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**The Works Of the late Right Honorable Henry St. John,  
Lord Viscount Bolingbroke**

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**Bolingbroke, Henry St. John**

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Essay II. Containing some reflections on the folly and presumption of philosophers, especially in matters of the first philosophy; on the rise and progress of their boasted science; on the ...

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ESSAY THE SECOND:

Containing some

R E F L E C T I O N S

On the Folly and Presumption of PHILOSOPHERS,  
especially in Matters of the FIRST PHILOSOPHY ;

On the Rise and Progress of their boasted SCIENCE ;

On the Propagation of ERROR and SUPERSTITION ;

And on the Partial Attempts that have been made to reform  
the Abuses of HUMAN REASON.

VOL. IV.

B



ESSAY THE SECOND

REFLECTIONS

On the Folly and Pretension of Philosophers  
especially in Matters of the First Philosophy;

On the Rise and Progress of their several Sects;

On the Propagation of Error and Superstition;

And on the several Attempts that have been made to reform  
the Abuse of Human Reason.

Vol. IV.



## ESSAY THE SECOND.

### SECTION I.

**H**E who asserts that there would be more real knowledge and more true wisdom among mankind, if there was less learning and less philosophy may offend some men's ears by advancing a paradox; for such at least they will call it. But men who enquire without prejudice, and who dare to doubt, will soon discover that this seeming paradox is a most evident truth. They will find it such in almost every part of human science, and above all others in that which is called metaphysical and theological. The vanity of the vainest men alive, of some who call themselves scholars and philosophers, will be hurt; but they who seek truth without any other regard, and who prefer therefore very wisely even ignorance to error, will rejoice at every such discovery.

There was a time when navigators bent themselves obstinately to find a passage by the North-East or the North-West to Cathay. Neither frequent losses nor constant disappointment could divert them from these enterprizes, as long as the fashionable folly prevailed. The passage was not found; the fashion wore out, and the folly ceased. The bounds of navigation were set: and sufficient warning was both given and taken against any further attempts in those dark and frozen regions. Many such there are in the intellectual world: and many such attempts have been made there with no better success. But the consequence has not been the same. Neither examples nor experience have had their effect on philosophers, more fool-hardy than mariners: and where the former wan-



dered to no purpose three thousand years ago, they wander to no purpose, at least to no good purpose, still.

“ Il faut pouffer à une porte pour sçavoir qu'elle nous est close,” says CHARRON somewhere in his Book of Wisdom. He says right, “ pour sçavoir qu'elle nous est close.” But when we know, or may know very certainly, by our own experience and by that of all the strong men in philosophy antients and moderns, that a door is shut which no human force can open, they who continue to sweat and toil in shoving at it are most ridiculously employed. They who affect to guess at the objects they cannot see, and to talk as if the door stood wide open whilst they peep through the key-hole, are employed still worse. The most antient philosophers may be excused in great measure for attempting to open every door of science; tho they cannot be so for imposing on mankind discoveries they never made. But they who followed these, in the course of philosophical generations, are inexcusable on the first head as well as the last; since what was curiosity in the others became presumption in them: and they scarce made amends, by the good they did in advancing some real knowledge, for the hurt they did in entailing so much that is quite phantastical on posterity.

TULLY confesses very frankly that nothing is so absurd which some philosopher or other has not said: and his own works would furnish sufficient proofs of the assertion, under the epicurean, the stoical, and the academical characters particularly, if they were wanted. But this confession does not go far enough: and we may employ upon this occasion against philosophers the objection made against the Jesuits by some of their enemies. The absurdities of philosophers are not to be ascribed to the particular men alone who broached them in every



every philosophical age, but to their order and institution, if I may say so; the principles and spirit of which lead by necessary consequences to such absurdities. The first founders of philosophy laid these principles, and inspired this spirit in days of ignorance and superstition. Their followers have refined upon them, confirmed them, and added to them. Time and authority have established them all: the oldest and the grossest most. Words that have really no meaning are thought to have one, and are used accordingly. Ideas, that are really incomplete and inadequate, are deemed complete and adequate. Ideas, that are obscure and confused, are deemed clear and distinct. In a word, time and authority have so well established metaphysical and theological absurdities, that they pass for the first principles of science, like certain necessary and self-evident truths which are really such. Men, who would have been giants in the human sphere, have dwindled into pigmies by going out of it. Instead of heaping mountains on mountains of knowledge to scale the sky, they heap mole-hills on mole-hills with great airs of importance, and boast ridiculously not only of their design, but of their success. They appear to me like sylphs, if you and ARIEL will give me leave to make the comparison, so proud of not being gnomes that they fancy themselves archangels. "Humana ad deos transferunt, divina mallem ad nos," is an expression used by TULLY, and extremely applicable to the philosophers of whom we are speaking. They do most presumptuously the first, and they pretend with equal folly and effrontery to do the last. They ascribe to the Supreme Being the manner of knowing, the ideas, and even the very affections and passions of his creatures. They presume to enter into his councils, and to account for the whole divine oeconomy, as confidently as they would for any of their own paltry affairs. This they call theology. They build intellectual and material worlds on the  
hypo-



hypothetical suggestions of imagination. This they call philosophy, metaphysical and physical.

By such means, and by such men, truth and error have been intimately blended together from the first essays of philosophical enquiry: and various systems of natural and supernatural theology have prevailed in different ages. Had any one of them been wholly founded in real knowledge and confined to it, as every one of them pretended to be, the certainty and the importance of such a system would have preserved it among the rational part of mankind. Truth, pure and unmixed, would have given it stability. But error has kept them all in a continual flux: and to the shame of the human head and heart, the most rational, or the most reasoning, part of mankind has maintained this flux by adopting some errors, by inventing others, and by cultivating both.

If there is no subject, and I think there is none, upon which the opinions of men have varied so extravagantly, and have stood in such manifest contradiction to one another, as they have on that of the first philosophy, the reason is, that men have not aimed so much at unattainable knowledge, nor pretended so much to it, on any other subject. Folly and knavery have prevailed most where they should be tolerated least: and presumption has been exercised most where diffidence and caution are on many accounts the most necessary.

“ Quale per incertam lunam sub luce malignâ

“ Est iter in silvis” —

Such is our journey in the acquisition of knowledge, whenever we attempt to travel far. We grope along in those paths which experience and the application of our minds open to

us.



us. We discern, according to our manner of perception, a few objects that lie in our way, and we guess at a few more. But we cannot even guess, with as much probability as is necessary to justify us in guessing, at our whole system, nor explain the phaenomena of it. How much less ought we to think ourselves capable of knowing the divine system! We have a very superficial acquaintance with man. Do we hope to become better acquainted with God? One would imagine that metaphysical divines did really entertain this hope. They may entertain it, as well as the huffing opinions, to use a phrase of Mr. LOCKE, which they entertain concerning the human mind or soul. They assume it to be near akin to the divine, something derived immediately from God, and capable of being united to him. An intellectual mirror it is, that reflects from the phaenomena of nature alone, and therefore indirectly, some very few notices of the Supreme Being, beyond the demonstrative knowledge that we have of his existence. But these men, when they lower their pretensions and would appear modest, assume it to be not a mirror that reflects such notices, but a spirit that is capable of receiving them, and that receives them directly from the divine intelligence. They tell us, with great metaphysical pomp of words, that reason, the supreme, eternal reason, is the sun of their intellectual world, in the light of which they see intelligible objects, just as sensible objects are seen in that of the material sun. On such bold presumptions they proceed, and whither may they not, whither have they not, been carried by them? The farther they go, the more their imaginary light fails them. But they cease not to flatter themselves: and whilst they expect at every moment, as it were, the dawn of a new day, they fall into the shades of night.

—“ Ubi



— “ Ubi coelum condidit umbrâ  
 “ JUPITER, et rebus nox abstulit atra colorem.”

Now since metaphysical divines have wandered thus for many thousand years in imaginary light and real darknes, they are not surely the guides we should chuse to follow. That a degree of knowledge to which I cannot attain is therefore unattainable by them, it would be impertinent to conclude. But I may conclude reasonably and modestly, that a kind of knowledge, whose objects lie above the reach of humanity, cannot be attained by human creatures, unless they are assisted by supernatural powers, which is a supposition out of the present case. I could not have discovered, as NEWTON did, that universal law of corporeal nature which he has demonstrated. But farther than that he could go no more than I, nor discover that action of the first cause by which this law was imposed on all bodies, and is maintained in them. It is the kind, not the degree, of knowledge that is concerned, and to be compared. Let us return therefore out of this scene of illusion into that of human knowledge; nor flutter, as HOBBS expresses himself, like birds at the window whilst we remain inclosed. We may be the better contented to confine our enquiries to the limits GOD has prescribed to them, since we may find within those limits abundant matter of real use and ornament to employ the studious labors of mankind. Experimental knowledge of body and mind is the fund our reason should cultivate: and the first is a fund that philosophers will never exhaust. In this part, let deficiencies be noted. There are, there can be no excesses: and as to the excesses that have been and are to be noted in the other, they are excesses of assuming and reasoning, not of experiment and observation. The phaenomena of the human mind are few, and on those few a multitude of hypotheses has been raised, concern-  
 ing



ing mind in general, and soul and spirit. So that in this part, the improvement of real knowledge must be made by contraction, and not by amplification. I will presume to say, that if our BACON had thought and writ as freely on this as he did on many other parts of science, his famous work, which has contributed so much, would have contributed more, to the advancement of real knowledge, and would have deserved it's title better. Men might have learned to consider body more, instead of doubting whether it exists, and to consider their own minds more, from which alone they can acquire any ideas at all of mind ; instead of dreaming like MALEBRANCHE that they interrogate the divine LOGOS.

What right the first observers of nature and instructors of mankind had to the title of sages we cannot say. It was due perhaps more to the ignorance of the scholars, than to the knowledge of the masters. But this we may venture to affirm, that their right to that appellation could not be worse founded than the right of all their successors to be called lovers of wisdom. There is an anecdote related by TULLY in his fifth Tusculan, and mentioned, I think, by DIOGENES LAERTIUS, which is much to our present purpose : or at least the tale is pretty enough to deserve to be told. The prince of the Phliasians having heard and admired the Samian, asked him what his profession was. He answered, that he was a philosopher, and he explained himself thus : He said, that the life of man seemed to him to resemble the great assembly or fair of Greece that was held at Olympia, where some resorted to acquire honor by exercising themselves in the public games, and others wealth by traffic ; whilst another sort of men came for a much better reason, to see and to observe whatever past. Thus, he said, some men come into the world to seek glory, and some wealth ; whilst a few, despising both, observe and



study nature : and these are lovers of wisdom. We might be induced by this tale to think that PYTHAGORAS confined himself within the bounds of real knowledge, if we did not know, by a multitude of other anecdotes, and by the scraps of his doctrine that have come down to us, how far he rambled out of them. He had been bred in schools where the distinction between human and divine knowledge and wisdom, to one of which we may attain, but not to the other, was so little made, that by aiming at the last, they missed in many respects even the former. To observe the constitution and order of things in the physical and moral systems to which we belong, to form general ideas, notions, axioms and rules on these particulars, and to apply them back again to human action and human use, constitutes knowledge : and the result of the whole is wisdom, human knowledge and human wisdom. But there are men, and there were such in the days of PYTHAGORAS, who talk of wisdom as if it was not the result of any procedure of this kind, but a superior principle antecedent to it, independent of human knowledge, and the influences whereof descend on the human mind from above, as christian theology teaches us that grace and faith are bestowed on us.

According to such philosophers as these, men of great authority in our learned world, we must date the progress of knowledge and wisdom from ADAM, who was the wisest of men, if it be no blunder to say so, before the fall, and the first and greatest philosopher after it. I will not mispend any time in collecting the puerilities and prophanations that have fallen from the pens of rabbins, and antient and modern doctors of the christian church. It will be enough, and in truth more than the subject deserves, to take notice, that if we give credit to these writers, we must believe that wisdom was infused into the mind of ADAM by GOD, and that he came  
out



out of the hands of his Creator with all the perfections of which his nature was susceptible : and of what perfections was not that nature susceptible, whilst he enjoyed the vision of GOD, and whilst the Supreme Wisdom, that is GOD himself, “ for the WORD is GOD,” was pleased to converse with him, and was delighted in his company \*? He had not only innate wisdom, but innate language too ; for ADAM and EVE discoursed together in Hebrew as soon as they were created. Even after the fall, ADAM preserved all the knowledge and wisdom whereof he was in possession, tho more obscurely than before ; because he had no longer the same immediate and intimate communication with the Supreme Intelligence. It should seem too, that he transmitted some faint glimmerings of these original illuminations to all his posterity. PLATO imagined, after more antient philosophers, that every man is born with a certain reminiscence, and that when we seem to be taught, we are only put in mind of what we knew in a former state. Now who can tell how high this reminiscence began, and through how many former states it may have been continued ! Several christian divines have taught, that all men having been contained in the first man, some of his original perfection has descended to them, as well as the taint of his original sin : and we may conceive one, no doubt, as easily as the other.

But however all this may have been, and whether ADAM preserved after the fall his whole stock of knowledge and wisdom, or whether he renewed it by experience and meditation in the course of a long life, the progress of knowledge and wisdom is deduced by the same writers from him to SETH, to ENOCH, to NOAH, to the patriarchs, to MOSES, to SOLOMON, to the elders of Israel, to the priests of the family of AARON, to the

\* —Iudens in orbe terrarum ; & deliciae meae, esse cum filiis hominum. Prov. c. 8. v. 31.



colleges of the prophets, to those sanctified orders the Rechabites and the Effenians, and in short to all the schools of the chosen people both before and after the captivity. Among this people we are told most dogmatically, that the whole treasure of knowledge and wisdom, as well as of true religion, was deposited by God, that it was preserved there, and that some of these riches were distributed from thence at different periods of time to the rest of mankind: so that the people of the whole earth lighted up their candles at the lamp of the tabernacle. JOSEPH is sometimes the ancient HERMES, MOSES the younger. Nay JOSEPH is sometimes the fifth MERCURY, mentioned in several traditions, who gave laws to the Egyptians, and taught them letters: and MOSES was the fourth, whom they thought it criminal to name on account of the plagues they had endured at the famous exode. By these men, the light of philosophy was spread in Egypt. DANIEL, ZOROBABEL and others of the captive Jews spread it in Chaldaea: and SOLOMON had spread it, long before, among his neighbours the Phoenicians, who left some sparks of it in all the countries to which these famous navigators sailed.

This account of the rise and progress of philosophy, with a multitude of other circumstances, is so inconsistent and so unauthorized, or rather so grossly fabulous, that they who give credit to it must first renounce all the conditions of historical probability. JOSEPHUS, EUSEBIUS, CLEMENT of Alexandria, and others, both Jews and Christians, laid the foundations of the whole legend, and dressed up different parts of it. Modern scholars, like BOCHART, HUET, STILLINGFLEET, and many more, have taken a great deal of ridiculous pains to support it. I shall not enter at this time into any particulars concerning the proofs they bring. I will only say, that, by the same methods, it will not be difficult to make antiquity depose



pose just as we please. If we affirm, as it is done in the present case, without even any seeming authority; if we connect at other times broken, and supply imperfect passages by guesses; and if we paraphrase such as are obscure, till we make them say what there is no reason but the reason of our scheme to believe they were intended to say; in short, and to mention no more of these learned artifices, if we adopt such anecdotes as suit our purpose, and reject such as are not favorable to it, tho' derived from the same or equivalent authority, no historical paradox will want sufficient color to make it pass for truth, at least among those who have, as the writers above-mentioned had, some favorite purpose to serve by it.

That arts and sciences travelled from the East to the West, from Chaldaea to Egypt, and from Egypt to Greece, has been a received opinion:

“ Tradidit Ægyptis Babylon, Ægyptus Achivis.”

This opinion agrees so well with our scripture account of the re-peopling the world after the deluge, and of the antiquity of nations, that it ought to be retained perhaps for that very reason. Two writers of more fame than good authority, but who are principally depended upon by modern antiquarians, seem to have thought so. JOSEPHUS relates, that ABRAHAM was enriched by the immense presents the Ægyptians made him for instructing them in the sciences that he brought from Chaldaea. EUSEBIUS assures us, from the same JOSEPHUS, that the Egyptians were ignorant of astrology and even of arithmetic, and from EUPOLEMUS, that ABRAHAM conversed, whilst he was in their country, with the priests of Heliopolis. But notwithstanding all the authorities on which this received opinion is founded, a man of ingenuity and much reading would not find it hard to establish another, by a new choice  
of



of passages, and by a new disposition of them ; for the learned ring different changes on the same set of bells. He might shew us perhaps, that arts and sciences came from the West in a more remote age than any the Greeks had knowledge of, that they were introduced and spread by the Atlantic people who over-run Africa and Europe, and of whom SOLON had never heard till the Egyptian priests related these wonders to him ; or he might bring them perhaps from the kingdom of Uranus, that kingdom to which ATLAS, coeval with SATURN, and his brother, according to DIODORUS SICULUS, gave his name ; if in truth the people of that kingdom were different from the others who bore the same name, which point of criticism it might be more difficult than important to settle, since in all cases arts and sciences would still have been brought from the West to the East. After this, it would be easy to transport them from Ethiopia, the African Ethiopia, or Egypt to more eastern nations, to the Phoenicians, the Assyrians, the Persians, the Indians and the Chinese.

## SECTION II.

**B**UT to dwell no longer on these serious trifles, let us consider whether the rise and progress of philosophy, especially of the first, may not be accounted for with a probability that is founded on the general tenor of tradition, and on the analogy with what we know of nations that have grown up from barbarity to civility, and from ignorance to knowledge.

I think then, on both these foundations, that philosophy neither had, nor could have, in the ordinary course of things, a stated beginning at any point of time, nor in any particular place.



place. It began, at different periods, in different places, and was subject to all the revolutions that attend the human state. It was the growth of some countries, it was propagated into others. It flourished long in some countries, it languished and was soon at an end in others. It thrived more or less, it lived and died according to the characters of people and the fortune of governments. Wherever it began, the beginnings of it were inconsiderable; for the trees which compose the grove of knowledge shoot up from the smallest seeds. Nor was this all. The imperfections of our nature, which have manifested themselves in the whole progress of philosophy, manifested themselves no doubt even more grossly at the rise of it, tho' ignorance concealed them at that time, as knowledge has disguised them since. Ignorance preceded knowledge. Error was coeval, and grew up with it. Error flourishes in shades, and before men could get out of those which ignorance spread, error had outgrown and overshadowed knowledge. Superstition accompanied them: and tho' error was the principal nurse, even knowledge contributed to rear this child of ignorance and fear.

It is agreeable to antient traditions, and modern relations, to believe, that wild uncivilized people, tho' reduced into societies subject to some regulations of government, and directed by some general rules which constant experience forces them to observe, have few means and little leisure to improve even in that knowledge, the foundations of which are already laid by urgent necessity among them, and which would render their state, if it was improved, much more comfortable. Their whole time is employed, the whole attention of their minds is bent to provide from day to day, and from season to season, for their sustenance: and the exercise of reason appears as little in them as in the beasts they sometimes hunt, and  
by



by whom they are sometimes hunted. Arts lie uninvented or unimproved, and science they have not. But the first openings to science, and the first motive to philosophical enquiries, they have even in the state I describe : and this motive shews itself in that curiosity to know the causes of the phaenomena, which is so natural to the human mind. The most common excite it. Those that are extraordinary excite it more, and those from which they receive much benefit or much hurt excite it most of all. Another principle, as natural to the human mind, but not very apt to direct our enquiries right, is that whereby we make ourselves the measure, as well as the final cause of all things. It is this that has represented the unknown causes of the ordinary as well as extraordinary, of the beneficial as well as hurtful phaenomena of nature to the minds of such savages and demi-savages as we describe, under the images of animal beings, a little different from man, but analogous to him, and endued only with greater power and greater intelligence. These they placed above or below, according to the different scenes of action to which imagination assigned them ; like the captain above and the captain below, the two divinities of the Hottentots. Thus the heaven, the earth, the sea and the air were soon peopled with divinities that directed all their motions, and directed them all relatively to man. Unable to discover the order of second causes, to trace those that are remote from those that lie nearest to our observation, and those that are more general from those that are less so, which would have led them at last to the first efficient cause of all things, they took a shorter and easier method of accounting for appearances, by ascribing every one to some particular efficient cause. Thus they made gods as many as they wanted ; and having once made them it became equally unnecessary to look after intermediate, and impious to suppose any superior causes. It thundered : JUPITER was angry. It lightened : he darted  
one



one of his fiery bolts at some devoted head. What would curiosity desire more to know \* ?

I MIGHT

\* If ignorance and fear were the two first sources from which polytheism and idolatry arose, flattery was in process of time another; or that which was gratitude originally, degenerated into flattery. Men who had been honored for the good they did during their lives<sup>a</sup>, or admired for their great actions, were adored after their deaths<sup>b</sup>. This custom was extended so far, that in some countries<sup>c</sup>, not only public benefactors and heroes and kings were deified, but every private man worshipped those to whom he had been particularly obliged<sup>d</sup>. Thus it was that the Egyptians came to have whole dynasties of gods and of demi-gods<sup>e</sup>. The fame of OSIRIS, whenever he lived, had been great: and the veneration of his subjects for him was such, that they gave his name to their gods, or ascribed the names of their gods to him<sup>f</sup>. Some have imagined, and among them Sir J. MARSHAM, if I remember right, that his whole family and his whole court had their share of divine honors. That as his sister, who was his wife too, followed him to heaven under the name of ISIS, so the president of his council became the god of arts and eloquence, under the name of MERCURY: and the general of his troops was the patron of magnanimity and military virtue, under that of HERCULES: nay that his brother and his sons were no more forgot by the priests, than BUSIRIS and AN-TAEUS, the governors of two of his provinces, have been by the poets. SESO-TRIS furnished the same matter to fables, many generations afterwards: and learned men think that several of those in HOMER may be traced up to this famous expedition. These deifications gave occasion to the hymns that were made and sung, not only as parts of divine worship, but as necessary means to preserve the memory of great events. TULLY says somewhere, that the funeral orations in use at Rome had corrupted history; because historians, in the dearth of materials, had taken such as they found in those rhetorical panegyrics. How much more must such hymns have corrupted both history and religion? The simplicity of true theism could never subsist in the figures of poetry. Affecting inspiration passed for real, hyperboles were understood literally, and the machinery of an ode was taken for matter of fact.

MEN grew fonder of polytheism by another custom that prevailed. Every sect framed a new list of gods, or gave new names to ancient divinities: and altho in some places temples were opened to the whole rabble of the sky, yet in others the gods seemed to be reduced to a smaller number, and every nation was fond to have it believed, that the deities they worshipped, belonged in a peculiar manner to their country and to them. The birth of BACCHUS, for instance, had been claimed by several nations of Asia and Africa, when ORPHEUS applied to the

<sup>a</sup> Cic. de Nat. Deor. l. 2.

