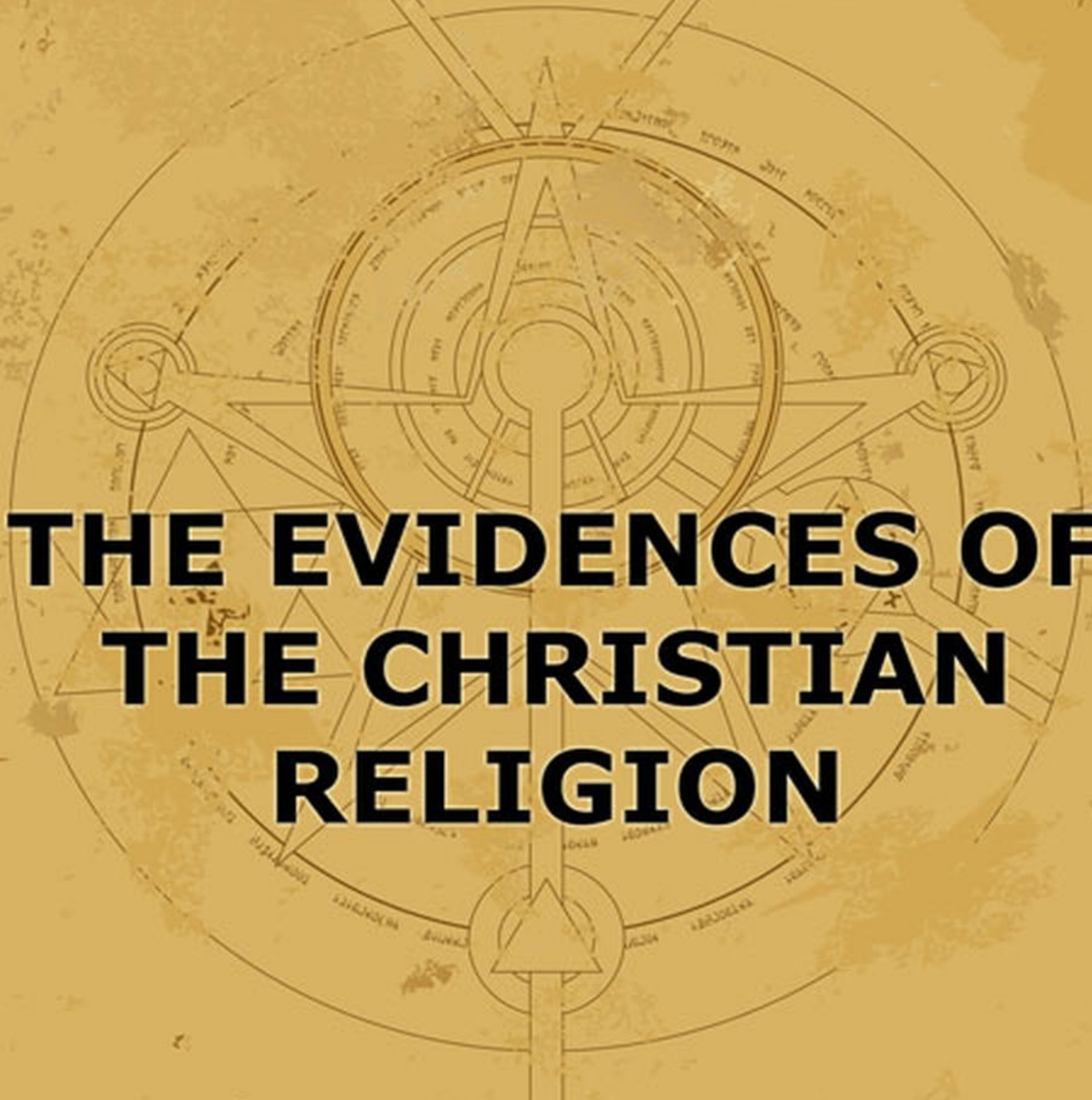


JOSEPH ADDISON



**THE EVIDENCES OF
THE CHRISTIAN
RELIGION**

**THE SACRED BOOKS
COLLECTION**

#421

The Evidences Of The Christian Religion

With Additional Discourses

Joseph Addison, Esq.

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PREFACE.

THE character of Mr. Addison, and his writings, for justness of thought, strength of reasoning, and purity of style, is too well established to need a recommendation; but their greatest ornament, and that which gives a lustre to all the rest, is his appearing throughout a zealous advocate for virtue and religion against profaneness and infidelity. And because his excellent discourses upon those subjects he dispersed among his other writings, and are by that means not so generally known and read as they deserve, it was judged to be no unseasonable service to religion at this time to move the Bookseller to publish them together in a

distinct volume, in hopes that the politeness and beauty peculiar to Mr. Addison's writings would make their way to persons of a superior character, and a more liberal education; and that, as they come from the hands of a layman, they may be the more readily received and considered by young gentlemen as a proper manual of religion.

Our modern sceptics and infidels are great pretenders to reason and philosophy, and are willing to have it thought that none who are really possessed of those talents, can easily assent to the truth of Christianity. But it falls out very unfortunately for them and their cause, that those persons within our own memory, who are confessed to have been the most perfect reasoners and philosophers of their time, are also known to have been firm believers, and they laymen; I mean Mr. Boyle, Mr. Locke, Sir Isaac Newton, and Mr. Addison; who, modestly speaking, were as good thinkers and reasoners as the best among the sceptics and infidels at this day. Some of them might have their particular opinions about this or that point in Christianity, which will be the case as long as men are men; but the thing here insisted on is, that they were accurate reasoners, and, at the same time, firm believers.

Mr. Boyle, the most exact searcher into the works of nature that any age has known, and who saw atheism and infidelity beginning to shew themselves in the loose and voluptuous reign of King Charles II. pursued his philosophical inquiries with religious views, to establish the minds of men in a firm belief and thorough sense of the infinite power and wisdom of the great Creator.

This account we have from one who was intimately acquainted with him, (Dr. Burnet) and preached his funeral sermon. "It appeared to those who conversed with him in

his inquiries into nature, that his main design in that (on which, as he had his own eye most constantly, so he took care to put others often in mind of it,) was to raise in himself and others vaster thoughts of the greatness and glory, and of the wisdom and goodness of God. This was so deep in his thoughts, that he concludes the article of his will, which relates to that illustrious body, the Royal Society, in these words: Wishing them a happy success in their laudable attempts to discover the true nature of the works of God and praying that they, and all other searchers into physical truths, may cordially refer their attainments to the glory of the great Author of nature, and the comfort of mankind." The same person also speaks thus of him: "He had the profoundest veneration for the great God of heaven and earth that ever I observed in any person. The very name of God was never mentioned by him without a pause, and a visible stop in his discourse."

And of the strickness and exemplariness of the whole course of his life, he says, "I might here challenge the whole tribe of Libertines to come and view the usefulness, as well as the excellence of the Christian religion, in a life that was entirely dedicated to it."

Against Atheists he wrote his *Free Inquiry into the received Notion of Nature*, (to confute the pernicious principle of ascribing effects to nature, which are only produced by the infinite power and wisdom of God;) and also his *Essay about final Causes of Things Natural*, to shew that all things in nature were made and contrived with great order, and every thing for its proper end and use, by an all wise Creator.

Against the Deists he wrote a treatise of things above reason; in which he makes it appear that several things, which we judge to be contrary to reason, because above

the reach of our understanding are not therefore to be thought unreasonable because we cannot comprehend them, since they may be apparently reasonable to a greater and more comprehensive understanding. And he wrote another treatise, to show the possibility of the resurrection of the same body.

The veneration he had for the holy scriptures, appears not only from his studying them with great exactness, and exhorting others to do the same, but more particularly from a distinct treatise, which he wrote on purpose to defend the scripture style, and to answer all the objections which profane and irreligious persons have made against it. And speaking of morality, considered as a rule of life, he says; "I have formerly taken pains to peruse books of morality, yet since they have only a power to persuade, but not to command, and sin and death do not necessarily attend the disobedience of them, they have the less influence: for since we may take the liberty to question human writers, I find that the methods they take to impose their writings upon us may serve to countenance either truth or falsehood."