<sup>b</sup> Hic est vetustissimus referendi bene merentibus gratiam mos, ut tales numinibus ascribant. PLIN. l. 2.

<sup>c</sup> Aethiopia. vid. STRAB. l. 17.

<sup>d</sup> Quamobrem major coelitem populus etiam quam hominum intelligi potest, cum singuli quoque ex semetipsis totidem deos faciant, Junones, Geniosque adoptando sibi. PLIN. ubi supra.

<sup>e</sup> Suscepit autem vita hominum consuetudoque communis, ut beneficiis excellentes viros in coelum famam ac voluntate tollerent. Hinc HERCULES, hinc CASTOR et POLLUX, &c. Cic. de Nat. Deor. l. 2.

<sup>f</sup> Haec arte POLLUX, & vagus HERCULES innixus arces attigit igneas. HOR.



I MIGHT illustrate what has been said by numerous examples, if I affected, what I esteem very little, particular and critical

son of SEMELE the fables he had learned in Egypt concerning another BACCHUS, and instituted in honor of this new divinity, the orgia and religious ceremonies he had seen practised in honor of others more antient, of the same name and profession, if I may use the term. It would be impossible to enumerate, not only all the different gods, but even all those that were worshipped under the same appellation; for VARRO, I think, reckoned at least three hundred JUPITERS.

BUT before I leave this head, I will mention very shortly, one or two ways more, by which these superstitions received increase, since they occur readily to my mind. Mistake and involuntary error was one, involuntary in the generality, tho often imposed, sometimes helped, and always connived at, by the pious frauds of the priesthood. The legend of Dodona related, that two black doves took their flight from the Egyptian Thebes, one into Lybia, the other into Greece; that the first ordered the temple of JUPITER HAMMON to be founded, and that the latter, perching on a tree at Dodona, and speaking in the human voice, declared it to be in the fates, that another oracle of JUPITER should be established there. The fact was attested by all that belonged to the temple, and the miracle passed currently. But the priests of the Theban JUPITER, who had no interest in this particular superstition, and with whom HERODOTUS conversed when he was in Egypt, explained the blunder and the fraud to him. Some Phoenician rovers, it seems, had carried off two priestesses, and sold one into Lybia, and the other into Greece, where they set up oracles on the model of that which was in their own country. BOCHART has shewn how affinity of sounds, which gave occasion to the Greek poets to call the priests Doves, might give occasion to this fable: and Sir J. MARSHAM cites a passage in HOMER, where doves are said to carry ambrosia to JUPITER. Let me say, by the way, that BOCHART might have learned from hence, how precarious a foundation for conjecture similitude of sound is, on which however, many of his conjectures rest principally.

THAT I may compare this antient, with a modern, instance of impudent fraud and foolish credulity, let me mention among many, one that prevails at this time even in France. It is believed then in that country by devout persons, that some holy man had formerly a revelation in a vision or a dream, directing a monastery to be built, and founded in a particular field, which was shewn to him. The good man published this revelation: a bigot age believed him: the monastery was founded, and a new order of lazy drones was added to the church. Their first and all their other monasteries were richly endowed: and they continue to this day under a name that marks their supposed divine institution, the name of Premontrè.

IF such gross lies could be imposed, if plain matters of fact could be thus perverted to foment superstition, what errors must have arisen to have the same effect



critical knowledge of the anecdotes of antiquity. It is enough for me to have read and considered them so far, as to see some general truths that result from them. I proceed therefore in the same manner to observe, that many antient traditions might induce one to think, that the unity of God was the original belief of mankind, and that polytheism and idolatry were the corruptions of this orthodox faith. CUDWORTH seemed to me to have established this opinion on as good foundations as any opinions of this sort can rest, and I own that I once very much inclined to it. But when it is considered more closely, and without prepossession, I apprehend that it can be supported neither by sacred nor by prophane authority.

Not by sacred; because the Mosaic account is plainly inconsistent with itself, as it stands in the books we have under the

effect from the use of hieroglyphics, symbols, and allegories, wherein physical and moral philosophy were delivered down to posterity? If naked truth, passing through many hands, came to be disguised, what must have happened to truth, wearing a mask at her first appearance? The hieroglyphic and the symbol remained, and the fable continued in tradition, when the signification of the one, and the moral of the other, were forgot. Books, which treat of antient mythology, furnish many instances of this kind. I will mention two out of DIODORUS SICULUS, as examples of another way, whereby superstitious opinions and practices encreased among the heathen. PALLAS was a virgin, born out of the head of JUPITER. She was a goddess, famous in many respects; and we see of what consequence her statue was in the Trojan war\*. Now the antient naturalists meant to express, by this daughter of JUPITER, nothing more than the air, uncorrupted, and holding the sublimer place among the elements. Thus again, as the Romans carried the eagle, so the Egyptians carried the images of divers beasts in their ensigns. These images, which were preserved only as monuments of their triumphs, came in time to be adored as authors of their victories. The dog, which ANUBIS, and the wolf, which MACEDON, wore on their shields or on their helmets, after having been long honored as emblems of these demi-gods, came to be gods themselves. From some such originals, might proceed many other monstrous objects of adoration,

— qualia demens  
— Aegyptus portenta colit — Juv.

\* DIOD. SIC. l. 1.

<sup>b</sup> Ib. l. 2.



name of MOSES. Not by prophane ; because those anecdotes are quite unfavorable to this opinion, and because every probable reason that can be drawn from the constitution of human nature, and from the ordinary process of the human mind, stands in direct contradiction to it.

METHUSALEM, it is said, saw both ADAM and NOAH, to both of whom God revealed himself in his unity. SHEM, the son of NOAH, lived even to the days of ABRAHAM. Need I stay to shew how impossible it is for any man in his senses to believe, that a tradition derived from God himself, through so few generations, was lost among the greatest part of mankind, or that polytheism and idolatry were established on the ruins of it in the days of SERUG, before those of ABRAHAM, and so soon after the deluge ? I should think it impossible even for the Jews themselves, who swallow so many fables and so many anacronisms. Since the unity of God was not universally taught in those early days, it was not so revealed, nor preserved in the manner assumed.

IF the inconsistency of this account makes us reject it, we shall find less reason to believe, on the authority of prophane traditions, that the unity of God was the primitive faith of mankind. Revelations to the Father and to the Restorer of the whole human race, might have established this faith universally : but without revelation it could not be that even of any one people, till observation and meditation, till a full and vigorous exercise of reason made it such. By considering the phaenomena separately, men could not arrive at a knowledge of the one Supreme Being : and such men, as we speak of, were not capable of taking an entire view of the harmony of the whole.

WRITERS



WRITERS are apt to talk of general consent, as if it proved in all cases, that opinions so consented to, have a real conformity, and bear a real proportion, to the universal reason of mankind. Thus in TULLY, there are some attempts to prove the truth of polytheism. Thus a modern philosopher and divine \* attempts to prove, that the belief of invisible spirits, employed in directing the affairs of this visible world, is founded in "natural instinct and the evidence of reason." It would be easy to shew, in a multitude of instances, that if this postulatam be admitted, things manifestly false must pass often for true, and things demonstrated true, for false. Even the existence of a first intelligent cause, the very unity of God, of which we are speaking, must be owned to want this pretended criterion of truth. But if universal consent be not necessary to establish this demonstrated truth, how much less necessary is it, that this should have been the primitive belief of mankind? Polytheism and idolatry are repugnant to right reason, that is, to the conclusions that reason draws from sufficient information, and from the combinations and comparisons of real, not phantastic ideas and notions. But polytheism and idolatry have so close a connection with the few superficial and ill-verified ideas and notions of rude ignorant men, and with the affections of their minds, that one of them could not fail to be their first religious principle, nor the other their first religious practice.

THERE is so little prophane authority for asserting the contrary, that if the passages, produced to prove it, were more direct, and more numerous and uniform than they are, they would not prove it to any one who gives as little credit to our

\* THOMASSIN, Met. d'étudier &c. la philos.

very



very best systems of antient chronology as they deserve. Suppose it clearly proved by some of these passages in any one instance, that the unity of God was the primitive belief, the term primitive will be equivocal, and the proof precarious. For how shall we be assured that we see clearly in the midst of chronological darkness, which is always thickest the further we go back, that this orthodox faith was not preceded among the same people by polytheism and idolatry, as we shall certainly find that it was succeeded by them? The whole world appears, as soon as we come into historical light, over-run with them. The vulgar embrace them easily, even after the true doctrine of a divine unity has been taught and received, as we may learn from the example of the Israelites: and superstitions grow apace and spread wide, even in those countries where christianity has been established, and is daily taught; as we may learn from the examples of the Roman churches, to say nothing of the reformed, who are less liable to the objection. But still it remains true, that the belief of one Supreme Being may be established on the ruins of polytheism and idolatry. In fact it hath been so, in historical ages. Why should it not have been so in that dark age, which preceded even the fabulous age, according to VARRO'S distribution of them? In the Theban dynasty, the Supreme Being was piously adored under the name of Kneph, and the people of it were so far from any idolatrous worship, that they refused on this account, as rigid Jews or Christians might have done, to contribute to a tax raised in Egypt, and applied to repair the temples, the images or pictures, and other instruments of idolatry. Now the Theban was the most antient dynasty of Egypt: and the Egyptians were the most antient people of the world: the first men therefore were unitarians, not polytheists. But how can this conclusion stand, when the premises neither have been, nor can be proved; when there may have been  
been



been dynasties more antient than this, or various revolutions of religion in this very dynasty; and when I have much more reason to believe, on the reason of the thing, and on a general analogy to what has happened in other countries, that the first men were polytheists, than any scholar has, on the precarious authority of a broken tradition or two, to pronounce them orthodox on this article of their faith? In short, there is, I think, no sufficient grounds on which to believe, that natural theology was taught in its purity first, and corrupted afterwards; whereas reason and observation both make it probable, that it has fared with the first philosophy as with every other part of science, that is, much error has been mingled sometimes with a little knowledge, and especially in the beginnings of men's inquiries into nature; and that at other times in the progress of these inquiries, where any progress has been made, more or less knowledge has been acquired with a less proportion of error. Conscious of human weakness and dependency, men have acknowledged in the infancy of philosophy, and even before the birth of it, power and intelligence superior to their own, such as made the world, or such at least as governs it. This was knowledge. But error grew up with it. They adored the visible objects that struck their senses, or at best the invisible beings that they assumed to reside in them. The rational, the orthodox belief, the first true principle of all theology, was not established, nor could be so, till the manhood of philosophy.

THE progress of this manhood was every where slow, and in some countries none appears to have been ever made. On the contrary, men continued from age to age in the same state, which may be properly called a state of natural error and superstition. Such nations, like changelings or naturals, may be said to have been children to their death. But in others:



others this progress was made, and favorable combinations of circumstances helped to quicken it, in some more, in some less; but in all much more to the improvement of useful arts, and of other sciences, particularly of government, than to the investigation of truths concerning the first philosophy. We read, with a just admiration, the accounts that are come down to us, short and imperfect as they are, of the wisdom and policy of antient nations, of the eastern empires, and particularly in HERODOTUS and DIODORUS SICULUS, of the Egyptian government. All the arts and sciences were carried far among them, several much further than we are able to imitate; and if we judge of their improvements in other sciences, as we may fairly do, by those which they made in astronomy, we shall find reason to be of opinion, that these sunk instead of rising in the hands of the Greeks, notwithstanding their boasts, and those of PLATO particularly, that they improved all they learned; as we see that the knowledge of the true solar system was lost soon after the days of PYTHAGORAS, and made way for the false one of PTOLEMY. But when we consider the state of natural theology among the same nations, and at the same time, we admire no longer; we remain astonished, that men who excelled in every other branch of knowledge, should embrace so many absurd errors in this, and deduce from their philosophy a system of religion that rendered them a proverb, even among polytheists and idolaters. To give a full account of this, would be to give an history of the progress of the first philosophy. I shall touch the principal heads as shortly as I can; and indeed the greatest scholars when they pretend to do much more, to enter into a detail of particulars, and to treat this subject minutely, involve themselves and their readers in webs of hypotheses, one generally as improbable as another, and none of them of any real use. They shew much learning, as it is called, and often  
much



much subtilty, and this is all they shew that deserves any commendation, if even this deserves it. I refer you therefore to them, if you are desirous to see more particulars than you will find here, concerning the rise and early progress of Pagan theology and worship.

AMONG people immerfed in ignorance and superstition, there arose in antient days, as there have done since, some men of more genius than the common herd, and that were placed in situations and circumstances, which gave them perhaps opportunities of receiving instruction from others, or at least better means of observing nature themselves, and more leisure for the investigation of truth, and for the improvement of knowledge. These men were the first missionaries, and I suppose the best, that have been seen in the world. They assembled little families, clans or hords, into larger and more civilized communities: they invented many useful arts of life: they established order and good government, and they taught men the great lesson of promoting the happiness of individuals, by promoting that of the public, and of preserving liberty by subjection to law. These legislators, however, had been bred in the superstitious opinions and practices of their families and countries, and for that reason one may incline to think, that they preserved a tang of this superstition in their legislative capacity; since it is much more rare to see men shake off entirely long habits of error, than to see them rise out of meer ignorance to certain degrees of knowledge. On this supposition, it would be obvious to account for the superstitious opinions and practices which they propagated, and rendered venerable in all the governments they established. But a reflection presents itself immediately, which lets us into a secret, and perhaps a truer motive that they had to hold this conduct. They might be neither bigots to old superstitions,

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nor



nor to those that they superinduced themselves. They could not believe that they had a correspondence, which they knew they had not, with gods or daemons, even if they believed the existence of such imaginary beings, and yet they all pretended to this great prerogative. The Egyptian wisdom, their religious and civil institutions, were taught by MERCURY: and their first legislators and philosophers assumed the name, or had it given them on this account. ZOROASTER and ZAMOLXIS, one among the Bactrians, and the other among the Scythians, had revelations from VESTA. MINOS had them from JUPITER himself, and CHARONDAS from SATURN. NUMA conversed familiarly with ÆGERIA, and PYTHAGORAS with MINERVA. I need mention no more, for I will not offend by adding MOSES to this catalogue.

Now since these men imposed revelations they knew to be false, we may conclude, they were not much in earnest about several of the doctrines they taught, and of the institutions they made, not even about a doctrine which most, and I believe all of them, were extremely solicitous to inculcate, I mean the doctrine of future rewards and punishments. They endeavoured to profit of the general disposition, to apprehend superior powers, in some of whom superstition had accustomed men to imagine a severity of justice, and even an inclination to afflict and torment; and they knew enough of the human heart, to know that men would be flattered with immortality in any shape, and tho the consequence of it might be their own damnation. Religion in the hands of these philosophical legislators, who succeeded to the authority of fathers of families, was a proper expedient to enforce obedience to political regimens: and neither the doctrines of it, nor the rites and ceremonies and manners of worship, could be too gross for those who had believed and practised many other superstitions  
in



in the days of still greater simplicity and ignorance, and whilst they were under paternal government. I can easily persuade myself, for I think it not only possible but probable, that many of the reformers had discovered the existence of one Supreme Being, which cannot long escape the knowledge of those who observe the whole face of nature. But this knowledge, and the consequences they should be able to deduce from it, might not seem to them sufficiently adapted to the character of the people with whom they had to do: a people led by their senses, and by the first appearances of things, with little use of reason, and little exercise of reflection, which might have rendered them capable of rising from sensible to intelligible objects.

NATURAL theology, pure and unmixed, it might be thought, would speak in vain to a multitude, in whom appetites and prepossessions, affections and passions, raised by sensible objects, were strong, and the force of reason small. It was necessary, therefore, in the opinion of these missionaries of good policy and good manners, and, in order to promote them both, of religion likewise, to suit their doctrines to such gross conceptions, and to raise such affections and passions by human images, and by objects that made strong impressions on sense, as might be opposed with success to such as were raised by human images, and by sensible objects too, and were destructive of order, and pernicious to society. That true self-love and social are the same, as you have expressed a maxim, I have always thought most undeniably evident; or that the author of nature has so constituted the human system, that they coincide in it, may be easily demonstrated to any one who is able to compare a very few clear and determinate ideas. But it will not follow, that he to whom this demonstration is made, nor even he who makes it, shall regulate his conduct according to



it, nor reduce to practice what is true in speculation. We are so made, that a less immediate good will determine the generality of mankind, in opposition to one that is much greater, even according to our own measure of things, but more remote: and an agreeable momentary sensation will be preferred to any lasting and real advantage which reason alone can hold out to us, and reflection alone can make us perceive. Philosophy may teach us to do voluntarily, as I have read that ARISTOTLE says it does, what others are constrained to do by force. But the many were not philosophers: and therefore the few might think very plausibly, that fear was necessary to make them act as such. The influence of reason is slow and calm, that of the passions sudden and violent. Reason therefore might suggest the art that served to turn the passions on her side.

THO I think, that they who instituted religions in the Pagan world were not convinced of the truth of their own doctrines, and that their sole view was to add, by this political expedient, divine to human authority, and the sanction of revelation to the dictates of right reason, yet am I persuaded, that many of them believed the existence of one Supreme Being, the fountain of all existence, as I said just now. They believed farther, the anecdotes of antiquity make it plain that they did, the existence of many inferior beings generated, not ungenerated gods and daemons. They erected, as it were, a divine monarchy on the ruins of a divine aristocracy; and in this respect, as well as many others, they refined, whilst they improved in knowledge, out of the absurdities of original superstition, into one that was a little less absurd, and that came nearer truth, or disguised error under more plausible appearances. But all these refinements, at least as soon as the distinction of a public and a secret doctrine was made, whenever that was made,



made, became parts of their hidden doctrine, which was communicated to the initiated alone. Their outward doctrine differed not from that of the vulgar, it was the same : or rather the superstition they found established by custom and habit, and that which they superinduced by institution, composed one monstrous system of ridiculous polytheism and nauseous idolatry. I imagine, that the first philosophy, of which I am to speak principally in this essay, took its rise among the sons of men, and was sometimes purged and improved, as every other part of philosophy was in certain places, and rendered more abominable in others.

I do not intend to make the apology of those, who destroyed the true principles of natural theology, by adopting old, and inventing new superstitions, in order to enforce submission to government, and the practice of morality. I say only, the first reformers of mankind are not without excuse on this head. Great authorities may be cited, antient and modern, Pagan and Christian ; some for imposing things untrue, some for concealing things true, and some for doing both, in matters of religion. But a much better excuse, and such a one as divines particularly will have no good grace in rejecting, may be urged in their favor ; and if nothing can justify, this will at least alleviate, their guilt.

THIS was their case : they found mankind immersed in superstition, and accustomed to licentiousness. To cure them of the latter, they made their profit of the former. They reduced curious superstitions that were taken up by chance, as every man's imagination suggested them to him, and without design, into systems ; and they directed these systems in doctrine and practice, to the purpose of reforming the manners of the half-savage people whom they civilized, and

to



to the improvement of social life under the influence of law. Appeals to the reason of unreasonable men would have had little effect: and they had no power to force inward conviction, any more than outward profession. They employed therefore the only expedient, as bad a one as it was, that they had, sufficient to force both; the dread of superior power, maintained and cultivated by superstition, and applied by policy.

WHAT now was the case of the famous legislator MOSES? Some excuse for the former will result, I think, from this comparison. When God remembered his covenant with ABRAHAM, an absurd expression, but very theological, the descendants of ABRAHAM had forgot their God. They were become Egyptians, that is, they were attached to the country, and still more attached to all the superstitions of it. They were constrained by miracles to abandon one; but no miracles, no interpositions of providence could oblige them to abandon the other. God was forced, therefore, to indulge them in several superstitious prejudices, as learned divines scruple not to affirm; and in fact it appears, that a great part of the ritual observances and laws of the Egyptians and of the Israelites were the same, or so near alike, as to leave no doubt of their having one common origin. This even HERMAN WITZIUS cannot deny. He allows that there was a great and wonderful conformity between them, "*magnam atque mirandam convenientiam in religionis negotio:*" and therefore he would persuade, if he could, against the plainest evidence that antiquity can furnish on any subject, that the Egyptians borrowed these institutions from the Israelites, the masters from their scholars and their slaves; which would not mend the matter neither extremely, if it could be shewn, as he attempted very weakly to shew it, against MARSHAM and SPENCER.

BUT



BUT you will ask, and a reasonable question it will be, why was God forced to indulge his people in these superstitions? The divine has his answer ready; because it becomes Infinite Wisdom to do nothing by extraordinary and supernatural means, which may be done by ordinary and natural; and because wise governors compound, as it were, often with obstinacy, and indulge men in some prejudices, that they may draw them off the more effectually from others\*. For these  
weighty

\* Thus it is divines account for the many Egyptian rites that were preserved in the Mosaic institution, by assuming that God ordered it so out of indulgence to his chosen people, who were strongly attached to the religion and manners of Egypt, and in order to reconcile them to his law, by a little mixture of superstition in the ceremonious part of it. Let another assumption, made on the same principle, and more presumptuous, if that be possible, than the former, be mentioned. It is this. That sincere, pious and learned man Mr. WHISTON supposes, in his new theory of the earth, that the sun, moon and stars were made before the six days work of the creation began; tho they are said to have been made at the same time, according to the obvious sense of the words of MOSES. They are said then first to be, or to be made, only because they became first conspicuous then, and their bodies distinctly visible, as in a clear day or night they now appear to us, according to Mr. WHISTON. The point is delicate, and therefore the good man thought himself obliged to account, as well as he could, for this apparent, and I fear real, difference between MOSES and him. He says, in the first place, that MOSES wrote in this manner, because it was necessary to secure the Jews from the adoration of the host of heaven. There was no other way to apply a fitting remedy to that prevailing custom. The worship of terrestrial things was demonstrated, by this account of their original, to be foolish and absurd; but that of the celestial bodies would have seemed permitted at least, if they too had not been included in the same relation. He says, in the next place, that we ought to look on the Mosaic history of the creation, as on a journal of the appearances of things, such an one as an honest and observing spectator on the earth would have made and have believed true, tho it was not agreeable to the reality of things. Now to the first of these bold assumptions, there lies a most cruel objection, of which Mr. WHISTON takes no notice. If MOSES had told the Jews, that the celestial bodies were created beings, as well as our earth, tho created before, even long before it, they would have believed him as soon, and have been as effectually armed against idolatrous worship, by a true representation, as they believed him, and were thus armed by an untrue one. Another objection indeed Mr. WHISTON supposes might be made to him, and he answers it plausibly enough; for tho there might be no spectator to observe and record what passed, yet if the nature of the  
history



weighty reasons, the God of truth chose to indulge error, and suited his institutions to the taste of the age, "ad faeculi gustum et usum," says SPENCER. For these weighty reasons, he would not enlighten the understandings, soften the hearts, nor determine the wills of his chosen people; tho he had hardened the heart of PHARAOH a little before against the strongest manifestations of almighty power; which is, I presume, as extraordinary and supernatural an operation as that of softening the heart to yield to such manifestations. We may carry this farther. God contented himself, according to these bold judges of the principles and views of his proceedings, to take ordinary and natural means in a case to which they were not adequate, as he must have known in his prescience that they would not be, and as we know by the history of these people, that they were not; their whole history being a continued series of difficult conversions from idolatry, and easy relapses to it. By this comparison it appears then already that

history required it, MOSES might very properly represent things as they would have appeared to any such spectator who had been present. But Mr. WHISTON immediately destroys the force, such as it is, of his own answer. "To speak my mind freely," says he, "I believe that the Messias was there actually present, that he made the journal, that he delivered it after to MOSES on mount Sinai, and that from thence it appears in the front of his pentateuch at this day." It is no longer MOSES then who represents things untruly, but such as they would have appeared to an honest ignorant spectator. It is the Messias who represents them untruly to MOSES, and deceives others deliberately, for he could not be deceived himself, to prevent by this fallacy an evil, that would have been prevented just as well by the truth. Whatever rank Mr. WHISTON is pleased to allow the Messias, he should have respected this divine person enough, not to impute to him a false journal, made for an unnecessary purpose. But this he does: whilst other divines impute to the Supreme Being, an indulgence to the superstitious prejudices and habits of the Israelites, tho reason as well as experience shews, that these means, which they assume that infinite wisdom employed, were in no sort proportionable to the end which they assume that the same wisdom proposed. These are the profane effects of theological presumption. I would sooner be reputed, nay I would sooner be, a Pagan than a Christian, or an Atheist than a Theist; if to be one or the other it was necessary to believe such absurdities as these, which however disguised, and softened by a certain cant of expression, are directly profane, and indirectly, or by consequence at least, blasphemous.