His zeal to propagate Christianity in the world appears by many and large benefactions to that end, which are enumerated in his funeral sermon: "He was at the charge of the translation and impression of the New Testament into the Malayan language, which he sent over all the East-Indies. He gave a noble reward to him that translated Grotius's incomparable book of the *Truth of the Christian Religion* into Arabic; and was at the charge of a whole impression, which he took care to order to be distributed in all the countries where that language is understood. He was resolved to have carried on the impression of the New Testament in the Turkish language; but the company thought it become them to be the doers of it, and so

suffered him only to give a large share towards it.—He was at seven hundred pounds charge in the edition of the Irish Bible, which he ordered to be distributed in Ireland; and he contributed largely both to the impression of the Welsh Bible, and of the Irish Bible in Scotland. He gave, during his life, three hundred pounds to advance the design of propagating the Christian religion in America; and as soon as he heard that the East-India Company were entertaining propositions for the like design in the East, he presently sent an hundred pounds for a beginning and an example, but intended to carry it much farther, when it should be set on foot to purpose. He had designed, though some accidents did, upon great considerations, divert him from settling it during his life, but not from ordering it by his will, that a liberal provision should be made for one who should, in a very few well-digested sermons, every year, set forth the truth of the Christian religion in general, without descending to the subdivisions amongst Christians; and who should be changed every third year, that so the noble study and employment might pass through many hands, by which means many might become masters of the argument.

In his younger years he had thoughts of entering into holy orders: and one reason that determined him against it was, that he believed he might in some respects be more serviceable to religion, by continuing a layman. “His having no interests with relation to religion, besides those of saving his own soul, gave him as he thought, a more unsuspected authority in writing or acting on that side. He knew the profane crew fortified themselves against all that was said by men of our profession, with this, that it was their trade, and that they were paid for it; he hoped therefore that he might have the more influence the less he shared in the patrimony of the church.”

Mr. Locke, whose accurate talent in reasoning is much celebrated, even by the sceptics and infidels of our times, showed his zeal for Christianity, first, in his middle age, by publishing a discourse on purpose to demonstrate the reasonableness of believing Jesus to be the promised Messiah; and, after that, in the last years of his life, by a very judicious commentary upon several of the epistles of St. Paul.

He speaks of the Miracles wrought by our Saviour and his apostles in the strongest manner, both as facts unexceptionably true, and as the clearest evidences of a divine mission. His words are these: "The evidences of our Saviour's mission from heaven is so great, in the multitude of his miracles he did before all sorts of people (which the divine providence and wisdom had so ordered, that they never were nor could be denied by any of the enemies and opposers of Christianity,) that what he delivered cannot but be received as the oracles of God, and unquestionable verity." And again, "After his resurrection, he sent his apostles amongst the nations, accompanied with miracles; which were done in all parts so frequently, and before so many witnesses of all sorts in broad daylight, that, as I have often observed, the enemies of Christianity have never dared to deny them; no not Julian himself, who neither wanted skill nor power to inquire into the truth; nor would have failed to have proclaimed and exposed it, if he could have detected any falsehood in the history of the gospel, or found the least ground to question the matter of fact published by Christ and his apostles. The number and evidence of the miracles done by our Saviour and his followers, by the power and force of truth, bore down this mighty and accomplished emperor, and all his parts in his own dominions. He durst not deny so plain matter of fact; which being granted, the truth of our Saviour's doctrine and mission unavoidably follows, notwithstanding

whatsoever artful suggestions his wit could invent, or malice should offer to the contrary.

To those who ask, “What need was there of a Saviour? what advantage have we by Jesus Christ?” Mr. Locke replies, “It is enough to justify the fitness of any thing to be done by resolving it into the wisdom of God, who has done it; whereof our narrow understandings and short views may utterly incapacitate us to judge. We know little of this visible, and nothing at all of the state of that intellectual world (wherein are infinite numbers and degrees of spirits out of the reach of our ken or guess), and therefore know not what transactions there were between God and our Saviour in reference to his kingdom. We know not what need there was to set up a Head and a Chieftain in opposition to THE PRINCE OF THIS WORLD, THE PRINCE OF THE POWER OF THE AIR, &c. whereof there are more than obscure intimations in scriptures. And we shall take too much upon us, if we should call God’s wisdom or providence to account, and pertly condemn for needless all that our weak and perhaps biased understanding cannot account for.” And then shews at large the necessity there was of the gospel revelation, to deliver the world from the miserable state of darkness and ignorance that mankind were in, 1. As to the true knowledge of God, 2. As to the worship to be paid him, 3. As to the duties to be performed to him. To which he adds the mighty aids and encouragements to the performance of our duty, 1. From the assurance the gospel gives of future rewards and punishments; and, 2. From the promise of the Spirit of God to direct and assist us.