MOSES,



MOSES, who pretended to be directed and authorized by God himself, indulged the Israelites in many favorite superstitions : as prophane legislators indulged the people, with whom they had to do.

BUT since I am got thus far into this subject, allow me to take a step or two more, and to raise from the dead one of those antient sages, who gave laws to heathen nations, and instituted religions among them. Let me suppose, that one of our learned divines summed up the accusation against him and his brethren, and contradistinguished them from the legislator of the Hebrew people, thus. Notwithstanding the conformity between some ritual laws and observances of this people, and of the Egyptians, and the frequent apostacies of the former, the knowledge of the one true God was preserved among them by the Mosaic dispensation, whilst polytheism and idolatry overspread the rest of the world. Thus the great design of God was effected ; and thus the whole oeconomy of divine providence is justified. Would the antient sage be left without any reply ? I think not.

HE might insist, in his own excuse, that MOSES, like prophane lawgivers \*, did not only indulge the people in some favorite habitual superstitions, but in others of his own institution ; and that his predilection for all these, over the real duties of natural religion, made him inflict more severe penalties on those who violated the former, than on those who violated the latter. He might insist, that among the superstitions of Mosaic institution there was one, which could be charged

\* Proclive est observare, Deum cuilibet legi rituali, manu elatâ, hoc est protervè et ex praemeditato violatae, supplicium extremum statuisse ; quum tamen peccatis suâ naturâ gravioribus, fornicationi, furto, proximi mutilationi, et ejusmodi, poenas longe mitiores irrogavit. SPEN. l. i. c. i.



neither on the Egyptian, nor any other heathen nation, and which surpassed the most extravagant of theirs. Besides the gods, which may be said to have been, as it were, in common, a local tutelary divinity was assumed by every city or nation, and was distinguished and appropriated by a particular appellation. This superstition, he would assert, that MOSES imitated, and abused, and aggravated by his imitation. Tho polytheism and idolatry overspread the world, might he say, the existence of the Monad, or the unity of the one Supreme Being, was not unknown to many of us. We could not teach this doctrine with success to the vulgar, incapable of conceiving things purely intellectual, but we taught it to those who were initiated into our mysteries: and if we did not propose the true God as an object of public and popular adoration, neither did we bring the notions of him down to the low and gross conceptions of the multitude, nor expose the majesty of this awful Being to their prophanations. This MOSES did. He would not consent to take upon him the commission he was appointed to execute, nor go to the children of Israel, till he was able to tell them the name of the God who sent him. In compliance with his importunity, and with the prejudices of the people, to whom he was sent, God is said to have given himself a name, a very magnificent one indeed, and such an one as might denote the Supreme Being; but still a name, by which he was to be distinguished as the tutelary God of ABRAHAM, ISAAC and JACOB, of one family first, and then of one nation particularly, and almost exclusively of all others.

OUR antient sage might add, that the least part of the miracles wrought among the Israelites, with so much profusion, and in a continued series of divine interpositions, would have been more than sufficient to draw any other nation, nay all the nations of the earth, from polytheism and idolatry. That in  
this



this case, neither he nor any other legislator would have found it difficult, by propagating the belief and worship of the true God, to civilize savage people without having recourse to the expedient they employed. That as they were in a case very different, they deserve excuse and pity rather than blame, for promoting natural religion and good government at the expence of true theology. But that MOSES deserves neither excuse nor pity, since he chose to make use of superstitions which he did not want, nay which defeated, instead of securing, his intent; if his intent was to destroy idolatry by the means of them: for the sage would insist, with great appearance of reason, first, that the true God was made known to the Israelites by such manifestations of himself to them, and that his law was promulgated in so solemn and awful a manner, if there is any truth in the Jewish traditions, as to leave no pretence for adding any thing to confirm the knowledge or to enforce the law. He would insist in the next place, that if the apostacies of the Israelites, after such manifestations and declarations of the one true God, can be any way accounted for, it must be by the effect of the very expedient which our divines pretend, that infinite wisdom employed to prevent these apostacies. He would conclude in short, that MOSES and the heathen legislators employed the same means, with this difference, that these means were better proportioned to their end than to his; since they designed to govern mankind by superstition; and he meant, or as divines presume to tell us, God meant, to destroy idolatry by indulgence to the very superstitions out of which it grew. Upon the whole matter, whether the first sages are entirely excusable or not, their proceeding was much more reasonable than that which was followed by the order, and under the immediate direction of God himself, as these Eunomians, who affect to understand the whole secret of the divine

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oeconomy, and to know God as well as he knows himself, have the boldness to assert.

THO I have said thus much, in excuse for those who were the first to establish religion and government, I shall not attempt any excuse for those who succeeded them, and who cultivated error and superstition on a principle of private ambition. This might be the case sometimes, and to some degree among the most savage people in antient days, as we see that it is in our own age among the wild nations of America and Africa, who have their conjurers and their diviners, and who practise certain foolish rites under their direction. It was more so, no doubt, when little states began to be formed by assemblages of a few roving families, that fixed themselves in societies under the conduct of some leader of their own or of some foreign legislator; the memory of which events has been preserved in the fabulous traditions that are come down to us concerning ORPHEUS and others; for a certain concurrence of fabulous traditions may hold out with sufficient evidence some general truths. But we have, if I mistake not, in the story of PYTHAGORAS, an example of error and superstition, propagated on a motive of private ambition, that is more circumstantial and better vouched.

PYTHAGORAS came into Italy, with great advantages for effecting his purposes. He came among Greeks, divided into many little states, under very unsettled governments. He came with great reputation of learning and wisdom and sanctity, from a nation renowned for its antiquity, for civil policy and for divine mystery; from a nation from whom the first rudiments of civility and even the use of letters had been imported into Greece, the mother country of all these little states.



states. He had a figure; for even that has been thought worthy of mention, to inspire respect to those who were to be taken by the eye. He had eloquence, to lead those who were to be led by the ear: and his miracles, for miracles are easily imposed on people ignorant or superstitious, and the people PYTHAGORAS had to do with were both, made him easily pass for the Pythian or Hyperborean APOLLO, for one of the genii that were supposed to inhabit the moon, or for a celestial divinity.

HE opened his school and began his mission at Crotona, where his orations to the old men, to the young men, to the women and to the children, and much more the miracle of fish which JAMBLICUS relates so circumstantially, gained him admittance and established his credit. As his first school or college, so his first church, was founded here. I may call it by that name, after CLEMENT of Alexandria, and may observe, after that father likewise, a conformity between the Pythagorean and Christian institutions in this respect. Persons of all ages and sexes, who were converted by the miracles and sermons of PYTHAGORAS, resorted to this church. They were instructed in the public doctrines of his religion, and in those divine truths, which they were to believe first in hopes of understanding them afterwards; which is the very method that St. AUSTIN in some part of his works prescribes to Christian converts. Some few, and such alone as he judged proper after a long and severe probation, like that he had gone through himself in Egypt, and from which neither the recommendations of POLYCRATES, nor the favor of AMASIS could exempt him, were admitted into his college, that became a seminary of enthusiasts. They lived there like Cenobites, members of this spiritual family, renouncing their own, and throwing their whole substance into the common stock. Their  
long



long silence, their abstinence, their self-denial, their purifications, their austerities, and the torments to which they submitted, prepared them for any trials, to which they could be possibly exposed in the propagation of their master's spiritual empire.

IN such an age, and with such ministers as these, men devoted to him, and ready to be martyrs for him, he could not have failed to succeed among a people who were already prepared, by the errors and superstitions of their former institutions, for any that the scheme of his ambition could render it necessary to impose. But he and his disciples shewed this scheme too grossly and too soon: for notwithstanding all the fine things that are said of this famous person by PORPHYRY, JAMBLICUS, and other writers, and notwithstanding all the obscurity and imperfection of traditions concerning these Grecian colonies, it seems apparent enough that the accusations of CYLO and NINO were not void of truth, nor the jealousy that prevailed groundless. PYTHAGORAS caused revolutions in several cities, in Crotona, in Sybaris, in Catana for instance, and his disciples, such as ZALEUCUS and CHARONDAS, if in truth they were his disciples, assumed wherever they came the part of legislators, whether called to it or not; as if it had been a right belonging to this religious society to give laws not only to their own, but to the civil society that admitted them likewise. Such too we may believe they pretended it was, since they all pretended to be divinely inspired: and divine inspiration, as well as divine institution, implies an authority far superior to any that is merely human. DIOGENES LAERTIUS hints that the Crotonians killed him for fear of being reduced under tyranny by him: and some traditions say, that commanding the army of the Agrigentines against the Syracusians he was beat, and killed in the pursuit.

IN



IN all cases, the declaration he was reported to have made, that he had rather be a bull for one day than an ox always, was understood ; and the bull perished. Almost all his disciples perished with him : and the expulsion of this sect out of Italy, may be properly enough compared to that of christianity out of Japan. The effect was not so entire in the former as in the latter instance ; since the philosophy of PYTHAGORAS continued to be taught in Italy by ARISTAEUS and others, who took warning and affected government no longer ; but who thought too, or pretended to think, that the gods would be displeas'd if they suffer'd so divine an institution to be extinguish'd.

THE same spirit, and the same apprehension, did not prevail in Egypt, and the great eastern kingdoms : for which reason I persuade myself that their ecclesiastical and civil constitutions grew up together, and that people who submitted to kingly, might submit the more easily to priestly government ; because the priests who had us'd to lead them by superstition, had acted in concert with their kings to make these establishments. Kings wanted their influence over the people ; the people wanted their influence over kings : and kings and people were both silly enough to imagine that they wanted such a protection from the gods, and such an intercourse with heaven as these prophets and seers, and magicians and priests, for we may jumble them all together, could alone procure.

S E C T.



## SECTION III\*.

AS beneficial as these men had been whilst they stood distinguished by knowledge and wisdom, or by pretensions to them, not by rank, as individuals not as members of a particular order, they became hurtful in many respects when they composed a community within a community, had a separate interest, and by consequence a separate policy. I

\* I HAVE sometimes thought, and said perhaps in our conversations, that the life of mankind may be compared aptly enough to that of every individual, in respect to the acquisition of science. There is in both a state of infancy, of adolescence, of manhood, and of dotage, to be observed. The ideas of infancy are taken superficially from the first appearances of things to the senses. They are ill compared, ill associated, and compounded into notions for the most part either trifling or absurd. In adolescence, ideas increase and grow a little better determined. Experience and observation compare and compound them better. In manhood, the judgment is ripened, the understanding formed, the errors of former states are assumed to be corrected, and the farther progress of science to be more sure. Thus it should be no doubt. But affections and passions multiply, and gather strength, in the whole course of this progress. What is gained one way is lost another: and if real knowledge increases, real error mixes and increases with it. Fancy may not impose, as it did perhaps, but it may incline strongly to error: and authority and custom will do the rest. They will invert the whole order of science. Ignorant ages and ignorant nations will impose on the most knowing: and even in the same age and nation, infancy imposes on adolescence, and adolescence on manhood, till the great round is finished, and the philosopher who began a child ends a child.

LET this be applied principally to knowledge in the first philosophy. Arts of all kinds, and many other sciences, have been improved not so much by building on old, as by laying new foundations; not so much by assuming implicitly principles either antient or modern, as by examining all, and adopting, or rejecting, or inventing without any regard to authority. The very reverse of this proceeding has been practised in matters of the first philosophy: and the professors of it at this hour, in the mature age of philosophy, do little more very often than repeat the babblings of its infancy, and the fallies of its youth. These men are more properly antient philosophers than those whom they call so. They live indeed in the mature age of philosophy. But in this age, whenever metaphysics and theology are concerned, they seem to rush forward into a state of dotage, and affect to hold the language that the first philosophy held in Oriental, Egyptian, and Grecian schools, before she had learned to speak plain,

pretend

T O B



pretend not to consider how their power encroached on that of the state, and became independent on it, nor how their wealth increased to the impoverishment of all other orders. We may guess at the antient by what we know of the modern clergy, and may be allowed to wonder that in those days, as well as in our own, it has been found so hard to discover that, tho' civil government cannot subsist so well without religion, religion may subsist and flourish too without ecclesiastical government. It will be enough for my purpose to observe, to what a degree of wealth and power this order arose in the nations we speak of, and to shew how it propagated error in philosophy, and superstition in religion.

As to the first then, the reverend Magi in Persia had the province of teaching princes how to govern, and of assisting their pupils in government afterwards. It was much the same in Egypt, where the priests had a peculiar right to admonish and to reprove, indirectly at least, the kings. In Ethiopia, this prerogative was carried farther: for there the kings were ordered to die whenever the priests thought fit, till a sacrilegious king, *ERGAMENES*, I think, arose, broke into the sacred college, and put these ghostly tyrants themselves to death. This did not happen neither till the bloody inquisition had been long in possession of this power, if *ERGAMENES* lived about the time of the second *PTOLEMY*. The wealth and the immunities of this order were as exorbitant as the authority and power. We may learn from *DIODORUS* the Sicilian, not only that this order had raised itself to a partnership in the sovereignty, but to an exemption from all impositions and burdens; for the members of it were "*participes imperii---cunctis oneribus immunus*," and they had also one third of the whole property of Egypt. As to their immunities, there is an astonishing instance in the book of *Genesis*. The miserable people



were obliged in a great famine to sell their lands to the king for bread. But the king gave bread to the priests : they eat their fill, and kept their lands.

To speak now of the manner in which, and the reasons for which, this order of men propagated error in philosophy, and superstition in religion, let it be considered, how necessary it was for them to maintain that reputation of sanctity, knowledge, and wisdom, on which this esteem and reverence had been founded. They had provided themselves many supports, in the form and constitution of the Egyptian and other governments ; but they saw at the same time, like able men, how necessary it was to continue in force and vigor, the original principles of the empire they had over the minds of men, on which all the rest depended. The general scheme of their policy therefore seems to have been this. They built their whole system of philosophy on the superstitious opinions and practices that had prevailed in days of the greatest ignorance : and, by consequence, their principal object was false, not real science. Real science would have discovered their fallacies in a multitude of instances : and it would have served their chief purpose effectually in none, if they had left it unsophisticated. Besides, men began to rise, as TULLY expresses himself, “ à necessariis ad elegantiora.” They might therefore have been overtaken by some who were not of their order in real, or have been detected in fantastical science. It was fit therefore, that they should guard against both these accidents : and they did so with much cunning. They multiplied and exaggerated their pretensions to such kinds of knowledge, as every man was conscious to himself that he could not acquire ; and yet as every man was prepared to believe, according to the prejudices of the age, that they had acquired by traditions, derived from ancient sages, or even by divine illuminations, and a correspondence



response several ways carried on with gods and daemons. But still they did not rest their security even on this alone. They had other expedients, and they employed them artfully and successfully. Most of their doctrines were wrapped up in the mysterious veil of allegory. Most of them were propagated in the mysterious cypher of sacred dialects, of sacerdotal letters, and of hieroglyphical characters: and the useful distinction of an outward and inward doctrine was invented, one for the vulgar, and one for the initiated; that is, one for those to whom it was useless, or dangerous to trust their secret, and one for those the ability, credulity, or enthusiasm of whom they had sufficiently tried by a long noviciate. Among the first, allegory passed for a literal relation of facts, and hyperbole was the common stile. Among the last, all was fraud or folly. We see enough of the first in the Old Testament to make both probable. Much in this manner, I think, that the corruption of the first philosophy was established in Egypt and the east, from whence it spread to distant countries and distant ages, after it became a trade in the hands of men, in whom the characters of philosophers and priests were confounded.

It would be tedious and useless to descend into many particulars concerning the various systems of polytheism and idolatry. Let us content ourselves with making some few observations that may point out the propagation of error in natural theology, as it descended from the Egyptians and other nations to the Greeks. To be particular about the rise of it would be ridiculous affectation. It arose long before the men, who appear to us to have been the first teachers of it, existed. PHERECYDES of Syros, who writ in prose, and philosophized out of verse and song the first among the Greeks, was the master of PYTHAGORAS and THALES, who founded the Italic



and Ionic sects, and lived therefore later than the fiftieth olympiad. HOMER and HESIOD lived indeed before the institution of the olympiads, and perhaps much about the same time; tho' TULLY, or CATO \*, places your blind man long before the other.

BUT I am far from thinking, that HOMER meant his Iliad and Odyssey should pass for philosophical poems; tho' it has been the madness of pedants almost from his own age to ours, to extol him and censure him as a philosopher. He meant to flatter his countrymen, by recording the feats of their ancestors, the valor of some, and the prudence of others; and he employed for the machinery of his poem the theology of his age, as TASSO and MILTON have employed that of theirs. Had ARNOBIUS, and much more such a weak philosopher as JUSTIN, or such a warm rhetor as TERTULLIAN, lived in our days, you would have been attacked in your turn, and have been made the father of rosycrusianism, and of all the silly doctrines about sylphs and gnomes; just as reasonably as HOMER has been attacked, by the zeal of Christian writers, for teaching polytheism and idolatry. I believe too, that you would have been as well defended by your commentator, by his interpretations of your allegories, and by his explanations of the hidden sense of the Rape of the Locke, for instance, as HOMER was by those who found out an hidden sense in all his fables, and who judged that he must have been very knowing in natural philosophy, because he mentions sun, wind, rain, and thunder for which you laugh at POLITIAN and others of his learned admirers †.

THEY who have represented HOMER as a great philosopher, have made themselves ridiculous. They who have re-

\* Cic. de Senect.

† Pref. to the Iliad.

presented.



presented him as the great author of polytheism, idolatry, and superstition, have done him wrong. Many antient bards flourished long before him. Who they were, whether the name of ORPHEUS, for instance, was given to different persons, like that of PHARO, and that of ZOROASTER very probably; whether it was derived from a Phoenician or Arabian word that signified knowledge, as VOSSIUS thought; whether no such man as ORPHEUS ever existed, as ARISTOTLE thought; or whether the verses ascribed to him were writ by a certain Cecrops\*, as the Pythagoricians pretended, it matters little. We may reason in this case much as TULLY does about ATLAS, PROMETHEUS, and CEPHEUS †; and we may conclude that the fabulous anecdotes, with which old traditions were crowded about ORPHEUS, to mention the most famous only, and the doctrines he taught, and the mysteries he instituted, prove at least thus much, that Egyptian theology, and many of those superstitions had been imported into Greece long before HOMER lived. We may easily figure to ourselves, with what advantage this theology and these superstitions were introduced among the rude, illiterate, and at that time half-savage Greeks, from a nation as famous as the Egyptian, and by men whether Egyptians, Phoenicians, or Greeks who had been the scholars of priests, prophets, seers, and magicians; of holy men who saw visions, and dreamed dreams, and enjoyed every sort of divine communication in a country, where dynasties of gods had ruled so long. PLATO had the front, in a much more enlightened state of Greece, to publish his own whimsies or those of PYTHAGORAS, in his Timaeus, on the faith of men begotten by gods, and therefore well acquainted with their fathers. Might not these missionary poets, or their masters, pass for such sons of the gods in the dark ages we refer to?

\* De Nat. Deor. l. 1.

† Tuscul. Quaes. l. 5.

Or



Or might not that divine fury, the sure mark of inspiration, be ascribed to them, which was believed to seize the sibyls, and which seized the prophets and sons of the prophets among the Jews, nay even those who happened to fall in their way, as we learn from the bible, that it seized not only SAUL, but even the men he had sent to take DAVID.

WE may believe that HOMER's predecessors went about fingering their spiritual and moral canticles, philosophical rhapsodies, and heroical ballads, as tradition reports that he did after them. What became of their hymns or canticles we know not, whether any were preserved, or when they were lost. But lost they were, which the scattered fragments of his works had been likewise, if they had not fallen by accident into the hands of LYCURGUS, as PLUTARCH, whom you cite for this fact, relates; and if SOLON had not perfected the compilation of them, as DIOGENES LAERTIUS relates, whom I wish you had cited likewise, to shew that the two greatest legislators of Greece published the two first editions of HOMER. In this manner his writings became the sole repertory to later ages of all the theology, philosophy, and history of those which preceded his. All the scriblers of Greece imitated, and pillaged them, and none more than PLATO.

SOLON had studied philosophy in Egypt under the two most celebrated priests of Heliopolis and Sais, and had learned even the Atlantic language, according to the report of PLATO. This consideration might influence the legislator strongly, in favor of a poet who had been skilled in the political, mythological, and every other part of Egyptian knowledge, above three centuries before he went to that school for instruction. But the general reputation of Egyptian wisdom, the beauty of those poems wherein they found, or imagined that they found



found so much of it interperfed, and the lofs perhaps of what their firft poetical reformers had committed to writing, if they writ any thing, might raife the eſteem for HOMER among all the Greek philoſophers, to that exorbitant and even ridiculous height, to which in fact it roſe. As ſoon as the rage of making complete ſyſtems of philoſophy, wherein theology and legiſlative knowledge had always a principal ſhare, began to be the prevailing mode in Greece, every ſyſtem-maker thought it neceſſary to be armed with the authority of HOMER: and they did for this purpoſe, the ſame thing by his writings, that St. JEROM ſays ſomewhere or other was done by the ſacred writings, every one endeavoured to drag them to his ſenſe, even when they were contrary to it. “*Scripturas tra-  
“ here repugnantes.*”

THE poems of HOMER, and the whole Pagan theology, like embroidered or painted curtains, coarſely wrought by ſuperſtition firſt, and afterwards enriched and heightened in their coloring by the imaginations of poets, hid the true ſcene wherein the principles of natural theology are to be found from vulgar ſight, which they amuſed with gaudy and grotesque figures, out of the proportions and forms of nature, divine or human, inſtead of ſhewing this ſcene in that ſimplicity, in which it will appear to every ſober eye. The true ſcene wherein the principles of natural theology are to be found, was ſignified perhaps in that remarkable inſcription on a temple at Sais, which PLUTARCH mentions, however differently that may have been interpreted. “*I am all that has  
“ been, is, and ſhall be, and my veil no mortal has ever yet re-  
“ moved.*” This veil repreſented the works of God, in which and by which alone he is to be diſcovered, as far as he has thought fit to communicate any knowledge of himſelf. Beyond this veil the eye of human reaſon can diſcover nothing. By the  
help



help of these images, we may form a just and clear notion of the different ways by which men run into error, on this important subject : the generality, by neglecting to contemplate God in the works of God : philosophers, by attempting to remove the veil, to contemplate God in his nature and essence, not in his works alone. The vulgar personified, deified, and worshipped the works, without looking up to the worker, as their poets had taught them : the generation of the visible world was to them a generation of invisible gods, for they had taken ideas of power and wisdom, of good and evil, from the phaenomena ; and they personified and deified not only these, but affections, passions, and almost every complex mode that the human mind can frame. When they were in this profuse mood of deification, we cannot wonder if they deified those men from whom they had received great benefits, nor if tutelary heroes became tutelary gods. Some of the philosophers, having been led by a more full and accurate contemplation of nature, to the knowledge of a supreme self-existent Being, of infinite power and wisdom, and the first cause of all things, were not contented with this degree of knowledge. They would explain, they would even analyse the divine nature. They made a system of God's moral as well as physical attributes, by which to account for the proceedings of his providence ; and reasoning thus beyond all their ideas, by a certain agitation and ferment of the mind, they remained in the labyrinths of absurdity they had formed ; acknowledging the existence of this Monad, this Unity, elevated above all essence and all intelligence, and yet neglecting to worship him ; conforming to the practice of idolatry, tho not to the doctrines of polytheism.

BUT how true soever all this may be, and much more to the same effect that might be added, yet the great principle  
that



that maintained all the corruptions of natural religion, was that of priestcraft. Philosophers and priests were the same persons long, as I imagine that bards and philosophers had been before: and when they assumed their distinct characters, the priests were too powerful, and the people too bigotted, to hope for any reformation. An opposition to the grossest superstition, or a disbelief of that rabble of the sky, those gods of different ranks and different employments, those celestial husbands and wives, fathers and children, brothers and sisters, would have passed for atheism; and the best of men would have been reputed atheists, and have been treated accordingly, as SOCRATES was. It was in these countries then, as it is in several countries now. Nothing was too absurd for stupid credulity to receive, nor for artifice, emboldened by success, to impose. Sham miracles were shewn like other false wares, in a proper light, and at a proper distance; and those errors which had contracted the rust of antiquity became, for that reason alone, venerable. In short, the whole scheme of religion was applied then, as it is in many countries, Christian and others, still, to the advantage of those who had the conduct of it. The worship of one God, and the simplicity of natural religion, would not serve their turn. Gods were multiplied, that devotions and all the profitable rites and ceremonies which belong to them, might be so too. The invisible MITHRAS would have been of little value, without the visible, to the magi: and a calf or a cat, nay garlic and onions, were more lucrative divinities in lower Egypt, than KNEPH had ever been in the upper.

BUT farther: it was not the first philosophy alone that was thus corrupted, but every other part of science that could be wrested and misapplied to the same purposes. The priesthood held it, in Egypt and in the other countries from whence the



Greeks derived their knowledge, to be a maxim of ecclesiastical policy, and a wise one it was, to keep every part of science like a monopoly in their own hands, and to be of some real use to mankind, in that manner at least. On this principle, they cultivated arithmetic and geometry. Arithmetic might be of use to them in order to calculate the number of their gods and daemons, or the revenues they enjoyed, which was no easy task: geometry might help them to set out the bounds of their possessions, and serve to other temporal purposes; for they had not yet discovered, as some modern writers have done, how well geometry may be applied to prove the immortality of the soul, and to the solution of other metaphysical and theological problems. But they had still more use for physics and astronomy, to both of which they applied themselves with industry and success, and both of which they made subservient to their great design. "Medicina animi," physics for the soul, was the title of some books of MERCURY, that were carried in the famous procession described by CLEMENT of Alexandria. It may be, that the principles and rules of theurgic magic were laid down in those sacred writings, and that the Egyptian priests pretended to raise themselves and others, by the observation of these rules, to such a communion with the gods, as to employ their divine power and knowledge whenever they were necessary. But the physics conversant about bodily substances only, produced another sort of magic which may be called natural; since it consisted in this, that the effects of causes very natural were ascribed by ignorant people, not indeed always and absolutely, to a supernatural power, but always to a power and knowledge above those of any other men than their magicians; and that a good chemist was deemed, like our friar BACON, a conjurer. Thus again astronomy, which had been cultivated long under the name of astrology, dwindled into that contemptible science.



ence which is at this day so justly distinguished from it. From considering the motions, men grew attentive to the supposed influences of the stars; and that ridiculous scene of fraud opened itself, which continues still to impose in the east, where astrologers, who cannot make an almanac, govern princes and nations, by pretending to read their destinies in the sky.

THE whole system of mythology and Pagan theology was so absurd, that it could not have been introduced into common belief, if it had not begun to be so, like other absurd systems of religion, in times of the darkest ignorance, and among creatures as irrational as Groenlanders, Samojeses, or Hottentots; if after that, error and knowledge growing up together, the former had not outgrown the other, and maintained itself against the improvements of human reason and of knowledge, by the force of habit; and finally, if legislators had not thought it dangerous to cure, and useful to confirm superstition: and yet, after all, much art was necessary to keep it in repute, besides the craft that has been already mentioned, as well as to make it answer the design of legislators.

ALLEGORIES that passed for facts, the fraud of oracles, the impertinence of parables that pretended to some meaning, and of fables that pointed at none, except it was to encourage vice by the example of their gods, composed an outward religion, supported a ridiculous worship, and served to amuse the vulgar; for in divine matters, the marvellous, the improbable, nay the impossible and the unintelligible, make the strongest impressions on vulgar minds. It has been said, that mysteries are designed to exercise our faith, and allegories our understanding; but nothing can be more foolishly said. A mystery, that is, a thing unknown, may exercise our understanding



just as well as our faith, and can in truth exercise neither. We may have faith in an authority we know, but it is faith in this authority, and not properly in the mystery, which makes us acquiesce in it. An allegory may be contrived to puzzle and perplex the understanding, or to hold out nothing to us but itself. In the first case it is impertinent, in the second it is fraudulent, and in both it perverts the sole use it should be employed for, in the didactic, or even in the poetical stile. Such allegories become, at best, and when they have really some meaning, a sort of riddles: they are fit to exercise the sagacity, and to be the intellectual amusement of children alone, and yet they have been the pride of great geni. JOSEPHUS, who was a Jew and a cabalist, admired them much: and he tells a silly story, on the authority of MENANDER of Ephesus, to give them credit, or to raise our ideas of the wisdom of SOLOMON, HIRAM, and ABDEMON. The two first had, it seems, a curious correspondence, in which they proposed riddles to one another, and the Tyrian paid most of the forfeits, till ABDEMON taught him to pose the wisest of men. PLATO\*, who disgraced philosophy as much as HOMER elevated poetry by the use of allegory, declared that this poet, whom he banished in another mood out of his commonwealth, should not be read by any who were not initiated in wisdom; that is, who were not able to draw an hidden sense out of his writings; that is, who were not able to make their own inventions pass for the signification of his fables, and the interpretation of his allegories. Allegory, in the true intention of it, is designed to make clearer as well as stronger impressions on the mind; and, therefore, as they who pretend to foretel future events should be suspected of imposture, when they deliver their predictions, like those who governed the oracles of the heathen world, in obscure and equivocal terms, that may be applied afterwards, as they often

\* In ALCIB.

were,



were, to different and even contrary events; so they, who pretend to teach divine truths in allegorical, symbolical, or any mysterious language, deserve to be suspected of imposture likewise. There may be good reasons for concealing, there can never be any such for disguising, which is a degree of falsifying truth. If men reasoned a little better than they do commonly, and were a little less blinded by prejudices, they would not be such bubbles as to receive on one authority what comes to them really on another. The obscure prophecy, and the abstruse doctrine, when one is interpreted, and the other explained, are not so properly the prophecy of the prophet, nor the doctrine of the doctor, as they are such of the persons who apply the prophecy to some particular event, and determine the doctrine to some particular sense, neither of which was possibly intended by them.

RAPIN says, in his comparison of PLATO and ARISTOTLE, that the symbolical theology of the Egyptians seemed to them the most respectful manner of treating divine subjects; and he quotes JAMBLICUS for this observation, that they thought themselves obliged to imitate nature on these occasions, who hides the perfections of the mind under the outward veil of the body. Now the first of these excuses will appear ridiculous enough, if we refer it only to the opinions of men. But if we refer it to any divine revelation, it is still more egregiously absurd. The last is an allegorical excuse for allegory, worthy of JAMBLICUS, and little worthy of a remark. But the jesuit gives, in the same paragraph, the true and universal reason, so universal and so true, that I wonder at him for giving it, of all figurative theology. "The priests, he says, who had the keeping of these mysteries, authorized this method to support their credit, and to draw veneration to themselves by the respect for those holy things which they hid  
" from



“ from the eyes of the people, that they might not be prophaned.”

I CANNOT let this subject go, without taking notice of what my lord BACON says upon it, in the preface to his treatise, which he calls “ de sapientiâ,” and might have called more properly “ de futilitate sive de infania veterum.” In that, he makes parables and allegories so essential to religion, that he affirms, that to take them away is to forbid almost all commerce of things divine and human \*. Whatever reasons this great author had to make such a declaration, it was rashly made. The expression is allegorical, but the meaning of it is obvious; and therefore I say, that as far as man is concerned in carrying this commerce on, we are justified in suspecting it of enthusiasm or fraud; since allegory has been always a principal instrument of theological deception. The chancellor admits, that it serves to involve and conceal, “ ad involucrum et velum,” which is in direct contradiction to its proper use, for that is to enlighten and illustrate, “ ad lumen et illustrationem.” He chose to say nothing of the former, rather than to be engaged in disputes, “ potius quam lites suscipiamus,” and we may add, rather than offend the clergy. For me, who think it much better not to write at all, than to write under any restraint from delivering the whole truth of things as it appears to me; who should think so, if I was able to write and go to the bottom of every subject as well as he; and who have no cavils nor invectives to fear, when I confine the communication of my thoughts to you and a very few friends, as I do in writing these essays; I shall repeat what I have said already, that the philosopher or divine, who pretends to instruct others by allegorical expressions without an immediate, direct, and intelligible application of

\* ——— cum ejusmodi velis et umbris religio gaudeat, ut qui eas tollat, commercia divinorum et humanorum ferè interdicat.

the



the allegory to some proposition or other, has nothing in his thoughts but the supposed allegory, and is mad enough to deceive himself, or knave enough to attempt to impose on those he pretends to instruct. If he has any thing there which he distrusts, and dares not venture to expose naked and stripped of allegory to the undazzled eye of reason, it is too much even to insinuate in such a case, and especially on subjects of the first philosophy. We may compare such theology as this to those artificial beauties, who hide their defects under dress and paint: "*pars minima est ipsa puella sui.*"

If we suppose the Supreme Being concerned in this commerce, as it is called, we suppose what is very prophane and audacious. I apply my lord BACON's words, "*prophanum quiddam sonat et audax.*" Can any thing be more so, than a supposition that the God of truth communicates with men by a wretched human expedient, contrived by them to deceive one another, or to help their imperfect faculties in the conception of things, and in the expression of their conceptions? TULLY \* entertained, in this very respect, much more worthy notions of the divine nature. He argues against the vanity of divination by dreams, in answer to his brother, on this principle. If they come from the gods, they are sent for the sake of man: and if they are sent for the sake of man, we ought to believe that all such advertisements must be intelligible to man †. Obscure dreams therefore cannot be such advertisements. They would be repugnant to the majesty of the gods §. When God speaks to his creature, it will be always in terms plain and precise. "*Hoc ne feceris. Hoc facito.*" Thou shalt have none other gods but me. Thou shalt love thy neighbour as

\* De Divin. l. 2.

† Intelligi à nobis dii velle debebant ea, quae nostra nos monebant. Ibid.

§ Obscura somnia minimè consentanea sunt majestati deorum. Ibid.

thyself.



thyself. The Stoics thought to evade this objection against divination by dreams, when they set up their sage, that ideal being, for the sole diviner \*. But TULLY laughed at all these pretensions to a supernatural virtue and knowledge, which CHRYSIPPUS made necessary to divination. He affirmed he knew no person who had them, and concluded from thence, that, if he should allow divination, there would be no one found to divine †. Thus may we laugh too, and affirm on long experience, that, if we allowed theological allegory to come from God with all the pretended types, symbols, and signs, there would be no one found to interpret it, so as to fix the sense of it indisputably: and yet, if the sense be not indisputably fixed, human imposture may pass for divine revelation, and the word of man for the word of God.

If I would enter into such a detail, in this place, it would be easy to collect almost innumerable examples out of Jewish and Christian writers, to excuse the laugh, and to justify the affirmation. But instead of that, I shall content myself with giving one or two instances, that occur to my memory, of the use that was made of interpretations of allegory in the Pagan theology.

STROBŒUS has preserved a passage of PORPHYRY, which shews that the Pythagoricians labored to discover the hidden sense of HOMER, who had spoke more darkly about gods and daemons than any of the antients, in order to confirm or improve their own theology by his: and he quotes one of these philosophers, PYTHAGOREUS CHRONIUS, who seemed to

\* ——— Stoici autem tui negant quemquam, nisi sapientem, divinum esse posse. Cic. de Divin. l. 2.

† ——— Vide igitur, ne, etiamsi divinationem tibi esse concessero --- neminem tamen divinum reperire possimus. Ibid.

make



make the poet's doctrine conformable to his own, rather than to make his own conformable to the poet's\*. But the Stoics were remarkable above all others for putting HOMER and the rest of the poets to this use. HESIOD was put to the same use, and his fables and allegories served to the same impertinent purpose as those of HOMER did. His poem was to some, what he professes at the entrance of it that he intended it should be, a theological rhapsody concerning the generations of gods. It was to others a mere physical allegory concerning the formation of the visible world; and accordingly we find that VELLEIUS accuses ZENO, in the first book of the nature of the gods, of misinterpreting HESIOD by attributing the names of JUPITER, of JUNO and VESTA to inanimate beings alone. VARRO, it is said, did the same: and thus the poem became to some a theogonia, and to others a cosmogonia. Another instance of the success philosophers had in their interpretations of allegories and fables, and of their end in making these interpretations, follows that which has been quoted: for after speaking of what CHRYSIPPUS had writ in his first book of the nature of the gods, CICERO's interlocutor adds, that this philosopher endeavoured, in the second, to accommodate the fables of ORPHEUS, MUSAEUS, HESIOD and HOMER to what he had advanced, "ut etiam veterrimi poetæ, qui hæc ne suspicati quidem sint, Stoici fuisse videantur." That the most antient poets, who had not even a suspicion that there were any such doctrines, might seem to have been Stoicians. Such examples as these are so far apposite, that they serve to shew how ill fitted allegory is to preserve the true sense of any doctrine, and that an allegorical system is easily made a nose of wax, to be turned any way that the interpreters of it please.

\* Nec tam se ad poetæ opiniones, quàm poetam ad suas accommodare nititur.



WHILST paganifm was thus muffled up in allegory to amufe the vulgar, and to maintain and propagate fuperftition, another art, in fome degré the reverfe of this, was employed to promote the true ends of natural religion, and the more effectual reformation of the manners of men. The art I mean is that which instituted rites and ceremonies to be performed, and doctrines to which they were relative to be taught in fecret. Antient writers, Pagans and Christians, fpeak much of thefe myfteries, for fuch they were called: the former with veneration, the latter often with an abhorrence, that little became thofe who imitated them in fo many instances, and who fuffered their own myfterious rites to run eafily into the very fame abufes, into which the others degenerated late. To attempt a minute and circumftantial account of thefe myfteries, and even to feem to give it, would require much greater knowledge of antiquity than I pretend to have, or would take the trouble of acquiring. They who attempt it have been, and always will be, ridiculously and vainly employed, whilft they treat this fubject as if they had affifted at the celebration of thefe myfteries, or had at leaft been drivers of the afs who carried the machines and implements that ferved in the celebration of them. They write dogmatically about things which could not be known authentically, nor in a detail of particulars, at the time they were in practice. *DIAGORAS*, the Melian, was proſcribed at \* Athens for revealing, or pretending to reveal them: and the poet *AESCHYLUS* † had like to have been maſſacred on a bare fufpicion that the people took at a representation of one of his plays, of ſomething which alluded to them. In a word, thefe rites were kept ſecret under the fevereſt penalties above two thouſand years ago. How can we hope to have them revealed to us now, by the help of tradition, or hiſtory, wherein we find the relations of other

\* *SUIDAS*.† *CLEM. ALEX. Strom. l. 2.*

things



things which were of public notoriety much later so imperfect and dubious? I pretend, therefore, to nothing more than the mention of a few general notions concerning these mysteries, which seem probable to me: whatever weight you lay upon them, about which I am not over solicitous, they will be sufficient for my present purpose and for your information. They will serve to shew, how men came nearer and nearer to the knowledge of the true God, and a more rational worship.

THE theology and the mythology of the heathen world were no doubt vastly increased by poets, who indulged their imaginations without any other view perhaps than the ornament of their works, and by philosophers, who having, like PLATO, more imagination than knowledge, endeavoured to conceal their ignorance under the veil of allegorical physics and chimerical metaphysics. Thus gods and daemons and other hypothetical beings were multiplied. Festivals and public devotions multiplied with them. Superstition spread, and external religion, which was made up of nothing else, flourished. But they who instituted religion, for the sake of government, saw that such religion as this would not be sufficient alone to answer their end, nor enforce effectually the obligations of public and private morality. It looked no farther than the present system of things, and in this they observed no settled distinction made by their gods between the religious and the irreligious, the best and the worst of men. It was not sufficient, they thought therefore, either to justify the providence of the gods, or to determine the conduct of men. The imaginary unjust distribution of good and evil, had been at all times a great stumbling block to theistical philosophers: and we see accordingly that hypotheses, contrived to solve the difficulty, had obtained in an antiquity beyond our oldest traditions. Such was that of the good and evil principle. Such was that of a future state



of rewards and punishments, and of a metempsychosis. Now what they had put to a philosophical, they put to a political use: and the last of these was at least one principal, and I suppose the principal, doctrine taught in the mysteries that they instituted.

THE mysteries of ISIS and those of MITHRAS seem to have been the most antient: and the former were those which INACHUS and ORPHEUS carried into Greece. What they were in their original institution, how they were propagated in several countries under the invocation, to use an expression of your church, of different divinities, what alterations from one to another they received, or how those of Eleusis came to be more universal and more revered than the rest, I am unable to tell, and you I believe not much concerned to know. But if you ask me how they came to be called mysteries, tho' their principal doctrine, the doctrine of a future state, was publicly known, as I think it was, my answer is ready. This doctrine, altho' known, and the solemn rites that belonged to it were mysteries among the Pagans, just as the doctrines and rites of baptism and the Lord's supper were mysteries in the first ages of the christian church. A general and confused notion of them transpired. But neither these doctrines, nor the mystical rites and ceremonies, were explained even to the catechumens, and much less to others. Nay the whole inward doctrine of the eucharisty was not opened to all those who received it, to those whom St. AUSTIN calls "tardiores:" and the reason he gives for this reserve, is, that they might not despise what they saw, "ne contemnunt quod vident." He thought, it seems, that no explanation would prevent this so effectually as an air of mystery maintained by the figurative and aenigmatical terms, in which the fathers affected to speak on all such subjects to the public. This precaution was carried so far, that  
a cur-



a curtain was drawn to hide the altar and the priest from the sight of the congregation, when he was about to consecrate, as I remember to have read in some of your writers. Several ages passed, before the pastors of the church thought it safe to let the people know, that a few genuflections, a few signs of the cross, a few thumps on the breast, and the muttering of a few words, were sufficient to draw God down from heaven, and to transubstantiate bread and wine into his flesh and blood.

THIS air of mystery produced not only the negative good that has been mentioned, it produced likewise a positive good of much consequence. The christian fathers found it necessary, on one hand, to admit converts thro several stages of preparation into the church, and, on the other, to keep up the fervor of these candidates for regeneration, and the consequence of it, salvation. The expedient of mystery answered both purposes. It kept them out of the whole secret, as long as that was necessary: and it excited in the mean time their curiosity, and holy impatience, to be in it. St. AUSTIN, who mentions the first, mentions the second purpose. He speaks, in one of his epistles, of the public prayers made to God, that he would inspire the catechumens with a desire of regeneration; " Ut eis desiderium regenerationis inspiraret:" and in another part of his works, he avows the human means that were employed for a very human reason, a reason drawn from the weakness of the human mind. He says, that altho the catechumens could have boren a communication of the sacraments to them, this was not done however, that the more honorably these sacraments were hid, the more earnestly this communication might be desired by them. " Etsi catechumenis sacramenta fidelium non produntur; non ideo fit, quod ea ferre non possunt; sed ut ab eis tanto ardentius concupiscantur, quanto honorabilius occultantur."

OTHER



OTHER authorities might be cited, and other instances produced, if they were necessary ; for this was the general policy of the christian church. But there is no need of any authority to confirm that of St. AUSTIN, in such a case as this : and the two instances I have brought are sufficient to shew, for what reasons mystery was established in the heathen devotions, by shewing those for which it was introduced and maintained in the christian devotions. The latter, in this respect, were copies of the former : and these copies, which we have in our hands, enable us to judge of the originals, which we have not.