The holy scriptures are every where mentioned by him with the greatest reverence. He calls them the Holy Books, the Sacred Text, Holy Writ, and Divine Revelation and exhorts Christians “to betake themselves in earnest to the study of

the way to salvation, in those holy writings wherein God has revealed it from heaven, and proposed it to the world; seeking our religion where we are sure it is in truth to be found, comparing spiritual things with spiritual." And, in a letter written the year before his death to one who asked this question, "What is the shortest and surest way, for a young Gentleman to attain to a true knowledge of the Christian religion, in the full and just extent of it?" his answer is, "Let him study the holy scripture, especially the New Testament. Therein are contained the words of eternal life. It has God for its Author; salvation for its end; and truths without any mixture of error, for its matter." A direction that was copied from his own practice, in the latter part of his life, and after his retirement from business; when, for fourteen or fifteen years, he applied himself especially to the study of the holy Scriptures, and employed the last years of his life hardly in any thing else. He was never weary of admiring the great views of that sacred book, and the just relation of all its parts. He every day made discoveries in it, that gave him fresh cause of admiration."

Of St. Paul in particular, upon several of whose epistles he drew up a most useful commentary, he says, "That he was miraculously called to the ministry of the gospel, and declared to be a chosen vessel:—That he had the whole doctrine of the gospel from God by immediate revelation:—That for his information in the Christian knowledge, and the mysteries and depths of the dispensation of God by Jesus Christ, God himself had condescended to be his instructor and teacher:—That he had received the light of the gospel from the Fountain and Father of light himself:—and, That an exact observation of his reasonings and inferences, is the only safe guide for the right understanding of him, under the Spirit of God, that directed these sacred writings."

And the death of this great man was agreeable to his life; for we are informed by one who was with him when he died, and had lived in the same family for seven years before, that the day before his death he particularly exhorted all about him to read the holy scriptures: That he desired to be remembered by them at evening prayers; and being told, that if he would, the whole family should come and pray by him in his chamber, he answered, he should be very glad to have it so, if it would not give too much trouble: That an occasion offering to speak of the goodness of God, he especially exalted the love which God shewed to man, in justifying him by faith in Jesus Christ; and returned God thanks in particular for having called him to the knowledge of that divine Saviour.

About two months before his death he drew up a letter to a gentleman (who afterwards distinguished himself by a very different way of thinking and writing) and left this direction upon it, "To be delivered to him after my decease." In it are these remarkable words, "This life is a scene of vanity that soon passes away, and affords no solid satisfaction, but in the consciousness of doing well, and in the hopes of another life. This is what I can say upon experience, and what you will find to be true, when you come to make up the account."

Sir Isaac Newton, universally acknowledged to be the ablest philosopher and mathematician that this or perhaps any other nation has produced, is also well known to have been a firm believer, and a serious Christian. His discoveries concerning the frame and system of the universe were applied by him, as Mr. Boyle's inquiries into nature had been, to demonstrate, against Atheists of all kinds, the being of a God, and illustrate his power and wisdom in the creation of the world. Of which a better

account cannot be given, than in the words of an ingenious person who has been much conversant in his philosophical writings: "At the end of his mathematical principles of natural philosophy he has given us his thoughts concerning the Deity, wherein he first observes, that the similitude found in all parts of the universe, makes it undoubted that the whole is governed by one supreme Being, to whom the original is owing of the frame of nature, which evidently is the effect of choice and design. He then proceeds briefly to state the best metaphysical notions concerning God. In short, we cannot conceive either of space or time otherwise than as necessarily existing; this being therefore, on whom all others depend, must certainly exist by the same necessity of nature; consequently wherever space and time is found there God must also be. And as it appears impossible to us that space should be limited, or that time should have had a beginning, the Deity must be both immense and eternal "

This great man applied himself, with the utmost attention, to the study of the holy scriptures, and considered the several parts of them with art uncommon exactness; particularly, as to the order of time, and the series of prophecies and events relating to the Messiah. Upon which head he left behind him an elaborate discourse, to prove, that the famous prophecy of Daniel's weeks, which has been so industriously perverted by the Deists of our times, was an express prophecy of the coming of the Messiah, and fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Mr. Addison, so deservedly celebrated for an uncommon accuracy in thinking and reasoning, has given abundant proof of his firm belief of Christianity, and his zeal against infidels of all kinds, in the writings that are here published of which it is certainly known that a great part of them were his own compositions.

I mention not these great names, nor the testimonies they have given of their firm belief of the truth of Christianity, as if the evidences of our religion were to be finally resolved into human authority, or tried in any other way than by the known and established rules of right reason; but my design in mentioning them is,

1. To shew the very great assurance of those who would make the belief of revelation inconsistent with the due use of our reason; when they have known so many eminent instances, in our own time, of the greatest masters of reason, not only believing revelation, but zealously concerned to establish and propagate the belief of it.

2. The remembrance of this will also be a means, on one hand, to hinder well meaning people from being misled by the vain boasts of our modern pretenders to reason; and, on the other hand, to check the inclination of the wicked and vicious to be misled, when both of them have before their eyes such fresh and eminent instances of sound reasoning, and a firm faith, joined together in one and the same mind.

3. Further, as, these were persons generally esteemed for virtue and goodness, and notwithstanding their high attainments, remarkable for their modesty and humility; their examples shew us, that a thong and clear reason naturally leads to the belief of revelation, when it is not under the influences of vice or pride.

4. And finally, as they are all laymen, there is no room for the enemies of revealed religion, to allege that they were prejudiced by interest, or secular considerations of any kind. A suggestion that has really no weight, when urged against the writings of the clergy in defence of revelation,

since they do not desire to be trusted upon their own authority, but upon the reasons they offer; lawyers and physicians are not less trusted, because they live by their professions; but it is a suggestion that easily takes hold of weak minds, and especially such as catch at objections, and are willing to be caught by them. And, considering the diligence of the adversary in making proselytes, and drawing men from the faith of Christ; equal diligence is required of those who are to maintain that faith, not only to leave men no real ground, but even no colour or pretence for their infidelity.

The following discourses, except that concerning the Evidences of Christian Religion, were all published in separate papers some years ago, and afterwards collected into volumes, with marks of distinction at the end of many of them, to point out the writers. Mr. Addison's are there distinguished by some one of the letters of the word CLIO; and the same marks of distinction are here continued; as are also the rest, where any letter was found at the end of the discourse.

à Mr. Addison having left his treatise on the truth of the Christian religion unfinished, the Publisher, to make it somewhat more complete, selected, from the Spectator, several papers (mostly the author's) on the being and perfections of God, the nature of religion, the immortality of the soul, and a future state; and printed them with it. But though the treatise and the other papers are well calculated to prove the truth of, and recommend the Christian religion to, the faith and practice of mankind; yet their influences will be but small, till men are awakened out of that insensibility into which they are fallen, and brought to believe how much they are interested in the great truths Christianity reveals. To beget thought and excite inquiry it was judged the following extract from Mons. Pascal's

Thoughts, against an atheistical indifference, would neither be an improper, nor an unacceptable introduction to the subsequent papers.

INTRODUCTION.

IT were to be wished that the enemies of religion would at least bring themselves to apprehend its nature before they oppose its authority. Did religion make its boast of beholding God with a clear and perfect view, and of possessing him without a covering or veil, the argument would bear some colour, when men should alledge, that none of the things about them do indeed afford this pretended evidence, and this degree of light. But since religion, on the contrary, represents men as in a state of darkness, and of estrangement from God; since it affirms him to have withdrawn himself from their discovery, and to have chosen in his word, the very style and appellation of *Deus absconditus*; lastly, since it employs itself alike, in establishing these two maxims, that God has left in his church certain characters of himself, by which they who sincerely seek him shall not fail of a sensible conviction—and yet that he has, at the same time, so far shaded and obscured these characters as to render them imperceptible to those who do not seek him with their whole heart; what advantage is it to men who profess themselves negligent in the search of truth, to complain so frequently that nothing reveals and displays it to them? For this very obscurity under which they labour, and which they make an exception against the church, does itself evince one of the two grand points which the church maintains, (without affecting the other) and is so far from overthrowing its doctrines, as to lend them a manifest confirmation and support.

If they would give their objections any strength, they ought to urge, that they have applied their utmost endeavour, and have used all means of information, even those which the church recommends, without satisfaction. Did they express themselves thus, they would indeed attack religion in one of its chief pretensions. But I hope to shew, in the following papers, that no rational person can speak after this manner, and I dare assert that none ever did. We know very well how men, under this indifference of spirit, behave themselves in the case. They suppose themselves to have made the mightiest efforts towards the instruction of their minds, when they have spent some hours in reading the scriptures, and have asked some questions of a clergyman concerning the articles of faith. When this is done, they declare to all the world they have consulted books and men without success. I shall be excused, if I refrain from not telling such men (what I have often told them) that this neglect of theirs is insupportable. It is not a foreign or a petty interest which is here in debate; we are ourselves the parties, and all our hopes and fortunes are the depending stake.