THE Christians, the primitive Christians themselves, could not revere their sacred mysteries more than the Pagans did theirs. They could not prepare for them, nor assist at them, with greater attention of mind, with greater purity of heart, nor with greater reverence and awe, than the Pagans prepared for and assisted at theirs. The Pagans confessed their crimes : and they went thro public and private purgations, which we may call penitences, long before they could be admitted to initiation. Such, for instance, as abstinence from women and from several sorts of food, with different austerities that are mentioned by PORPHYRY, and that writer of Milesian tales, APULEIUS ; after which the public proclamation “ *procul ite profani,*” and the private examination of every one who presented himself, “ *an purus ades ?*” followed constantly. No man, who was noted for crimes, durst be a candidate for initiation : and NERO, as much an emperor and a tyrant as he was, durst not present himself as such, after he had killed his mother. We find the dispositions, and the manner, in which they were required to assist at these mysterious rites and ceremonies, described in terms that might edify the most pious and orthodox



dox ears. Let me quote the first that occurs to me, tho it is not the strongest that might be produced with the pains of a little search. The passage is in that oration, which TULLY made on the occasion of some answers given by the haruspices, whom the senate had consulted. In that oration, speaking of those mysteries which CLODIUS had polluted, and exaggerating the crime, he takes notice that they were such as forbid, not only curious, but even wandering eyes, and excluded not only the wicked, but the imprudent. “ Non solum curiosos oculos excludit, sed etiam errantes—quò non modò  
 “ improbitas, sed ne imprudentia quidem, possit intrare.” Such was the general character, such the particular behavior, required of the persons initiated into these sacred mysteries: and the excitements to the observation of all that was thus required, could not be greater; since they are summed up by TULLY, who had been initiated himself, in this, that the initiated learned how to live with joy and to die with better hopes; “ cum lætitia vivendi rationem, et cum spe meliore moriendi.\* They were raised “ ad præsentiam et participationem deorum,” says JAMBLICUS, a blessing which the Egyptians first enjoyed according to him. Their souls were purged and purified, till they became such as they had been in their original state, and before their descent into the prison of the body. When they left the body, they took their flight at once to the islands of the blessed, nay they became gods, or like to gods, according to some seraphic doctors of platonician divinity; whilst those of the prophane, unpurged, unpurified, and clogged by the gross affections of the body, stuck in dirt and wallowed in mire †.

\* Cic. de Leg. l. 2.

† In coeno et luto volitari. DIOC. LAERT.



## SECTION IV.

It is easy to conceive, by this short account of the heathen mysteries, how well this inward religion, for such I may call it in contradistinction to vulgar paganism, was calculated to form some particular men to virtue and piety, and to promote by consequence so far the good of society, which was the great end of the first legislators, by means more reasonable than those of vulgar religion. The celebration of these mysteries lasted several days, and returned often enough, to afford frequent opportunities of initiation to those of both sexes who were desirous of it, as well as of confirmation and improvement to those who had been already initiated. Lessons of morality were thus frequently renewed, habits of piety were solemnly maintained, and to enforce them all, that great sanction, which consists in the rewards and punishments of another life, and which had been added very wisely to the law of nature by human institution, and in belief at least, if not originally and by divine institution, was inculcated so, that every man must apply it to himself, and the impression be lasting.

It may be said perhaps that no reformation of manners, no degree of virtue and piety, beyond those which vulgar paganism was sufficient to procure, can be justly ascribed to these institutions; whereas they maintained much, at least, of the same rank polytheism in belief, and the same rank idolatry in practice. If this be said, the objection will be easily answered, as far as it relates to the effect they had, by running a parallel, as I shall do in another essay, between pagan and christian reformation of manners; for if it appears, as I think it will, that the latter has in this respect on the whole no advantage  
to



to boast above the former, some reformation must be allowed to have been wrought by the pagan system of religion; after which there can remain no dispute whether this reformation was owing to the inward and hidden, rather than to the outward and public, part of this system.

BUT I consider here the theology and religion of the heathen with regard to their nature, not to their effects, and I shall proceed therefore to observe, that by the mysteries hitherto spoken of, I mean only such as are called the lesser, and as seem to have been preparatory to the greater, which remain to be spoken of. There were certain stages thro which men were admitted by slow steps into the whole mystery of christianity. So they were admitted likewise into that of heathenism. The first legislators contented themselves to establish a vulgar religion, in compliance with the ignorance and superstition of the savage vulgar. But they prepared, at the same time, the means of supplying its defects, and of leading men little by little, and by such a progression as their different talents and characters rendered them capable of making, to a better knowledge of natural theology and natural religion, from fiction to truth, from allegory to that which allegory was intended to signify. There was a state of purgation, a state of initiation, and a state of consummation. The two first were, I believe, those of the lesser, and the last that of the greater mysteries.

HE who has been curious to examine the religious notions of rude, ignorant, and half stupid people, in the pale of the christian church as well as out of it, will not be apt to wonder that there were many in the heathen world who remained contented with the vulgar religion, and little curious about the mysteries; nor that they were led rather by example than by

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reflection



reflection to initiation, when it became almost as general among them as baptism is among us, and to the belief of a future state. Now such as these might have been revolted against the mysteries, if they had found the gods they were accustomed to adore wholly degraded in them. These gods therefore were to keep their places in some sort, "suus cuique honos;" tho many fabulous stories about them were exploded, or else were represented as allegories not facts, and explained in a better sense. The doctrine too of a future state of rewards and punishments, would have made less impression on such minds, perhaps, if it had not been taught to the eyes, as well as to the ears, by solemn ceremonies and pompous shews. Ceremonies, therefore, and shews seem to have been instituted, and to have been made parts of these mysteries. But then there were other persons, and the number of these increased as philosophy came to be more and more cultivated, who could not bear to have the absurdities of polytheism, however mitigated, imposed upon them in any sort, nor think it religion to worship men who had been made gods by poetical licence, with all their vices about them. They could not assist at the ridiculous rites of idolatry, nor be spectators of all the puppet shews of devotion, without being provoked to laughter or to indignation.

I CAN easily believe, that the foolish creeds, and the burlesque rites of paganism were rendered, in the preparatory mysteries, a little less shocking to the common sense of those in whom knowledge began to get the better of prejudice. But this reformation and improvement could not be carried far at once. Allegory served to disguise ignorance, and to muffle up even knowledge in mystery among the vulgar. To cure this abuse, to take off these masks, and to lay allegory aside whenever it did not serve to illustrate truth, and to improve or facilitate know-



knowledge, required time: and men, who had been bred in darknes, were to be accustomed to the light by degrees. This, I imagine, that the mysteries did, and were contrived to do. If too much light had been let in at once upon the initiated, they would have been dazzled and hurt by it. Rather than suffer the grossest objects of their superstition to be suddenly removed, these idiots might have clung to them the more closely: just as we have seen in France, that popular tumults have arisen when some bishops have attempted to take away images, and to forbid devotions, in which the common people had been too long indulged, by the connivance or by the fraud of their pastors. On the other hand, the reformation of vulgar religion, which was wrought by the lesser mysteries, was too little certainly for those who were able to frame true notions of a Supreme Being, and of the worship due to him from his creatures. Thus it became necessary to make a sort of political composition with error: it became necessary for the institutors of religions to separate the few from the many, and to carry the first on alone from initiation to consummation, from the lesser to the greater mysteries. There are good, and, I think, sufficient grounds to be persuaded, that the whole system of polytheism was unravelled in the greater mysteries, or that no more of it was retained than what might be rendered consistent with monotheism, with the belief of one supreme self-existent Being. Now on the principles on which this was done, some of the established ceremonies of vulgar religion might seem quite innocent, and others might be tolerated. Some indulgence, and even a kind of occasional conformity to them, could not be safely refused, in countries where such superstitions had long prevailed; where they were incorporated into the very frame of government, and where powerful bodies of men had a particular interest in the support of them.



## S E C T I O N   V .

SINCE I have mentioned the compatibility of some remains of the grossest polytheism with monotheism, and the principles on which the few might conform to the many, at least in the exteriors of religion; it is necessary that I should explain my self on these heads, which contain the sum of theology or the first philosophy, as it was understood by the most intelligent of the heathen, even in those countries where idolatry seemed to triumph the most.

It cannot be proved, without the help of the old testament, nor very well with it, as I have hinted above, that the unity of God was the primitive belief of mankind: neither does it appear to my apprehension, that in fact it could be so, according to all the rules of judging that may be drawn from reason and analogy. But yet I think it sufficiently evident, from reason and analogy both, that this first and great principle of natural theology could not fail to be discovered, as soon as some men began to contemplate themselves and all the objects that surrounded them, and to push their philosophical researches up from causes that must be the effects of other causes to a first, intelligent, self-existent cause of all things. Accordingly, we find that this discovery had been made in Egypt, and all the eastern nations that were famous for learning and knowledge, long before the dates of our most antient memorials: whereas the same discovery does not appear to have been made by those people, whom we are able to view in these memorials, before they emerged out of ignorance into the light of knowledge and philosophical truth.



IF I would descend into particular proofs, to confirm by the testimony of antient writers, what I advance on a probability that reason and analogy will support, I should not be at a loss to furnish them. But I consider, that the work is done to my hands, in a much better manner than I should be able to do it, and that it would be ridiculous to display my little pedlar's shop of learning before you, when so immense a storehouse of it lies open in the true intellectual system of the universe. There you will find a full and superabundant collection of proofs that demonstrate, beyond a possibility of doubting, the unity of God to have been acknowledged by the most antient of the idolatrous nations; tho they may not demonstrate, as I think they do not, that this was the primitive faith of mankind: because we see that the things of this world are in a perpetual rotation, and because in several countries, at several periods, men may have gone from idolatry to true religion, and have fallen from this back again into idolatry, as we know that divers nations have gone from barbarity to politeness, and then have finished the round, and have returned from politeness to barbarity. EUSEBIUS, and a multitude of other writers after him, would have us believe, that it was the particular prerogative of God's chosen people to be in possession of this knowledge, tho the contrary may be proved, even from his own writings, as well as by the confession of saint AUSTIN, and of other fathers of the church: and JOSEPHUS \* asserts, that ABRAHAM was the first who dared to say, that there is but one God. ABRAHAM seems, according to this historian, to have derived his knowledge of the one true God from philosophical observation and meditation, before he became so well acquainted with the Supreme Being as he was afterwards, when God entered into a covenant with him. He could not derive it by tradition from his ancestors; since JOSE-

\* Ant. Jud. l. 1. c. 7.

PHUS



PHUS and PHILO, and many of the rabbins, affirm, that the father of the faithful was bred an idolater. Shall we think it strange now, that other men should discover, by their meditations on the works of God, what ABRAHAM discovered? Has this fundamental article then of all true theology, so little proportion to our clear and best determined ideas? Or is it so repugnant to all the phaenomena of nature? Much otherwise. It is so well proportioned to one, and so agreeable to both, that we should be justly surprized to observe the affectation of restraining this knowledge to the patriarchs and their descendants, if it was not as easy as it is to discern that the Jews meant to do greater honor to their nation, and to reflect greater authority on their revelations, and that the Christians thought it proper to maintain this groundless assertion, in order to shew the preparation for, as well as the necessity of, a new revelation to the Jews and Gentiles both.

BUT let us not be deceived, by the vanity of one, nor by the artifice of the other. God never left himself without a witness, which witness is the whole system of his works; tho human reason must be cultivated to discover this, as well as other truths, and tho it has not been therefore discovered alike by all people, and at all times. All truth requires some search, and many are to be acquired by labor. But there is no one that requires less labor than this, as there is no one that deserves or rewards our search so well. Thus I think, and in thinking thus I adore the goodness of the Supreme Being. Bishop WILKINS \* says, in his principles of natural religion, that “ the things which distinguish human nature from all other things are the chief principles and foundations of religion, namely, the apprehension of a deity, and an expectation of a future state after this life, which no other creature below man doth par-

\* L. 2. c. 1.

“ take



“ take of---it is not reason in the general, which is the  
 “ form of human nature, because there are some degrees of  
 “ ratiocination discernible in the brute creation, and such a  
 “ natural sagacity as at least bears a near resemblance to rea-  
 “ son.” Thus the good bishop makes the difference between  
 reason in man and in other animals very rightly to consist in  
 the degree, not in the kind, without perceiving how far this  
 concession of an apparent truth would carry him in the dispute  
 about souls, and material and immaterial spirits. But even in  
 the case before us it will not serve his purpose, nor evince that  
 reason, as it is determined to actions of religion, is the parti-  
 cular form of human nature. It will prove at most that some  
 men have, and that no other species of animals has in general,  
 nor in particular instances, the faculty we call reason in such a  
 degree, as to render them capable of discovering the existence of  
 the Supreme Being, and the duties of natural religion. I said  
 some men, because even among the creatures that are all com-  
 monly, but perhaps erroneously, comprehended in this species  
 on account of their outward form, there are stupid savages, of  
 whom it seems lawful to doubt, whether they are able to make  
 greater discoveries concerning God and religion, than the half  
 reasoning elephant. Upon the whole matter, they who suppose  
 all men incapable to attain a full knowledge of natural theo-  
 logy and religion without revelation, take from us the very es-  
 sence and form of man, according to the bishop, and deny that  
 any of us have that degree of reason, which is necessary to di-  
 stinguish our species, and sufficient to lead us to the unity of a  
 first intelligent cause of all things.

Now since the unity of God might be known by a due use  
 of human reason, and since it was actually known to the anti-  
 ent legislators, who established the mysteries spoken of for  
 the support of religion, and religion for the support of govern-  
 ment,



ment, it cannot seem marvellous, that this doctrine was taught in the celebration of the greater mysteries. The marvel would be, if it had not been taught in them. But then there is as little room to wonder, that the same men should establish the belief of a divine monarchy, as they did establish it. By degrading the pagan gods, they destroyed the aristocracy of heaven: and by reasoning from human ideas of order, they ran of course into an hypothesis, which has been adopted in some manner or other by the jewish, the christian, the mahometan, and every other system of theology. They supposed that the making and governing the world required the ministration of a multitude of inferior beings, beings not eternal, but produced in time by emanation, or by some other inconceivable manner of generation, concerning all which there has been more absurdity propagated by Pagans and Christians, whether heretics or orthodox, than all the bedlams of the world can match. When they reasoned *à posteriori*, from the works to the existence of one God, they reasoned well, and they arrived at truth. But when they reasoned in the same manner from oeconomical and political institutions of human wisdom, they reasoned ill, and fell into error. This error however was pious error: and pious error is more excusable than pious fraud. They dared not presume to suppose the supreme incomprehensible and ineffable Being employed constantly, nor at all immediately, about human affairs, and yet they thought divine providence necessary in the general conduct of these, as they discerned plainly that it was necessary to preserve and rule the great machine of the universe. Much less dared they suppose this Being to be the tutelary local divinity of any one people, and much less still to be an earthly king in the literal acceptance of the word. They were not enough familiarized with the belief of divine revelations, to frame such conceptions as these.

SOME



SOME of their philosophers, indeed, refined so sublimely their speculations about the Supreme Being, that they grew quite unintelligible. God was, in their conceit, above all essence, tho existent, above all intelligence, tho intelligent. He was in all things :

“ JUPITER est quodcunque vides, quocunque moveris.”

He pervaded, he animated the whole world, and like the soul gave life and motion to all the parts of it. In him they lived, and moved, and had their being. Some of these men therefore, whilst they seemed to worship the parts of this visible corporeal system, might really worship the invisible God alone, in the various manifestations of his wisdom, energy and power. I say some of them; because it must be confessed, that some, even of those who had been consummated by admission into the greatest mysteries, were not entirely orthodox on this head. They adopted notions more intelligible, and less unworthy of the deity than many that have been mentioned, but such however as had too near an analogy to man and to the affairs of mankind. They imagined a divine monarchy on a human plan, the administration of which was not carried on by the immediate agency of God himself, but mediately, as in terrestrial monarchies, by that of inferior agents, according to the ranks and the provinces allotted to them. Such were the celestial gods, the sun, the moon, the stars, or the spirits more properly who inhabited and presided in them, who directed their motions, and maintained their influences. Such again, but in a lower order, were the aethereal and aërial daemons, the genii and the lares, who dwelled below the moon, and had little else in charge but what related to man, and even to particular men. Such again were heroes and public benefactors, who might well be admitted into the celestial hierarchy; for

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by the very doctrine of the mysteries, private devotions, and the exercise of private virtues could render men like to gods here, and gods hereafter.

SINCE greater purity of manners, and a more internal devotion were required of the initiated than of the vulgar, it is but reasonable to conclude, that in the mysteries the gods were reformed as well as their worshippers, that JUPITER was no longer the whore-master he had been represented, nor MERCURY the pimp, nor VENUS the common strumpet, and so on. But still it must be confessed, that those fictitious divinities, which superstition and poetry had invented, which the lesser mysteries had preserved, and which the greater had tolerated, were alike numerous and ridiculous, as well as the rites and ceremonies instituted in honor of them, and practised even by those who were consummated in the greater mysteries. Thus in the eleusinian orgia, for instance, not to quote those of BACCHUS, the most extravagant and the soonest corrupted of any, the wanderings of CERES in search of her daughter were dramatically represented: and the initiated ran about like frantic people with lighted torches in their hands.

IF this apparent idolatry moves your indignation, call to mind the distinction of a worship of Latria and a worship of Dulia. They, who acknowledged but one God, could pay the first to that God alone: they could not be idolaters. They might honor the other divinities, as your church honors her saints, by the second. If this ridiculous worship moves your laughter, have a care: it was in those days just as it is in ours, and in paganism just as it is in christianity. The intelligent pagans, who were consummated in the mysteries, could explain away, no doubt, some of the apparent absurdities of these rites, and give good prudential reasons for their compliance with others.



others. CELSUS had boasted that he was fully acquainted with the christian religion, and on that supposed acquaintance had presumed to censure it. ORIGEN, as I find him quoted by CUDWORTH, shews CELSUS that it was not less impertinent in him to pretend to be well informed of christian theology, than it would be in a stranger who sojourned in Egypt to pretend to be well informed of the Egyptian theology, tho he had not been instructed in the mysteries of it by the priests who were alone able to instruct him. ORIGEN adds, that not only among the Egyptians, but among all other nations, who had besides their religious fables a secret doctrine, the religious rites were performed rationally by ingenious persons, whilst the superficial vulgar looked no further in the observation of them than the external symbol or ceremony. This was a full answer to CELSUS: and so far ORIGEN makes the case of paganism and christianity the same.

Now if they were the same in his time, sure I am they are the same in this respect in ours: and that you may see this the more clearly, and learn not to pass too rash a censure on the poor pagans, let us feign for a moment that ABAMMON, or any other heathen priest you please, is risen from the dead. He is curious in the first place to visit Egypt and the East; but he finds them subdued by ignorant and barbarous people, and no traces left of their antient civility, policy, and erudition. The countries devastated, the cities laid in ruins, and none of the colleges of the learned to be found. He hastens away to the West; for he is told that in those regions that border on the Atlantic sea arts and sciences have revived, and philosophy has fixed her throne. As he advances thither, he finds some faint resemblance of the plenty and of the magnificence of antient Egypt. Stately temples strike his eye, and excite his curiosity the most. He observes that one is dedicated to the Trinity. He takes



this to be some triad into which TYPHO had mangled the deity, and he laments that ISIS had not joined the parts again together; for he cannot be supposed to know what the Nicean council has decreed for this purpose. He observes, that another is dedicated to the mother of God, and imagines that CYBELE may be adored in it. Others he observes in great number, and all distinguished by some particular invocation. Whilst he is thus employed, a procession comes by. ABAMMON sees with pleasure the priests of ISIS attend it in their white garments, and with their heads shaved according to the Egyptian rite; but he is at a loss to guess what a cross of wood, which is carried before them, can mean. He remembers, that malefactors were executed in some countries on such an instrument of cruelty; and therefore his surprize increases when he is told that the son of God suffered on it to satisfy divine justice, and to expiate the sins of mankind. This calls to his mind perhaps the human sacrifices that were so long in use among the Phoenicians and other nations. But he is still in doubt; for among them men were sacrificed to appease the gods, and here a god is the victim. He follows the procession into one of the temples. The service begins; he gets as near the altar as he can. He sees no preparations for any sacrifice, but observes that the priest holds something white and round in his hand. He asks what it is, and is told that it is a wafer. He observes him pour some liquor into a cup. He asks, and is told that it is wine. A moment after the priest having held up this wafer and this cup successively over his head, the people prostrate themselves in acts of adoration. They bid him do the same; for they assure him that the wafer is become the body, and the wine the blood, of God. The service over, he has time to survey the church. He sees altars on every side, and pictures or statues over all. He sees tapers and lamps burning even by day. The pictures and statues he concludes to be the  
gods



gods of this people, and the tapers and lamps to have been lighted at some sacred fire, at that perhaps which ZOROASTER brought from heaven. He stares at an old man with a long beard, looking out of the clouds at a young man tied to a stake and whipped, and at a white pigeon hovering in the midst of the picture. As he proceeds on his journey of curiosity, he sees in another temple the same old man talking to a beautiful virgin, the virgin seeming to receive orders from him, and thrusting a little child head foremost into a mill, four monstrous beasts, such as Africa never produced, assisting twelve venerable persons to turn the mill, before which an arch-priest, with a tripple crown on his head, and a golden cup in his hand, is represented kneeling. The arch-priest receives wafers that fall from the mill into the cup. He gives them to a man who wears a red cap; the man of the red cap gives them to one who wears a broad pointed cap; he of the broad pointed cap gives them to one who wears a square black cap; and he of the square black cap doles them about to the people. ABAMMON observes over the door of the same temple an animal that has four heads, the head of a man, the head of an ox, the head of an eagle, and the head of a lion. He observes an ass, to whom peculiar respect seems to be paid, and whole flocks of sheep and whole droves of cattle. These he takes for symbols; and they have so plain an allusion to those of Egypt, when Egypt was the mistress of symbolical theology, that ABAMMON would be ready to carry himself back to his own age and country in imagination, if the herds of swine, that have their place too in this sacred painting, did not give him a good deal of scandal. The people he converses with, swear to him in the most solemn manner that they adore one God alone, and that they abhor polytheism and idolatry. He hears them, takes his leave and goes away persuaded that they are polytheists as much, and idolaters more than he or any of his fathers



fathers were. This fable may serve to shew you that it is not only unreasonable, but unsafe to censure any religion rashly and without sufficient information, as pagans have calumniated judaism and christianity, and Jews and Christians, paganism and mahometanism. The weapons of retaliation are always at hand, tho' those of defence are not: and we see that even the christian religion is not invulnerable. But it is time I should proceed to other corruptions of philosophy, of the first especially, and to other forms under which error has been propagated.