The immortality of the soul is a thing which so deeply concerns, so infinitely imports us, that we must have utterly lost our feeling, to be altogether cold and remiss in our enquiries about it. And all our actions, or designs, ought to bend so very different a way, according as we are either encouraged or forbidden to embrace the hope of eternal rewards, that it is impossible for us to proceed with judgment and discretion, otherwise than as we keep this point always in view, which ought to be our ruling object and final aim.

Thus is it our highest interest, no less than our principal duty, to get light into a subject on which our whole conduct

depends. And therefore, in the number of wavering and unsatisfied men, I make the greatest difference imaginable between those who labour with all their force to obtain instruction, and those who live without giving themselves any trouble, or so much as any thought, in this affair.

I cannot but be touched with a hearty compassion for those who sincerely groan under this dissatisfaction; who look upon it as the greatest of misfortunes, and who spare no pains to deliver themselves from it, by making these researches their chief employment and most serious study. But as for those who pass their life without reflecting on its issue, and who, for this reason alone, because they find not in themselves a convincing testimony, refuse to seek it elsewhere, and to examine to the bottom, whether the opinion proposed be such as we are wont to entertain by popular simplicity and credulity, or such as though obscure in itself, yet is built on solid and immoveable foundations, I consider them after quite another manner. The carelessness which they betray in an affair where their person, their interest, their whole eternity, is embarked, rather provokes my resentment than engages my pity; nay, it strikes me with amazement and astonishment; it is a monster to my apprehension. I speak not this as transported with the pious zeal of a spiritual and rapturous devotion. On the contrary, I affirm, that the love of ourselves, the interest of mankind, and the most simple and artless reason, do naturally inspire us with these sentiments; and that to see thus far, is not to exceed the sphere of unrefined, uneducated men.

It requires no great elevation of soul to observe, that nothing in this world is productive of true contentment; that our pleasures are vain and fugitive, our troubles innumerable and perpetual; and that after all, death, which threatens us every moment, must, in the compass of

a few years, (perhaps of a few days) put us into the eternal condition of *happiness*, or *misery*, or *nothing*. Between us and these three great periods, or states, no barrier is interposed but life, the most brittle thing in all nature; and the happiness of heaven being certainly not designed for those who doubt whether they have an immortal part to enjoy it, such persons have nothing left but the miserable chance of annihilation, or of hell.

There is not any reflection which can have more reality than this, as there is none which has greater terror. Let us set the bravest face on our condition, and play the heroes as artfully as we can, yet see here the issue which attends the goodliest life upon earth!

'Tis in vain for men to turn aside their thoughts from this eternity which awaits them, as if they were able to destroy it, by denying it a place in their imaginations. It subsists in spite of them; it advanceth unobserved: and death, which is to draw the curtain from it, will, in a short time, infallibly reduce them to the dreadful necessity of being forever nothing, or forever miserable.

We have here a doubt of the most affrighting consequence, and which therefore to entertain may be well esteemed the most grievous of misfortunes; but, at the same time, it is our indispensable duty not to lie under it without struggling for deliverance.

He then who doubts, and yet seeks not to be resolved, is equally unhappy and unjust. But if withal he appears easy and composed; if he freely declares his indifference; nay, if he takes a vanity in professing it, and seems to make this most deplorable condition the subject of his pleasure and joy, have not words to fix a name on so extravagant a creature. Where is the very possibility of entering into

these thoughts and resolutions? what delight is there in expecting misery without end? what vanity in finding one's self encompassed with impenetrable darkness? or what consolation in despairing forever of a comforter?

To sit down with some sort of acquiescence under so fatal an ignorance, is a thing unaccountable beyond all expression: and they who live with such a disposition ought to be made sensible of its absurdity and stupidity, by having their inward reflections laid open to them, that they may grow wise by the prospect of their own folly. For behold how men are wont to reason, while they obstinately remain thus ignorant of what they are, and refuse all methods of instruction and illumination!

Who has sent me into the world, I know not; what the world is, I know not, nor what I am myself. I am under an astonishing and terrifying ignorance of all things. I know not what my body is, what my senses, or my soul. This very part of me which thinks what I speak, which reflects upon every thing else, and even upon itself, yet is as mere a stranger to its own nature as the dullest thing I carry about me. I behold these frightful spaces of the universe with which I am encompassed; and I find myself chained to one little corner of the vast extent, without understanding why I am placed in this seat rather than any other; or why this moment of time, given me to live, was assigned rather at such a point, than at any other of the whole eternity which was before me, or of all that which is to come after me. I see nothing but infinities on all sides, which devour and swallow me up, like an atom; like a shadow, which endures but a single instant, and is never to return. The sum of my knowledge is, that I must shortly die; but that which I am most ignorant of, is this very death which I feel myself unable to decline.