## SECTION VI.

WHAT has been said above, has been said generally and hypothetically; for what man in his senses would presume to be particular or positive on matters of so great antiquity, and so imperfectly and darkly delivered down on authorities for the most part very precarious? I think, however, that it is probable. It is probable that allegory, the refuge of ignorance, the veil of error, and the instrument of metaphysical and theological deception in its abuse, was one great support of paganism. It rendered the outside of this religion pompous and shewish: and this was enough to raise and to maintain a respect and veneration for it in the minds of the vulgar, who never look further than the outside, and who are fond of the marvellous. It is probable, that in the mysteries instituted by the first legislators to be a further support of religion, such allegories and symbols as were kept in use, and such as were more rationally invented for instruction, not for deception, were explained in such a manner as to serve all the purposes of morality, and to form men to be better citizens, by making them better men, than it was thought that civil laws and institutions alone could oblige them to be. It is probable, in the last place, that the few  
who



who were consummated in these mysteries, and to whom the hidden doctrine was revealed, acknowledged the unity of the Godhead, learned to join a sort of mitigated polytheism with monotheism, and, tho they conformed in the public worship, to have their private belief, as I am persuaded that you have yours.

It is plain enough, that the knowledge of the one true God would have been acquired by men, and would have been preserved in the world, if no such people as the Jews had ever been: and nothing can be more impertinent than the hypothesis, that this people, the least fit perhaps on many accounts that could have been chosen, was chosen to preserve this knowledge. It was acquired, and it was preserved independently of them among the heathen philosophers, and it might have become, nay it did probably become, the national belief in countries unknown to us, or even in those who were fallen back into ignorance before they appear in the traditions we have; just as it became the first principle of religion among the inhabitants of the Theban dynasty, \* who held that there was no God but one, and this one God was represented under a human figure by some, with an egg, the symbol of the world, coming out of his mouth; with a scepter and a belt in his hand, and with other emblems. Thus he was described by PORPHYRY, as EUSEBIUS relates, and what other Being can we understand to be meant by this description but that God who spake, and the world was made?

THUS the theology of the heathen was founded on original truth, but was corrupted afterwards, as other theologies have been, in its progress, and by the extension of it. The heathens, at least all of them who deserve to be quoted, acknowledged one sole Supreme Being, the oldest of all beings, ac-

\* PLUT. de ISIDE et OSTRIDE.

ording



ording to THALES, because unmade or unproduced, that is, self-existent, and because he alone is so\*. But then they corrupted their ideas of the majesty of this Being, by those which they had of human majesty; for, by meaning to think with more reverence, they thought unworthily of God. They lost sight of him, if I may be allowed such an expression, and suffered inferior imaginary beings to intercept a worship due to him alone. They reasoned so little or so ill, on other notions much better associated with this notion of a God, such as those of omniscience, of omnipresence, and of that energy of omnipotence which is sufficient by one simple act of the will, for thus we must speak to speak intelligibly, to create and govern an universe, that they thought it much more agreeable to nature and truth to account for all the phaenomena of the physical and moral worlds by supposing the agency of second and third gods, of supercelestial and celestial divinities, and of daemons, than to have recourse to the first God, who dwelled in darkness unpenetrable, or in light that blinded the human sight; for both these images were employed, and both signify the same thing. Thus they attempted to reconcile monotheism with a sort of mitigated polytheism; for such, at least, I think it was rendered by those consummated in the mysteries, and such I called it before; tho PLUTARCH says expressly, in the place I have just now quoted, not only that the most antient Egyptians held the unity of God, but also that they believed no mortal could be a God; which opinion was sufficient of itself to degrade numberless beings, that went under the vague and equivocal denomination of gods,

THIS system, made up of monotheism and of something very near akin, nearer than they who held it imagined, to a polytheism, inconsistent with the former, proved itself to be a very

\* DIOG. LAER.

rank



rank foil: and immense crops of error sprung up from it, of error more ingenious and more plausible than the superstitious opinions of savage nations, but yet as real. Tho' the belief of many inferior gods did not destroy the belief of one supreme, it maintained however a sort of idolatrous worship, since it maintained a sort of polytheism. For as we cannot suppose that the vulgar, the uninitiated, adored the true God even intentionally, so we cannot suppose that the initiated, nor even the consummated, held constantly in mind some such casuistical distinction as that of *Latria* and *Dulia*, when they offered sacrifices to other divinities and invoked them directly. That learned man CUDWORTH seems to think more favorably even of the vulgar, somewhere in his famous fourth chapter: and I am not ignorant that the doctrine of a mediation between God and man was established in the heathen theology. But I know too, that the suspicion I have may be justified by the example of Christians, who hold a mediation likewise: and of these the former seem the most excusable. The Christian believes that he may have access at all times to the throne of grace; but the poor heathen, filled with a religious horror, durst not approach the divine monarch except thro' the mediation of his ministers. Aethereal and aerial daemons stood in the lowest rank of superior powers. To these he addressed himself, if they were evil to soften their malice, if they were good to obtain their mediation with the celestial, and by them with the supercelestial gods. He who durst not presume to think that the prayers of men could reach to these, might offer up sacrifices and prayers to those.

PHILOSOPHERS and priests, who led the multitude in matters of science and religion, were the same men in Egypt and the antient kingdoms of the East for many ages, how much soever they were distinguished in later times and in other countries.



Whilst they continued such, they profited alternately, in one character, of what they did, in another. Philosophers in prose and verse helped to fill the calendar of the priests: and theology became the assistant of philosophy wherever she was wanted. Thus, in the case before us, when philosophers had once established a divine monarchy, at the head of which they placed the first God, enthroned in darkness, or hid by excess of light, creating and governing all things by several orders of inferior beings, there was a sort of gradation formed from man to God most inconsistently with some other of their notions. In favor of this gradation, and to make it appear the shorter, the souls of men were deemed immortal and of a celestial origin. They were raised up, at least, to the very confines of divinity: and daemons, and beings superior to daemons, had little precedence above them, if any. They were confined indeed to human bodies, and degraded to animate these systems of organized matter by a temporary union with them, but they returned afterwards to their proper and kindred stars. The others were confined too, and had their respective powers and provinces allotted to them, in the general government even of sublunary affairs.

THEOLOGY did not fail to build on foundations philosophy had laid: and the professors of both improved the opportunity they had of feigning a close correspondence between heaven and earth. They assumed, that they had the means of knowing what was decreed above, that they could disclose the will of the gods, avert their anger, procure their favor, and exercise a coercive power over daemons. They imagined spirits that belonged to the several planets, fiery and aerial, aquatic and terrestrial: so that men, and not men alone, but all other animals, plants, metals, and stones, partook of these different natures, and of the different influences which descended from above.



above. The distinction of good and evil daemons was extremely useful, in accounting for the physical and moral phenomena; and it doubled the fees of the priests. Accordingly, this distinction had been established in the remotest antiquity, when philosophers did, what they do still, and instead of tracing causes up gradually from their effects, take the less laborious task of inventing them at once and by a fall of imagination. JUSTIN the martyr found our christian devil precipitated from heaven, in the nineteenth book of HOMER's Iliad. PLUTARCH quotes EMPEDOCLES for writing, that the evil daemons had been driven from thence by the gods: and you may have the word of MARSILIUS FICINUS, in his dissertation on the apology of SOCRATES, that PLATO had heard in Egypt how JUPITER cast the impure daemons into hell, as well as he had learned from PHERECYDES of Syros, either by tradition or by his writings, how several of these spirits had rebelled against God under the conduct of OPHIONEUS. These reprobate spirits became the instruments, or rather the authors of all physical and moral evil: and the protection of such as had not fallen from this purity was sought, to prevent or remove this malignant influence. The one procured to men peace of mind, and health of body. The others inspired lusts, inflamed passions, and, entering into the bodies of men as well as of other animals, tormented and distorted their limbs, and plaid a thousand extravagant pranks in the wantonness of their power and malice.

SUCH absurdities as these, and many others which I will not take the trouble to collect, being grafted on a few true principles, composed the theological wisdom of the Egyptians and the Chaldaeans, and corrupted the whole mass. I say their theological, for their political and moral wisdom deserves to be mentioned without a sneer. The relations of it, and



of the effects of it, which we find in HERODOTUS, DIODORUS SICULUS, and other antient authors, inspire us with admiration and respect: and it is not possible to account for the folly and madness of men on these theological subjects, who were so reasonable and so wise on all others, except by resolving it into the vanity of philosophers and the craft of priests. If these men had pretended to none of this chimerical knowledge, but had contented themselves to teach in the simplicity of truth, the little we are able to know of the divine nature and the first philosophy, their systems, which they had the rage of extending, would have been too narrow for their vanity; and their wealth, which they had the rage of increasing by this lucrative trade, would have been too little for their avarice.

It is hard to say which was greater, the impudence of their pretensions, the art with which they conducted them, or the success they had in imposing them on mankind. The sky was spread like the great volume of fate before them. They and their adepts alone could read in it, and discover the secrets it contained. The whole mystery of celestial influences was known to them alone. They could procure them, remove them, change them, and fix them to certain portions of matter, or even fix the spirits themselves, who directed these influences, to statues prepared by the rules of their magical art. They had mysterious methods of disentangling the soul from corporeal incumberments, and preparing it for every kind of supernatural illumination. The mind was composed for prophetic dreams, the eyes were strengthened for celestial visions. They received inspiration, and they contemplated the gods that gave it. How they understood this contemplation, how they saw the forms of the gods, \* and how the presence of the

\* Praesentiam saepe divi suam declarant. Saepe visae formae deorum. Cic. de Nat. Deor. l. 2.



gods was declared to them, might be explained, perhaps, in much as intelligible a manner as the presence of daemons in their statues was explained. Suppose a wall of looking-glasses, and so disposed at the same time as to occasion an eccho \*. Your figure and your voice too will be reflected from it, and you will be in some sense in that wall. I hurry over all these impertinences, and I conclude by saying, that from this conspiracy of philosophy and theology, in the establishment of theurgic and natural magic, have proceeded all the folly and knavery of judicial astrology, of horoscopes, of spells, of charms, of talismans, of wizards, of witches, and of rosycrucians, and all the enthusiasm, blasphemy, and superstition that have accompanied these excommunicated persons and things, and that might have been reproached with great reason, upon many occasions, to the orthodox persons themselves who excommunicated both. I say might have been reproached, and I say it with reason; since many of the opinions which these orthodox persons hold, or have held, may be traced up thro the same schools, thro which the greatest extravagancies of astrologers, magicians, and rosycrucians have descended to these days. But we must not stop here. We must pursue the propagation of error in higher instances than these, and in such as prevail under some form or other even at this day, even among men the most enlightened in our enlightened age.

PAGAN theists, who deemed it too great presumption to worship the Supreme Being, might well have thought it still more presumptuous to dogmatize about his nature and attributes: and since they held the unity of the first cause of all things, they should have seen the absurdity and inconsistency of analyzing this monad into several principles, and of assum-

\* MARS. FICIN.

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ing other supercelestial and supereffential beings. All this was done however, the absurdity was put in practice, and the inconsistency was admitted into the first philosophy. Reason was overborne in this case by affections and passions, as reason is in almost every case where that rational animal man is to decide, and excessive curiosity and excessive vanity prevailed against the plainest dictates of common sense. God has proportioned, in every respect, our means of knowledge to our station here, and to our real wants in it. The bodies, that surround us, operate continually on us: and their operations concern not only our well or ill being, but our very being. We are fitted therefore to acquire, by the help of our senses properly employed, by experiment and industry, such a degree of human knowledge about them as is sufficient for the necessary uses of human life, and no more. In like manner, the knowledge of the Creator is on many accounts necessary to such a creature as man: and therefore we are made able to arrive, by a proper exercise of our mental faculties, from a knowledge of God's works to a knowledge of his existence, and of that infinite power and wisdom which are demonstrated to us in them. Our knowledge concerning God goes no further. We are in absolute ignorance of the real essence and inward constitution of every sensible object. How much less reason is there to expect any knowledge of the manner of being, and of the nature and essence of the invisible God, or of his physical and moral attributes, beyond that which his works, the effects of his nature and attributes, communicate to us! This degree, this sufficient degree of knowledge concerning God is a fixed point, on one side of which lies atheism, and metaphysical and theological blasphemy too often on the other.

NOTWITHSTANDING this which has been said, and which appears to be of the utmost evidence, philosophers have proceeded,



ceeded, without any regard to it, from the most early ages: and the whole sum of theology has been in every age a confused rhapsody of discordant, fluctuating hypotheses. The science to which they pretended was unattainable. Their doctrines therefore, tho' dogmatically taught, and implicitly received in their several schools, were nothing more than arbitrary hypotheses: and hypotheses being so extravagantly prolific, that one often engenders twenty, it is no wonder that the confusion increased, that the more these doctrines were explained the darker they grew, and that the latter pythagoricians and platonicians were, if possible, less intelligible than their masters, and all those who had gone before them. I mention these particularly, because they were the great theological doctors of Greece, and the great channels thro' which all the metaphysical jargon, and all the superstitious opinions of antient nations, have come down to us, intermingled with some scraps of good sense and of true theism. PLUTARCH says there was nothing unreasonable, fabulous, nor superstitious in the sacred institutions of the Egyptians, from whose schools we know that PYTHAGORAS and PLATO derived their theology. But on the contrary, he says, that all of them had moral and useful causes, and historical and philosophical meanings. But the priest made his court, at the expence of truth, to the priests, to whom he addressed his treatise concerning ISIS and OSTRIS: and we shall do better to give credit, on this occasion, to DI-DONYSIUS HALICARNASSENSIS \*, who confesses, that altho' many of the Greek fables shewed the operations of nature by allegories, and were composed for consolation under the calamities of life, for taking away perturbations of mind, for removing false opinions, and for other very good and commendable purposes, yet they are to be condemned in general, many as impious, all as pernicious; and he praises ROMULUS for admitting none of them.

\* Ant. Rom. L. 2.



## SECTION VII.

IT may be worth while to give two instances of the extravagant hypotheses which philosophy and theology conspired to frame, as soon, perhaps, as men began to turn their thoughts to these subjects; for we find ditheism and tritheism established in the most early ages, concerning which we have any anecdotes.

THEY who believed a self-existent Being, the first intelligent cause of all things, must have believed this Being to be all-perfect. But then, as they modelled his government on an human plan, so they conceived his perfections, moral as well as physical, by human ideas; tho they did not presume to limit the former by the latter. Thus, God was said to be the first good; but then the general notion, or the abstract idea, as some philosophers would call it, of this good, was not only taken from human goodness, but was considered too with little or no other relation than to man, that excellent creature, the very image of his Maker, and one half of whom, at least, was divine. A question arose therefore on these hypotheses. How could evil come into a system, of which God was the author, and man the final cause? this question made a further hypothesis necessary. It was "dignus vindice nodus:" and another first God, another coeternal and coequal principle was introduced to solve it, a first cause of all evil, as the other was of all good. The contest between these independent and rival powers began by a struggle, some have said by a battle, when one of them endeavoured to reduce matter, which these philosophers held to be a third principle, tho not a third God, into an orderly uniform frame and regular motion, and when the other endeavoured to maintain disorder, deformity, irregularity,



larity, and to spoil, at least, the great design. The same contest was supposed to continue in the government that commenced at the formation of the world, and physical or moral good and evil to be produced, as one or other of these gods prevailed.

PLUTARCH\*, who was a zealous assertor of this doctrine himself, asserted it to have been likewise that of the magians, the Chaldeans, the Egyptians, and of every philosopher almost of any note among the Greeks from PYTHAGORAS down to PLATO. He represents it as an opinion settled in the minds of men by the authority of legislators and divines, of philosophers and poets, and not only as an opinion, but as an article of faith, on which sacrifices and religious rites were established. But every man has some favorite folly, and this was his. BAYLE himself is forced to confess, that the representation is exaggerated. How indeed is it possible to believe that such numbers of reasonable men could concur, from age to age, in so great an absurdity? Some of them might, and it is probable that they did, hold an opinion very near akin to this and derived from it, but not the same that PLUTARCH held, and the Marcionites and Manichaeans after him. This hypothesis was mitigated by another; and instead of a god unproduced and self-existent, an inferior being, produced and dependent, was assumed to be the author of evil. The preceptor of TRAJAN could not help admitting, most inconsistently with himself, that the two principles were not of equal force, and that the good principle was prevalent: but even further that ZOROASTER, and by consequence the magi, called the good principle alone God, and the evil principle a daemon. This mitigated hypothesis was adopted by orthodox Christians, as the other was by heretics, and has therefore supported itself longer than the other: tho the other spread more among Christians, from the third century,

\* Lib. de ISIDE et OSIRIDE.



and before MANES down to the seventh and even to the ninth, than it had ever spread and prevailed in the pagan world. But whatever success these hypotheses have had, when we consider even that which I have called mitigated, as a pagan dogma, we must say, that altho it does not imply contradiction so manifestly as the other, yet it implies it as strongly, and is still more injurious to the Supreme Being. It implies it as strongly; for to affirm that there are two self-existent gods, independent and coequal, who made and govern the world, is not a jot more absurd, than it is to affirm that a God sovereignly good, and at the same time almighty and alwise, suffers an inferior dependent being to deface his work in any sort, and to make his other creatures both criminal and miserable. It is still more injurious to the Supreme Being; for if we had been to reason with pagan ditheists on their own notions, we might have insisted, that it is no disgrace to a prince to reign according to the constitution of his country jointly with another, as the ephori reigned at Sparta, and the consuls governed at Rome, and that the ill government of his partner reflects no dishonor on him. But that to say of a monarch, in the true sense of the word, who is invested with absolute power, that he suffers one of his subjects to abuse the rest without controul, and to draw them into crimes and revolts, for which he punishes them afterwards, is the most injurious accusation that can be brought. That heathen theists of common sense reasoned in this manner we cannot doubt, and that they did so I find a remarkable proof, tho a negative one, and brought for another purpose, in the intellectual system. CELSUS objected to the Christians that they believed a certain adversary to God, the devil, called in hebrew Satan, and that they affirmed impiously that the greatest God was disabled from doing good, or withstood in doing it, by this adversary. Now CELSUS, who made this objection to the Christians, would not have made it, I think, if he himself had



had held the mitigated ditheism we have mentioned, whether he held the other or no.

LET us speak of tritheism, the other instance proposed to shew how natural theology was rendered a confused heap of absurd and inconsistent hypotheses, by men who presumed to dogmatize beyond the bounds of human knowledge.

DR. CUDWORTH could not well conceive, no more than LA MOTTHE LE VAYER, how a trinity of divine hypostases should be first discovered merely by human wit and reason. He would have it believed, therefore, a revelation to the Jews, and a tradition derived from them. But he supports his suggestion ill. That the Samothracians held a certain trinity of gods, which they called by an Hebrew name Cabbirim, or the mighty gods, and that there are in the books of the old Testament certain significations of a plurality in the Deity, are allegations so vague and inconclusive that they prove nothing, or might be turned to prove what the learned author would have disliked very much, to prove it ill perhaps, but as well at least as they prove his suggestion. The other proof he brings, may be equivocal as well as weak in the manner in which it is expressed. He quotes PROCLUS for saying that the trinity contained in the Chaldaic oracles was at first a theology of divine tradition, or a revelation, or a divine cabbala, and he quotes the Greek of PROCLUS, after which he adds, viz. amongst the Hebrews first, and from them afterwards communicated to the Egyptians and other nations. If PROCLUS now had said all this in terms, or had spoke to the effect of the additional words, which I am unable to determine, not having the book at this time in my power, the proof would have been no better than either of the former. But if the additional words are not of PROCLUS, but of the doctor, the doctor seeming to quote PRO-



CLUS quotes himself, in respect to the point he was concerned to secure, that this divine revelation could be made to no other nation, if it was made, than to the Hebrews.

I PROCEED now to say that it is not so hard to conceive how human wit and reason might, and why philosophers did, invent the hypothesis of a trinity, without any obligation to the Jews, who from their exode to their return from their seventy years captivity, and from thence till all their books were written or reduced into a canon, borrowed much more than they lent.

THE confusion and obscurity of the first philosophy, as it was taught in the antiquity to which we look up in this discourse, was in no part greater than in this of the trinity. They who have pretended to explain it, to improve it, and to build upon it, have only perplexed it the more: some because they were as chimerical as the first inventors, and others because they had some particular purpose to serve. What is unintelligible in PLATO, for instance, or in the fragments that we have of pythagorean doctrines, you will not perceive to grow more intelligible when you have consulted JAMBLICUS, PORPHYRY, PLOTINUS, any of the philosophers of these sects, or any of the christian fathers who sanctified a great deal of this heathen lore. MARSILIUS FICINUS, and the whole crowd of modern translators, commentators, and collectors, will help you as little. Even CUDWORTH, the best of them, leaves you where he found you, and gives you little else than a non-sensical paraphrase of nonsense. It was not his fault. The good man passed his life in the study of an unmeaning jargon: and as he learned, he taught.



IF he had not been fond of giving a divine original to a doctrine that became a fundamental article of christianity, he might have deduced the original of this very human hypothesis, for such it was in the pagan world, from what he had asserted and proved already. He had shewn how poets and philosophers promoted polytheism by allegorizing corporeal nature. Was it hard then to imagine, that they allegorized incorporeal nature likewise? they deified sensible, why should they not deify intellectual, objects? They increased the number of their gods, by deifying even mixed modes and relations. Why should they not do the same, by making ideal substances of the wisdom and power of God, and of that divine spirit which they imagined to pervade all things? There was no need of inspiration, nor any extraordinary communication, to prompt them to do so: and it would have been matter of wonder if the whole system of nature had not been reduced, as it was, into one body of corrupt theology, by the Egyptians and the other nations of the East, and by the Greeks who philosophised many centuries together on the same foolish principles.

THE habitude of erecting extravagant hypotheses into doctrines of the first philosophy, and of founding natural theology on the most unnatural principles, might seduce men easily into tritheism, without any such apparent reasons for it as they had for ditheism. But if they thought themselves obliged to invent the latter in order to account for the existence of evil, they saw that there was a necessity for inventing the former, in order to give an appearance of consistency to the very best of their theistical systems. They had gods and demi-gods and daemons enough. But none of them could be reputed first causes, or principles, and three such at least were necessary to be found.

WHEN



WHEN they had imagined a celestial, on the plan of a terrestrial, monarchy, they found place and rank and business for all the imaginary beings that superstition had created: but they confined the monarch, like an eastern prince, to the inmost recesses of his palace, where they supposed him to remain immovable. They acknowledged him, very rationally, to be the source of all intelligence and wisdom and power, as well as the fountain of all existence, and the spring of all life and motion throout the whole extent of being. But then they imagined, very irrationally, that this unity was such an immovable essence as could not have acted in the formation, and as did not act in the preservation and government, of the world. They raised their notions of the divine majesty so high, or, to speak more properly, they refined so metaphysically upon them, for they cannot be ever raised too high, when they are kept within the bounds of our real ideas, that they placed the Supreme God not only far out of the sight of human intellect, but even out of the reach, if I may say so, of that system whereof they confessed him to be the first cause. There were, indeed, according to them inferior generated gods participant in some sort of his wisdom, and delegates in some degree of his power; but this participation and this delegation were not sufficient: and to make such a system as that of the universe, the very wisdom and the very power of the supreme self-existent Being were necessary. No cause out of the Deity could produce such effects, and all other beings with participated wisdom and delegated power would be but second causes at best, acting indeed, but acted upon, without any adequate efficacy of their own.

WE may very well believe, that some such considerations as these determined the most antient philosophers to assume a  
trinity



trinity of divine hypostases in the Godhead. A second proceeding eternally from the first, and a third proceeding eternally from the second, or from the first and the second. Subsistencies, beings not independent like the good and the evil god, but distinct. Subordinate, but subordinate within the Deity, and far above the highest order of generated gods. It is probable that neither ZOROASTER, nor the magi, nor MERCURY TRISMEGIST, nor the Egyptian divines, were as ingenious to abstract and distinguish and to invent new words, as the Nicæan fathers, or the latter pythagoricians and platonicians. They might content themselves with establishing the general difference I have mentioned between these three, and all their other gods. CUDWORTH says, that they understood by this trinity the Godhead: and I remember to have read somewhere, in PLOTINUS perhaps, or in some other madman of that stamp, that there are emanations within the Deity as well as emanations that go out of it. The second of these gods, then, was the divine intellect personified, an emanation that did not emanate, if you allow the term, out of the Deity. The third was the divine Spirit, another emanation that did not emanate neither. Thus the difficulties that embarrassed these great divines, might seem to be taken away; for tho' the immovable essence of the unity could not move, nor act, nor pervade, and become the soul of the world immediately, yet all this might be done by the second and third persons of the Godhead, who exerted all the energy of the first.

THAT such an hypothesis was established among the most antient of the heathen divines cannot be doubted, tho' their doctrines are come to us in broken scraps very imperfectly, and therefore very darkly. This imperfect and general knowledge is enough however to satisfy any reasonable curiosity, and it leaves room enough for great scholars to dispute and wrangle  
about



about particulars. Let us leave that part to them, and pursue reflections of another kind.

SOME, and I think very few, of the Greek philosophers were rank atheists. *DIAGORAS* was one: and, if it be true that *DEMOCRITUS* bought and instructed him, he might pass easily from the absurdity of believing that the visible species of things and the ideas we receive from them are gods, to that of believing that there is no God. *THEODORUS* was another: and he was so zealous in his atheism, that he wrote several books to maintain it. *STRATO* was not quite so positive in the denial of any Supreme Being; but he was very positive, that he had no need of assuming any to account for the making of the world. He went thro' all the parts of it, and pretended to shew, that all of them were effects of natural causes, of matter and motion. "Naturalibus fieri aut factum esse dicit ponderibus et motibus," says *TULLY* \*. *EPICURUS* acknowledged gods, but gods so extremely ridiculous, that he was guilty of something worse than atheism, whilst he affected theism, "invidiæ detestandæ causâ," says the same *TULLY*.

SUCH philosophers as these imagined a sort of plastic nature working blindly but necessarily, and requiring no superior principle to direct her action. The greatest part of the ancient naturalists thought very differently from these. They established a material, and an efficient, intelligent cause of all the phenomena. Tho' all of them believed matter eternal, they had various opinions about the material cause. It was to some an assemblage of all the elements massed and confounded and fermenting together, "rudis indigestaque moles." To others it was some one select element; to *THALES* water, or perhaps a fluid chaos; to *ANAXIMENES* air; to *ARCHELAUS* air condens-

\* Acad. Quæst. l. 4.



ed into water, the principle of THALES; or rarified into aether, the fiery principle of the stoics. Their notions of the efficient intelligent cause were not more uniform than these: but as these were different manners of conceiving the same thing, so were the others. The material cause, under every notion of it, was matter still; the efficient cause, under every notion of it, was intelligence still: and all the notions of this kind, which theistical philosophers entertained, were less repugnant, if I am not much deceived, than it is commonly thought. It seems to me, that the differences between them were more apparent than real, and that they arose chiefly from different applications of the same trinitarian hypothesis. On this foundation, much of what has passed for atheism may be explained easily into theism. I could carry instances of my charity a great way up on this occasion, to the ionic philosophers, ANAXIMENES and ARCHELAUS for instance, if not to ANAXIMANDER: and if THALES, the founder of this school, wants little, ANAXAGORAS, the last but one of his successors, wants no excuse to clear him of atheism.

THE hypothesis of a trinity in the godhead was brought from Egypt into Greece by ORPHEUS, whoever he was, and possibly by others in that remote antiquity. It is not unlikely too, that this doctrine being taught to an half savage people, who were unable to distinguish between gods in the godhead and gods out of it, if in truth that distinction was made so early, increased and confirmed their polytheism. But the true philosophical age having begun much later in that country, when the Greeks, instead of waiting for missionaries from Egypt, went thither themselves in quest of science, this hypothesis could be little known, and less employed before that aera; whereas it was much in use afterwards, and we find the traces of it in all that theistical philosophers taught. These traces are



obscure and confused. The doctrine itself was so, till PLATO appeared like the pagan ATHANASIUS, defined the mystery, and fixed a profession of faith that lasted till the christian ATHANASIUS altered it. Thus we may account, in part, for the obscurity and confusion wherein we discover the traces of this doctrine. It was very obscure and confused in the minds of the philosophers themselves. No wonder then if the references to it, and the opinions derived from it, are still more so in the writings of men who have conveyed them down to us in fragments, and who understood the doctrine even less than these philosophers \*. TULLY

\* WE shall have no room to be surprized, that the pagan doctrine of a trinity in the godhead was taught, and has come down to us, so confusedly; if we consider, how confusedly and how darkly the fathers of the three first centuries expressed themselves on the same subject: tho' the learned bishop BULL would have made, if he could, these primitive fathers all "ad unum" Athanasians, and the doctrine of the church to have been exactly that of the Nicaean council, long before ATHANASIUS was born, or the council was held. If this doctrine has come down to us with greater precision, than that of the heathen philosophers, and in an uniformity of terms, the reason is obvious. Antient theists applied their unsettled notions of this kind differently, and according to their different systems of philosophy. They were under no common controul, to enforce an uniformity of terms at least: whereas among Christians there was such a controul, and men were obliged to use the same forms of words, whatever their opinions were. Their leaders indeed disputed much, and each of them formed a party: but when they met in councils, they were obliged sometimes by art or intrigue, and sometimes by the determining influence of imperial authority to unite in terms, and to create an appearance of uniformity. Thus the christian doctrine of the trinity was fixed. Different councils, it is true, made different decisions, and reverend fathers, who had held one opinion in one council, changed it in another; there were therefore several orthodoxies "pro tempore," if I may say so. But that which prevailed last has come down to us: and nothing has been neglected, not even interpolation, to make more antient fathers hold the language of those who were more modern; an example of which I will quote from ERASMUS \*. That learned, exact, and candid divine not only acknowledges in many places, among a multitude of other defects, such as unfairness, uncharitableness, and violence, the inaccuracy of these fathers in their writings; but he complains likewise of the interpolations and alterations, which have been made in them for the purpose I have mentioned. St. HILARY, for instance, who spoke sometimes of the son of God, as of a God of the same kind, or of the same nature with his father, which expressions however do not come up to a complete

\* Ep. in HILARIUM.



TULLY makes VELLEIUS say, that THALES was the first who inquired into such matters; that he asserted water to be the

notion of consubstantiality, dared not call the holy ghost God, nor ascribe adoration to him; either because he is not called God expressly in scripture, or because the faint thought it more necessary to insist on the godhead of the son, whose human nature made it more difficult to persuade mankind that he was God; or else, finally, because the claim of the holy ghost had not been yet admitted in due form by councils, who erected themselves, as it were, into courts of honor to settle ranks and precedency in heaven. ERASMUS thinks that such reasons as these obliged HILARIUS to use much caution in his expressions, and therefore, speaking of the holy ghost, he had contented himself to say, "promerendus est:" but some orthodox interpolator added, "et adorandus." Many other instances of corrupting the text of this writer there are, and those principally where such liberties ought to have been taken the least, as in his books "de trinitate," and "de synodis;" for in them, says ERASMUS, he treated very difficult and very dangerous points of divinity, "periculosae de rebus divinis difficultates."

THE same artifice was employed sometimes in favor of opinions reputed heterodox, if we may believe RUFINUS, who, in defending ORIGEN against that bully, JEROM, and that ideot, EPIPHANIUS, insists that ORIGEN would not have been exposed to their censure, if his writings had not been interpolated. But this artifice, as well as others, had a much greater, and an entire effect, when it was employed on the side of the orthodox, that is, of the majority, or of those who made themselves pass for the majority. Thus it happened, in the case of the trinity, and in many others, that christian doctrines have been handed down with an appearance of uniformity, which pagan doctrines could not have.

BUT farther, if christian doctrines had come down in the writings of the most ancient fathers, with still less uniformity than they have, such modern fathers as bishop BULL, would not have found it hard to make them appear entirely uniform. This he has attempted, in the case of the trinity, with great applause from the ecclesiastics of your church, and from those of ours. He owns, for instance, that ORIGEN talks sometimes too freely and sceptically; that TERTULLIAN cared little what he said, provided he contradicted his adversary; and that two eggs are not more alike, than the expressions of this father to the whimsies of VALENTINIAN. He gives us LACTANTIUS for a rhetor ignorant in theology, and St. JEROM for a sophist not to be relied on much. Many of their expressions being gnostical, and arian, as well as those of other fathers; they were not much in his favor; and yet to save them for other purposes wherein their authority might be necessary, he distinguishes between witnesses of the faith, and interpreters of the scriptures. He allows them to be good witnesses, and condemns them often as bad interpreters. He makes this distinction particularly, when he speaks of a passage in IRENAEUS, where this father cites a passage from the prophet ISAIAH, to prove the divinity of the holy ghost. BULL thought ORIGEN orthodox in his opinion, tho not in his expressions,



the first principle of things, and God the mind who framed them  
all

concerning the trinity. Few of the fathers, who lived before the Nicæan council, were so; and therefore BULL supposes them orthodox against their expressions, rather than proves them to have been so, by their expressions. He does by them, what they did by the scriptures, and draws them to his sense, in what terms soever they signify their own. CUDWORTH thinks these primitive fathers heterodox in opinion, as well as in expression. They must needs have been much in the wrong, since they agreed in asserting the subordination of the son to the father. They had taken this opinion of the logos from the platonic philosophy, and their whole trinity was built on the plan which PLATO had made less confused than that of other heathen trinitarians. "Usque ad tres hypostasies, dicit PLATO, Dei progredi essentiam; et esse quidem, dicit, Deum summe bonum, post illum autem secundum conditorem, tertium autem mundi animam."

THE absurdities and prophanations built on such notions as these, were innumerable. He who endeavours to consider them with attention, will find his head turn in the confusion they create, and no precise discrimination of orthodox and heterodox possible to be made between them, either according to reason, wherein they have no foundation at all, or to gospel revelation, wherein they have very little. They were however propagated by pagan and christian theology, till metaphorical generations were thought to be real, and till the virtues and operations of the one Supreme Being, were assumed to be distinct hypostasies or subsistences in the divinity; as the aeons of VALENTINIAN signified, I presume, no more, in the allegorical cant of the first christian times, than virtues and affections of the divinity, which were afterwards understood to be real beings existing out of the first Being.

THESE doctrines were encouraged, perhaps introduced by others, that traditional theology among the heathens, and cabalistical literature among the Jews, had preserved from the most antient ages; and which, as wild as they were, had wanted neither knaves nor fools to vouch for them. These were such as supposed frequent manifestations of the Supreme Being to his creatures. According to these, he manifested himself sometimes under the form of an angel; sometimes a little, and but a little differently, under that of a man; both of which were called God whilst the manifestation lasted. That this was so, we may conclude from divers passages of the old testament, and from several Egyptian traditions. Thus it became in time not hard to imagine a much more noble manifestation of the Supreme Being himself, in the appearance of the Logos or the Word, under an human form, into which God had insinuated himself, and in which he remained incarnated. "Pater in me manens facit ipse opera." The Word, that is the supreme reason, was always with God, for God alone is that supreme reason: but this reason spoke to mankind under the sensible image of a man, when that person appeared who was called the son of God on account of his miraculous birth, and most important mission. Such was the Word of ST JOHN; "the visible image of the invisible God." To this let us  
add,



all out of water †. *DIOPHANTUS LAERTIUS* says, that *THALES* held God to be the oldest of all the things that exist, because ungenerated or unproduced; and the world to be the most beautiful, because it was made by God §. These expressions might induce one to think, that *THALES* was not only the oldest, but the most orthodox, of the Greek philosophers, even more so than the divine *PLATO*; and that his doctrine may serve as an instance to confirm *TERTULLIAN*'s maxim, how precarious forever it be, "id verum quod primum." They might induce one to think, that *THALES* intended the Supreme Being, whose sole action in the production of things other theists did not acknowledge; tho they acknowledged his existence. But these passages, compared with others, will rather serve to shew, in how confused a manner the trinitarian hypothesis led these philosophers to speak of God, and of the first efficient cause. *BAYLE* thought the text of *TULLY* corrupted in the passage concerning *THALES*, because *VELLEIUS* having said, that this philosopher was the first, says immediately after, that *ANAXAGORAS* || was the first, who taught this doctrine. There may be room for such a suspicion, and whatever interpretation be given to the passage, it will be little agreeable to the usual clearness and precision of that great author.

add, for the honor of humanity, and on the authority of scripture, that angels suffered themselves to be adored by men before this manifestation; but that they have declined this honor ever since the son of God took upon him the human nature.

† *THALES*, qui primus de talibus rebus quaesivit, aquam dixit esse initium rerum: Deum autem eam mentem, quae ex aqua cuncta fingeret. Cic. de Nat. Deor. l. 1.

§ Antiquissimum eorum omnium quae sunt, Deus; ingenitus enim. Pulcherrimum mundus; à Deo enim factus est.

|| *ANAXAGORAS*, qui accepit ab *ANAXIMENE* disciplinam, primus omnium rerum descriptionem et modum mentis infinitae vi ac ratione designari, et confici voluit.

WHEN



WHEN we consider that THALES had been instructed in the Egyptian schools, and reflect on the opinion imputed to him by STOBÆUS, that the first cause had no action, we must be persuaded, that however he spoke of mind, he did not intend the first God in the heathen trinity. He seems rather to have confounded Nous and Psyche, mind and soul, the second and the third god. A passage in DIOGENES LAERTIUS is very favorable to this notion; for in that THALES is said to have held, that mind, and therefore the efficient cause which had made all things out of water, was the swiftest of things, and pervaded rapidly the universe\*. None of these philosophers presumed to employ the first God, as the immediate active efficient cause of things. They introduced therefore into their physiological theology the second and the third gods of the zoroastrian and orphic trinity, whom they sometimes seem to distinguish, and whom they much oftener confound.

PYTHAGORAS talked, it is said, of an immaterial unity and a material duality, by which he pretended to signify perhaps the first principles of all things, the efficient and material causes: and yet we see how his doctrine is represented in the first book of the nature of the gods. He was understood to have taught, that God is a soul diffused thro all being, and from which all human souls were taken †. This was called "avulsionem ætheris immortalis et divini:" and CICERO remarks, or makes his interlocutor remark, that PYTHAGORAS did not see how by this avulsion or distraction God himself was rent and torn, "discerpi ac dilacerari Deum §."

\* Velocissimum, mens; nam per universa discurrit.

† PYTHAGORAS — censuit animum esse per naturam rerum omnem intentum et commentem, ex quo animi nostri carperentur, &c.

§ DIOG. LAER.

THIS



THIS pythagorean god was very like the aetherial god of the stoicians, and both of them signified, if my notions are right on this subject, which I do not presume to affirm, tho I think them as probable as any others, the third divinity in the godhead, according to the trinitarian hypothesis, which was certainly known to the Samian, and could not be unknown to the master of the portic. These theistical naturalists imagined a sort of plastic nature, as well as the atheistical naturalists; but instead of such a one as acted blindly and necessarily, they assumed one that acted by design and choice, that is with intelligence. This mind or intelligent spirit, for they were often undistinguished, being infused, as it were, into all the parts of the material world, and moving and directing the whole as the human mind or soul moves and directs the human body, they conceived, the stoics at least conceived, the material world like a great animal endued with life, sense, and intellect, according to the curious logic of ZENO, who advanced this paradox on the strength of logic for want of any better foundation, and just as he advanced many, and might have advanced ten thousand more. But still we must not imagine, that air or water, or aether or fire, or the world itself was God in the opinion of these philosophers. No, they were theists, and their god was the divine spirit that exerted the power and energy of the father of spirits; their god was the mind or soul of their trinity, or both together. They who looked up to the "sublime candens" of ENNIUS invoked JUPITER, according to this poet, and who was JUPITER? not the aether, the "sublime candens," but a being every where present and almighty, the father of gods and men, the lord of all things, and who governs them with his nod\*.

As

\* Aspice hoc sublime candens, quem invocant omnes jovem—patrem divum-  
que



As extravagant as these doctrines may appear, you must not condemn them too rashly. If ZENO lived in these days, he might justify what he taught about aether, and a divine spirit that acts in it and by it, by greater authorities than you apprehend perhaps. He might soon reconcile his opinions to those of some christian philosophers, and shelter himself behind their orthodoxy. There are those who ascribe as much to this active, luminous, fiery aether as ZENO did: and since he thought it, or rather called it, God, because of the divine spirit whose vehicle it was, they would soon persuade him to admit that this divine is an incorporeal spirit, without whose immediate action upon aether, even aether itself would be incapable of producing any one of the phaenomena, and not the least operation could be performed in the whole extent of physical nature. They would persuade him to it the sooner, because by rejecting all existence, besides spirit and idea, and by making his doctrines coincide with theirs in the whole, he would deliver himself from a most absurd inconsistency, or from the trouble of defending it. I find, in one of the finest letters of SENECA \*, whose authority concerning the tenets of ZENO, the founder of the sect he had embraced, is decisive, that this philosopher denied the existence of a material world, and by consequence, one would think, of his favorite aether. PARMENIDES asserted one sole substance, like SPINOZA. ZENO denied even this, says SENECA †. He could not believe his God, therefore, to be so much as cloathed with aether, unless he contradicted himself: but by taking refuge among these philosophers, he might talk as if he did; he might maintain that

que hominumque—dominatorem rerum, omnia nutu regentem—praesentem ac praepotentem Deum. Cic. de Nat. Deor. l. 2.

\* Ep. 88.

† — PARMENIDI, nihil est praeter unum—ZENONI ne unum quidem.

he



he was so cloathed, and might assume the right they assume, to talk most learnedly of all the corporeal phaenomena without believing that they exist; in short, he might reduce inconsistency itself into system. *SENECA*, and the whole portic, might cry out that too much subtilty does great hurt, and is injurious to truth \*. They would cry out in vain.

HAVING observed how *THALES*, *PYTHAGORAS*, and *ZENO*, the founders of three famous sects, reasoned about the first principles of things, I come to speak of *ANAXAGORAS*. Now this philosopher, like the rest, held matter to be eternal. But he differed from them in his notions concerning the efficient cause. He did not make a plastic intelligent nature of mind and spirit, confounded into one. He did not make the same of spirit alone, as he might have done, since this spirit being divine and even a third God, according to antient traditions, could want no intelligence. He did not mingle up both or either of these with matter, to constitute a soul of the world. He advanced a much more rational hypothesis than any of those who went before, or who came after him. *DIODEGENES LAERTIUS* has preserved the summary of it in his own words. He was the first, says this biographer, who added mind to matter, that is, he added it in a manner that neither *THALES* nor any of the Greek philosophers had imagined before him; for he writes thus in the beginning of his work, all things were blended together, when mind came and put them into order †. “*Accessit mens.*” Mind then was no part of them, no plastic nature working in them. Mind, the first efficient cause, was distinct from them, and extrinsecal to them. I determine not, whether *ANAXAGORAS* meant by mind the Supreme Being in his unity,

\* Quantum mali faciat nimia subtilitas, et quàm infesta veritati sit. ib.

† Primus hic materiae mentem adjecit, in principio operis—sic scribens, omnia simul erant, deinde accessit mens eaque composuit.



without any regard to the hypothesis of a trinity, or whether he assumed distinctly the second God of this trinity, whilst others assumed the third only, or confounded the second with the third in their notions of a first efficient cause. In all cases he was a more reasonable theist, and especially if he ascribed the production, order, and government of the universe to the one, whom others considered only as the first God; which I incline to think was his meaning.

BUT to what purpose do I comment on this passage, when the doctrine of ANAXAGORAS concerning a first efficient cause is so fully mentioned by ARISTOTLE and PLUTARCH? The former of these was much more inclined to censure, than to approve the opinions of other philosophers: and yet ANAXAGORAS extorted his approbation, on this occasion at least, how much soever their opinions might differ on others. He who taught that mind or intellect was the efficient cause of the world, and of all order in it, appeared like a man of good sense, “quasi sobrius,” in comparison with the former naturalists, who were a set of vain babblers, “vana dicentes,” say ARISTOTLE\*: and he adds, we know that this man was ANAXAGORAS. The same philosopher, in another place†, lets us farther into this doctrine; for he says there, that according to it this mind, the first principle or efficient cause, was simple and unmixed, and that ANAXAGORAS ascribed to it both knowledge and the beginning of motion§. PLUTARCH goes farther||, for he contrasts the doctrine of ANAXAGORAS, who held that matter was motionless till God gave it motion as well as order, with that of PLATO, who held that matter was in a disorderly motion, and that God did nothing more than direct

\* ARIST. metaph. l. 1.

† ARIST. de anima l. 1.

§ — Simplicem, et non mistam, et puram esse, sinceramque dixit. Atque eidem principio haec utraque tribuit, cognitionem — et motum, dicens, universum mentem movisse.

|| PLUT. de placit. phil. l. 1. c. 7.

this.



this motion so as to bring order out of confusion. This is the substance of the passage: and surely the Ionic philosopher came nearer to orthodoxy in this case than the divine PLATO, tho such a platonic madman as poor DACIER may not scruple to assert, and to believe piously, that, according to PLATO, motion was imprinted on matter by the same spirit who created matter\*.