As I know not whence I came, so I know not whither I go; only this I know, that at my departure out of the world, I must either fall forever into nothing, or into the hands of an incensed God, without being capable of deciding which of these two conditions shall eternally be my portion. Such is my state; full of weakness, obscurity, and wretchedness. And from all this I conclude, that I ought therefore to pass all the days of my life, without considering what is hereafter to befall me; and that I have nothing to do but to follow my inclinations, without reflection or disquiet, in doing all that which, if what men say of a miserable eternity prove true, will infallibly plunge me into it. 'Tis possible I might find some light to clear up my doubts; but I shall not take a minute's pains, nor stir one foot in the search of it. On the contrary, I am resolved to treat those with scorn and derision who labour in this inquiry with care; and so to run, without fear or foresight, upon the trial of the grand event; permitting myself to be led softly on to death, utterly uncertain as to the eternal issue of my future condition.

In earnest, 'tis a glory to religion to have so unreasonable men for its professed enemies; and their opposition is of so little danger, that it serves to illustrate the principal truths which our religion teaches. For the main scope of Christian faith is to establish these two principles, the corruption of nature; and the redemption by Jesus Christ. And these opposers, if they are of no use towards demonstrating the truth of the redemption, by the sanctity of their lives, yet are, at least, admirably useful in shewing the corruption of nature, by so unnatural sentiments and suggestions.

Nothing is so important to any man as his own estate and condition; nothing so great, so amazing, as eternity. If therefore we find persons indifferent to the loss of their being, and to the danger of endless misery, 'tis impossible

that this temper should be natural. They are quite other men in all other regards: they fear the smallest inconveniences; they see them as they approach, and feel them if they arrive; and he who passeth days and nights in chagrin or despair, for the loss of employment, or for some imaginary blemish in his honour, is the very same mortal who knows that he must lose all by death, and yet remains without disquiet, resentment or emotion. This wonderful insensibility with respect to things of the most fatal consequence, in a heart so nicely sensible of the meanest trifles, is an astonishing prodigy, an unintelligible enchantment, a supernatural blindness and infatuation.

A man in a close dungeon, who knows not whether sentence of death is passed upon him, who is allowed but one hour's space to inform himself concerning it, and that one hour sufficient, in case it have passed, to obtain its reverse, would act contrary to nature and sense, should he make use of this hour not to procure information, but to pursue his vanity or sport. And yet such is the condition of the persons whom we are now describing: only with this difference, that the evils with which they are every moment threatened do infinitely surpass the bare loss of life, and that transient punishment which the prisoner is supposed to apprehend. Yet they run thoughtless upon the precipice, having only cast a veil over their eyes, to hinder them from discerning it, and divert themselves with the officiousness of such as charitably warn them of their danger.

Thus, not the zeal alone of those who heartily seek God demonstrates the truth of religion, but likewise the blindness of those who utterly forbear to seek him, and who pass their days under so horrible a neglect. There must needs be a strange turn and revolution in human nature, before men can submit to such a condition; much more, ere they can applaud and value themselves upon it. For,

supposing them to have obtained an absolute certainty that there was no fear after death, but of falling into nothing; ought not this to be the subject rather of despair than of jollity? And is it not therefore the highest pitch of senseless extravagance, while we want this certainty, to glory in our doubt and distrust?

And yet after all, it is too visible, that man has so far declined from his original nature, and as it were departed from himself, as to nourish in his heart a secret seed plot of joy, springing up from these libertine reflections. This brutal ease or indolence, between the fear of hell and of annihilation, carries somewhat so tempting in it, that not only those who have the misfortune to be sceptically inclined, but even those who cannot unsettle their judgment, do yet esteem it reputable to take up even a counterfeit diffidence. For we may observe the largest part of the herd to be of this latter kind, false pretenders to infidelity, and mere hypocrites in atheism. There are persons whom we have heard declare that the genteel way of the world consists in thus acting the bravo. This is that which they term throwing off the yoke, and which the greater number of them profess, not so much out of opinion, as out of gallantry and complaisance.

Yet, if they have the least reserve of common sense, it will not be difficult to make them apprehend, how miserably they abuse themselves, by laying so false a foundation of applause and esteem. For this is not the way to raise a character, even with worldly men, who as they are able to pass shrewd judgment on things, so they easily discern, that the only method of succeeding in our temporal affairs is to approve ourselves honest, faithful, prudent, and capable of advancing the interest of our friends; because men naturally love nothing but that which some way contributes to their use and benefit. But now what benefit

can we any way derive from hearing a man confess, that he has eased himself of the burden of religion; that he believes no God, as the witness and inspector of his conduct; that he considers himself as absolute master of what he does, and accountable for it only to his own mind? Will he fancy that we shall be hence induced to repose a greater degree of confidence in him hereafter, or to depend on his comfort, his advice or assistance in the necessities of life? Can he imagine us to take any great delight or complacency, when he tells us, that he doubts whether our very soul be any thing more than a little wind and smoke; nay, when he tells it us with an air of assurance, and a voice that testifies the contentment of his heart? is this a thing to be spoken of with pleasantry? or ought it not rather to be lamented with the deepest sadness as the most melancholic reflection that can strike our thoughts?

If they would compose them to serious consideration, they must perceive the method in which they are engaged to be so very ill chosen, so repugnant to gentility, and so remote even from that good air and grace which they pursue, that, on the contrary, nothing can more effectually expose them to the contempt and aversion of mankind, or mark them out for persons defective in parts and judgment. And indeed should we demand from them an account of their sentiments, and of the reasons which they have to entertain this suspicion in religious matters, what they offered would appear so miserably weak and trifling, as rather to confirm us in our belief. This is no more than what one of their own fraternity told them with great smartness, on such an occasion. If you continue (says he) to dispute at this rate, you'll infallibly make me a Christian. And the gentleman was in the right: for who would not tremble to find himself embarked in the same cause with so forlorn, so despicable companions.

And thus it is evident; that they who wear no more than the outward mask of these principles are the most unhappy counterfeits in the world; in as much as they are obliged to put a continual force and constraint on their genius, only that they may render themselves the most impertinent of all men living.

If they are heartily and sincerely troubled at their want of light, let them not dissemble the disease. Such a confession could not be reputed shameful; for there is really no shame, but in being shameless. Nothing betrays is much weakness of soul, as not to apprehend the misery of man, while living without God in the world: nothing is a surer token of extreme baseness of spirit, than not to hope for the reality of eternal promises: no man is so stigmatized a coward, as he that acts the bravo against Heaven. Let them, therefore, leave these impieties to those who are born with so unhappy a judgment as to be capable of entertaining them in nearest. If they cannot be Christian men, let them however be men of honour. And let them, in conclusion, acknowledge that there are but two sorts of persons who deserve to be styled reasonable, either those, who serve God with all their heart, because they know him; or those who seek him with all their heart, because as yet they know him not.

If then there are persons who sincerely inquire after God,, and who, being truly sensible of their misery, affectionately desire to be rescued from it, it is to these alone that we can in justice afford our labour and service, for their direction in finding out that light of which they feel the want.

But as for those who live without either knowing God, or endeavouring to know him, they look on themselves as so little deserving their own care, that they cannot but be unworthy the care of others: and it requires all the charity

of the religion which they despise, not to despise them to such a degree, as even to abandon them to their own folly. But since the same religion obliges us to consider them, while they remain in this life, as still capable of God's enlightening grace; and to acknowledge it as very possible, that, in the course of a few days, they may be replenished with a fuller measure of faith than we now enjoy, and we ourselves, on the other side, fall into the depths of their present blindness and misery; we ought to do for them what we desire should be done to us in their case, to intreat them that they would take pity on themselves, and would, at least, advance a step or two forward, if perchance they may come into the light. For which end it is wished, that they would employ, in the perusal of this piece, some few of these hours which they spend so unprofitably in other pursuits. 'Tis possible they may gain somewhat by the reading; at least they cannot be great losers. But if any than apply themselves to it, with perfect sincerity, and with an unfeigned desire of knowing the truth, I despair not of their satisfaction, or of their being convinced by so many proofs of our divine religion as they will here find laid together."

SECT. I.

I. General division of the following discourse, with regard to Pagan and Jewish authors, who mention particulars relating to our Saviour.

II. Not probable that any such should be mentioned by Pagan writers who lived at the same time, from the nature of such transactions.

III. Especially when related by the Jews.