It was objected to ANAXAGORAS, by ARISTOTLE and by several christian writers, that altho he acknowledged a supreme mind to be the efficient cause of all things, yet he had never recourse to it when he could account for the phaenomena without it. That he used the divine intellect as a machine, to remove difficulties, otherwise insuperable, out of the way †; but in every other case, he chose rather to insist on natural causes §, than to argue from the principles of || mind and reason. All this now means no more, than that he neither mingled logic, like ARISTOTLE, nor theology, like PLATO, with his physics: and the objection is not only absurd in itself, but so much the more so, because the methods of inquiring into nature, implied in it and opposed to that of ANAXAGORAS, are infinitely absurd. I acknowledge, might ANAXAGORAS say, a supreme mind that disposed and ordered the whole frame of the universe, that gave it motion and set the great machine a going under the influence and direction of second causes, which proceed and work effects according to the original impressions that divine wisdom and power made uniformly on all matter, or differently on the different elements of it. These original

\* Il a été imprimé a la matiere par le même esprit qui l'a créé. La doctrine de PLATON.

† — Tanquam machinâ utitur intellectu, &c. ARIST.

§ — Magis caetera omnia, quam intellectum, causam eorum quae fiunt ponit.

ARIST.

|| — Ex mentis rationisque regula — EUSEB.



impressions, which proceed from the inconceivable energy of the first efficient cause, and this order of second causes which proceeds from them, I call laws of nature. Knowledge of the first is wholly unattainable. I presume therefore to speak seldom of it, and always hypothetically. Knowledge of the second may be attained in some degree by observation and experiment, and by no other means. By these we may rise a little way from particular to general and more general causes, and within these bounds I confine my physical researches.

IF ANAXAGORAS held this discourse, whatever cavils might be made by atomic or other philosophers to some of the terms he employed, we should be obliged to confess that he talked very rationally. Logic came into mode after his time. But logic, to speak like my lord BACON, cannot reach the subtilty of nature, and by catching at what it cannot hold, serves rather to establish and fix error, than to open the way to truth. I may say too, after men of the greatest name in philosophy, what it would become me ill to pronounce on my own authority, that ARISTOTLE rendered himself as ridiculous by applying logic to natural philosophy, as DES CARTES rendered himself estimable by the application of geometry to it. As to theology, they who abuse it by mixing it with physics, any farther than ANAXAGORAS did, degrade the Supreme Being in their ideas, and lead men back towards polytheism, or to something very like it at least. Which is the less pardonable, because it is done wantonly, as it were, and without any apparent motive but impertinent curiosity, or as impertinent vanity. They are unable to conceive how body can act at all, and therefore they suppose the immediate presence and action of an incorporeal agent in every operation of corporeal nature. But to what purpose? aether, it is said, that pure invisible active fire, permeates the hardest bodies, or gravitation or attraction



traction intercedes all body, even the "minima naturae." Is not this now to ascend high enough in the series of second causes? Or if we cannot conceive how aether performs of itself, and without any concurrent cause, the operations, and produces the effects which chemists ascribe to it, do we hope to discover how mind acts on aether, or concurrently with it? Will any man, who is in his senses, expect to discover what those original impressions are, or how they were given by the supreme mind, which determine aether in this manner, and make it the sensible cause of these effects? I think not. They who believe that the newtonian attraction is no original nor universal property of matter, will do extremely well to attempt the improvement of this system, by discovering the physical or metaphysical cause of it. They who believe it such a property will inquire no farther, nor agitate their minds, nor beat their brains, to discover the cause, and in hope to determine how this property was impressed originally on matter. A leibnitzian who does not believe any such original universal property, nor any thing more than a new phaenomenon to have been discovered, should consequentially attempt the improvement I have just mentioned. But I think he would rather attempt to demolish by logic, what has been erected on experiment, and geometry, without being able to substitute any thing so good in the room of it. He would require of the newtonian, to give him the sufficient reason of such a property in matter. He would retire from the visible corporeal world to the intellectual world of ideas, and endeavour to make the inquiry, that he could carry on no farther in physics, end in metaphysics. The newtonian, if he was wise, would refuse to follow him, lest the inquiry should end after much labor of abstract meditation as oddly as that of LEIBNITZ did, when he could find the sufficient reason of extension in nothing better than non-extended substances, in those simple beings his monades.

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As it is unreasonable to indulge the foolish desire of knowing, or the impertinent desire of appearing to know, beyond the reach and comprehension of our very limited faculties in all cases, so it is particularly both prophane and injurious to true theism to assume the immediate presence and action of the Supreme Being in all the operations of corporeal nature; however the assumption may be palliated by metaphysical distinctions, and how innocent soever the intentions of those who make it may be. They who do this, do in effect reduce God in their ideas, notwithstanding all the magnificent expressions which they employ, to be a sort of plastic intelligent nature, working constantly on matter, if not in it. The notion is much the same with that which the pagans entertained. It is only less reverential to the Supreme Being than theirs was. They gave this employment to a third God, who was in that hypothesis the second link in that chain of being that reached down from God to man. These christian philosophers and divines give it to the Supreme Being himself; for they profess that they adore this Being in his unity, and have no other God but him. We are forced to help our conceptions of the divine nature by images taken from human nature, and the imperfections of this nature are our excuse. But then we must take care not to make humanity the measure of divinity, and much more not to make the last the least of the two. When we have raised our idea of any human excellency as high as we are able, it remains a very limited idea. When we apply it to God, we must add to it therefore our negative idea, or our notion of infinity; that is, we must not confine it by the same, nor suppose it confined by any limitations whatever. Thus when we speak of the world the work of God, we must not conceive it to have been made by a laborious progression, and to have remained at last imperfect like the works of men.

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We must conceive on the contrary, as well as we can, that God willed it to exist, and it existed; that he wills it to continue, and it continues distinct from the workman, like any human work, and infinitely better fitted by the contrivance and disposition of it to answer all the purposes of the divine architect, without his immediate and continual interposition. To think otherwise is to measure divinity by a more scanty measure than humanity, and, because we cannot conceive how the operations of this vast machine are performed, to account for them by supposing it, in this instance, less perfect than a machine of human execution. Carry a clock to the wild inhabitants of the cape of Good Hope. They will soon be convinced that intelligence made it, and none but the most stupid will imagine that this intelligence is in the hand that they see move, and in the wheels that they see turn. Those among them, who pretend to greater sagacity than the rest, may perhaps suspect that the workman is concealed in the clock, and there conducts invisibly all the motions of it. The first of these hottentot philosophers are, you see, more rational than atheists; the second are more so than the heathen naturalists, and the third are just at a pitch with some modern metaphysicians.

THE same objection was pushed by PLATO against ANAXAGORAS on this farther consideration, that, by insisting on second causes alone, he neglected the contemplation of final causes and to “penetrate the designs of that Supreme Spirit who governs the world; whilst SOCRATES undertook to explain all nature by the fitnesses and unfitnesses of things, and rather to give men great views, and to elevate their minds, than to instruct them in natural philosophy\*.” I have touched this subject, I believe, already in part, and enough to shew, after my lord BACON, that the method ANAXAGORAS took, and our modern

\* DACIER on the doctrine of PLATO.

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philosophers have pursued with so much honor to themselves, and so much benefit to mankind, tended to the advancement of real knowledge; whereas the contrary method tended to obstruct, and did really obstruct it. But in this place, and without repeating what has been said before, I must examine the objection in another view, and shew by a comparison of the two methods, that SOCRATES and PLATO, who were in all things the same, as PLUTARCH says \*, substituted fantastic in lieu of real knowledge, and corrupted science to the very source; that of the first philosophy in a particular manner, and by such assumptions, and such a method of reasoning as continue the taint to this day.

THEY discovered a first intelligent cause, as ANAXAGORAS had done, "à posteriori," that is, by the only true way by which we are able to make this discovery. The reflections which SOCRATES made on the creatures, as we learn from XENOPHON †, demonstrated to him that the Creator of the world was not chance. It might have been expected from the character of SOCRATES, that he would have confined his speculations to the same principle of reasoning, or have controuled them by it. But he did the contrary. XENOPHON, who took minutes of his discourses, accused PLATO of corrupting the doctrine of their common master, and DIOGENES LAERTIUS says, that PLATO ascribed to him many things which he never taught. This writer quotes for it even the authority of SOCRATES himself; for he relates, that when this philosopher heard the *lysis* read, he cried out "oh HERCULES! how many things does this young man feign of me?" But notwithstanding these testimonies, and without entering into the quarrel between XENOPHON and PLATO, like GELLIUS, ATHENAEUS, and others, it would be easy to prove by several authorities, and even by

\* De placit. phil.

† De memorab.

that



that of XENOPHON, that if SOCRATES did not say all that PLATO made him say, yet he advanced many points of doctrine much more improper to be subjects of inquiry, than many which he forbid to be made such. In short, tho he is said to have drawn philosophy from the clouds, and tho he did in fact prefer the study of morality to that of physics, yet he mounted to the clouds himself, and lost himself in them. How could he do otherwise? when he declared that the two offices of philosophy are the contemplation of God, and the abstraction of the soul from corporeal sense \*. Men, who are presumptuous and mad enough to think themselves capable of such contemplation and such abstraction, may well begin their inquiries out of the bounds of human knowledge: and they who do so, run a great risque of getting never into them. Such were these famous philosophers: and that you may the better comprehend their method, I choose to set it before you in the light in which it stands in the Phaedo. You will see it there, and perhaps it is the only thing worth observing in the whole dialogue, with this advantage, that the method of reasoning “à priori” is contrasted with that of reasoning “à posteriori.”

IN the account which PHAEDO gives of the discourse SOCRATES held immediately before his death, concerning the immortality of the soul, two objections that were made to him are mentioned. It was objected that the soul, being nothing more than a kind of harmony resulting from the composition of the body, instead of lasting longer than the body, must decay with it, and even perish before it. In the next place, the soul having been compared to a taylor, who makes himself several suits of cloaths, and wears them out one after another, the objector urges, that she may wear out herself at last by the fatigue of

\* STANLEY from PLATO.



going thro so many generations, and perish with one body, tho she has out lived many. Such weighty objections threw the auditors, who had been convinced before by the no less weighty arguments of SOCRATES, into doubt and perplexity. SOCRATES felt none, as you will believe of course: and PHAEDO proceeds to relate how he continued the disputation, how he convinced CEBES one of the objectors, and how he left SIMONIAS the other without a reply. In order to do this the more effectually, he thinks it necessary to consider the causes of generation and corruption: and he says on that occasion, that he had been desirous in his youth to study physics, or the history of nature, as he calls this science. Now the more he studied nature, that he might discover the cause of generation and corruption, and the constitution of human bodies, the more blind and the more ignorant, it seems, he grew: and this we shall believe the more easily still, if we consider how superficially his scholar talks, and how grossly he blunders too, whenever he touches these subjects, which he affects to treat as matters of amusement rather than of serious application. SOCRATES became acquainted with second causes and effects in the course of this study; but he could go no higher, and he remained much dissatisfied with such imperfect knowledge. He was therefore extremely rejoiced when he fell by accident on the works of ANAXAGORAS; for that philosopher teaching that mind or intelligence had disposed and ordered and was the cause of all things, he expected to find in those writings the sufficient reason of LEIBNITZ, not only how but why this mind or intelligence had disposed and ordered every thing, why every thing is as it is thro the whole extent of nature. But he was again wonderfully disappointed. ANAXAGORAS proceeded on observation and experiment, such as he was able to make, to consider how second causes work in the corporeal system, and the production of the phaenomena, under the direction, and by the energy of the first. But  
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he presumed not to go up to the first, to discover how this direction was given, how this energy was communicated, nor, in a word, what the designs, the reasons, and the ends of the divine architect were. SOCRATES therefore, who aimed at nothing less than knowledge of this kind, despised ANAXAGORAS, and considering what he had a mind to know, without any regard to the means he had of knowing, he despised physics and resorted to metaphysics. There he and his scholar found the immaterial forms of things, eternal ideas and incorporeal substances; by which if you should ask me what I understand him to have meant, I should be obliged in conscience to answer you as honest CEBES answered SOCRATES, "per Jovem haud multum." Whatever they are, they exist in the divine intellect. There we may, and there we ought to contemplate them; for the Logos or second God in the platonic trinity was an assemblage, a congeries, as CUDWORTH calls him, of beings crowded into one, the place of ideas in the platonism of MALBRANCHE, and the same thing to the soul, as the soul is to the body; for so we must understand an expositor and translator of PLATO, or deny him any meaning at all\*.

IF you would know how SOCRATES pursues his sublime metaphysical method of investigating nature, you may please to imagine ANAXAGORAS and him in your garden, and yourself sauntering between them. You admire the beauty and smell of one of your flowers, and you ask the philosophers what makes it so fine and so sweet? The first talks to you of the figure of the flower, of the variety of colours which set off one another, and the several tints which run into one another and beget a pleasing confusion. He talks to you of the different strainers thro which the sap is filtered, and of the great alterations that he has observed to be wrought to the taste as well as to the

\* DACIER Arg. du PHAEDON.



fight and smell in fruits as well as flowers by this operation of nature. But he owns very frankly, that his knowledge extends no further, and that he cannot so much as guess at the inward constitutions, and the real essences of substances. SOCRATES asks ANAXAGORAS whether his senses do not deceive him, when they give him ideas that are not full nor true representations of the outward objects? Whether he does not perceive, that sensible objects are always in a flux, and never exist; whereas intellectual objects are permanent, and exist always? Whether he can pretend therefore to have any thing more than opinion about the former, and whether the latter alone are not objects of knowledge? Whether the intellectual contemplation of these is not disturbed by the impressions of the other, and whether we are not kept from knowledge by taking opinion for it? Such questions as these, and many more, we may suppose, that SOCRATES would ask according to his usual style, in reply to the Ionic philosopher; after which he would bid you shut your eyes and stop your nose, if you are curious to know why the flower is fine and sweet. He would bid you raise your thoughts by intense meditation, and an abstraction from all particulars, up to the immaterial forms, the first fine and the first sweet. It is by them, he would say, that this flower becomes fine and sweet, just as a thing is big by bigness, or little by littleness, just as one is one by the participation of unity, and two are two by the participation of duality.

IF, in the course of your conversation, it should turn on moral subjects, the same method of reasoning would be applied even to them. Should you ask ANAXAGORAS what goodness is, or justice? He might bid you perhaps turn your eyes inward first, then survey mankind, observe the wants of individuals, the benefits of society, and from these particulars frame the general notions

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ons of goodness and justice. He might go a step further, and add, this is human goodness and human justice, such as we can comprehend, such as we can exercise, and such as the supreme mind has made it both our duty and our interest to exercise, by the constitution of the human system, and by the relations which arise in it; from all which our notions of goodness and justice result, and are compounded. Of divine goodness and divine justice, might this philosopher conclude, I am unable to frame any adequate notions, and instead of conceiving such distinct moral attributes in the Supreme Being, we ought perhaps to conceive nothing more than this, that there are various applications of one eternal reason, which it becomes us little to analyse into attributes.

THE language of SOCRATES would be very opposite to this. He would bid you turn your eyes from the moral, as well as the physical world to the intellectual, nor aim at knowledge where it is not to be had, but seek it where it is alone to be had. He would bid you disengage your soul from the incumberment of your body by purification and intense meditation, rise from sense to pure intellect, and, despising the low drudgery that the acquisition of particular opinions requires, aspire to nothing less than general knowledge, a knowledge of the immaterial forms of things, which are antecedent to actual existence, a knowledge which may be obtained in part now, and which will be complete hereafter. He would proceed and insist, for this is the express doctrine of the Phaedo, that when you have once mounted up to these eternal, independent, and unalterable ideas, you should make them the foundations or first principles of all your reasoning, and receive as true, or reject as false, whatever you observe to be agreeable, or repugnant to them. Thus you would become able to imitate God in the exercise of goodness, justice, and every other moral virtue;

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since his and your ideas of these virtues would be taken from the same originals: and SOCRATES might the better conjure you, as he conjured his auditors in the prison, to make yourself as like as possible to your great exemplar, the Supreme Being.

I THINK you are not extremely conversant in the works of PLATO: and you may suspect therefore that I aggravate the impertinence of his doctrines. But the truth is, that as I have made ANAXAGORAS say nothing more than what he would, or might have said, conformably to his manner of philosophizing; so I have made SOCRATES advance nothing which the PHAEDO in particular, as well as PLATO'S writings in general, will not vouch. But since I have brought this rambling essay down to the founder of the academy, it is necessary that something more should be said about him and his philosophy; for his appearance, and the institution of his school make a most remarkable epocha in the history of the first philosophy. So remarkable, and so necessary to be well surveyed, that we cannot otherwise discern the true origin of the first philosophy, and the theology which prevails at this hour in our own country, and among all the nations of the West.

#### S E C T I O N   V I I I .

SIGNS, symbols, sacerdotal letters, sacred dialects, and hieroglyphics were employed by the egyptian and eastern nations, to preserve and to perpetuate their knowledge. Strange means indeed! For how imperfectly, how darkly, how uncertainly must this knowledge have been conveyed both to and from the greek philosophers? What precision or clearness can we imagine, for instance, that DEMOCRITUS could find in those  
ethics



ethics which he is said to have transcribed from the columns of ACICARUS in Babylonia? These monuments of egyptian and eastern philosophy were explained, it may be said, to DEMOCRITUS and to the other Greeks, who went into those countries for instruction in every part of science, by the brachmans, the magi, the gymnosophists, and the egyptian priests, into whose colleges they were admitted, and into whose rites they were initiated. I believe that this was so. I believe that the egyptian and eastern masters explained and commented the hieroglyphical or sacerdotial text to their grecian scholars, and I believe further, that the scholars set up for masters soon. The philosophy they had learned, marvellous and mystic, suited their genius extremely, and was particularly adapted to their humour, in ages when every man who had pretensions of this kind affected to institute a new sect, or to distinguish himself at least by some new hypothesis. But what was the effect of all this. Did they become more intelligible than their masters, or was their knowledge more real? We have in our hands the book JAMBlicus wrote in answer to the questions which PORPHYRY had asked. JAMBlicus wrote long after the times we speak of here; but his sum of theology and theurgic knowledge was extracted from assyrian and chaldaean memorials, from the columns of the first MERCURY, and from books that contained all the doctrines of the antients, concerning matters of a divine nature, which were probably the books of the second MERCURY, or such as went under his name. In short, from the same sources, from whence the Greeks had so many centuries before derived their knowledge real and pretended. Was it grown more clear? Was it not in JAMBlicus, and in all the greek philosophers, who mingled up their own conceits with those of their egyptian and eastern masters as unintelligible in jargon, as the original of it all could be in hieroglyphics or sacerdotial letters.

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SUCH we may conclude was the first philosophy among the Greeks, from the beginning of their philosophical aera, which we date no higher than PHERECYDES of Syros and THALES, dark in its original, and rendered more dark and more confus'd by men who grafted incessantly one degree of fantastical knowledge on another, and who for want of any criterion to fix their opinions, wandered into every hypothesis which their warm imaginations, overheated by those of Egypt and the East, could suggest to them.

IN the midst of this darkness and confusion, PLATO arose, about two centuries after the commencement that has been set of the philosophical aera. If he dispell'd any of this darkness, it was by introducing a false light into the first philosophy, that led men oftener out of the way of truth than into it: and as to the confusion, which vague notions and systems of mere imagination necessarily produce, there was never any greater than that which arose in metaphysics and theology, after platonism began to be dogmatically taught in the school of Alexandria, and in those of christianity.

THIS philosopher availed himself of all the fantastical science that was then in vogue. He went into Egypt, he heard CRATYLUS, a scholar of HERACLITUS. He had a philosophical correspondence with ARCHYTAS: and, that he might improve himself the more in pythagorean doctrines, he went into Italy and conversed with the principal men of that broken sect. He was a follower and a scholar of SOCRATES from his youth. Neither SOCRATES nor he had any great claim to the honor of being first inventors or teachers in any part of science. That the master reduced speculation to action we cannot doubt: and TULLY in his academical questions describes him pompously



poufly as the first who called philosophy off from objects which are placed by nature beyond our reach, and which had employed all the philosophers before him, to the business and duty of common life, and to the consideration of virtue and vice, of good and evil. But public and private morality, and all the rules of good government, to say it by the way, had been taught long before SOCRATES, by SOLON and the other sages of Greece: and if we compare the success of his mission at Athens with that of PYTHAGORAS at Crotona, as it is represented by JUSTIN \*, we shall find no reason to think him either the first or the greatest missionary of natural religion. Sure it is, that he devoted himself to this work with much sincerity, perseverance and zeal, and was the martyr of a much purer doctrine than many a modern missionary has died for teaching. All we are to understand, therefore, by what is mentioned above, seems to be this, that he confined his lessons of philosophy to ethics: and even this cannot be true, if his lessons were such as PLATO represents them. I cannot help thinking, that TULLY was more attached to SOCRATES on account of his academical, than his moral character.

THERE was a greater simplicity, no doubt, in his manner of teaching than in that of PLATO, and in the doctrines too, very probably, that he taught. When questions were asked him about another world, he answered with much simplicity, that he had never been there, nor had ever seen any one who came from thence. PLATO pretended to know more of the matter, and to have his knowledge from one who had been there, and whom the infernal judges had sent to reveal what he had seen and heard. This idle tale was taken probably from the magi or the Chaldaeans, if this ERUS ARMENIUS,

\* Lib. 20.



mentioned in the tenth book of his politics, was one of the ZOROASTERS: and as idle as it is, it got into history \*, and has been recorded gravely, among other stories of extraordinary events. But tho the doctrines, as well as the manners of SOCRATES, were more simple than those of PLATO; yet we know from PLUTARCH, and even by the discourses which XENOPHON as well as PLATO ascribes to him, that he entertained and propagated many of those theological and metaphysical notions, which are not, most certainly, parts of natural theology; because they cannot be necessarily deduced from any knowledge that we have of nature.

METAPHYSICS may be said to have succeeded mythology and physics in Greece about this time, tho the name was not invented till long after. PHERECYDES, PYTHAGORAS, and PARMENIDES made strong pretensions to a science of this sort. But the first and the last founded no sect; and that of the other was soon dispersed and extinguished: tho DIOGENES LAERTIUS says, by mistake doubtless, that it continued eighteen generations. The writings of these philosophers being soon lost, nor any set of men remaining long to preserve a body of their doctrines, PLATO and ARISTOTLE had an opportunity of decking themselves in their plumes, and of coming down to posterity as originals on this and other subjects, on which they were far from being such.

THE fables and the superstitious notions that prevailed among the vulgar of all ranks, in the days of polytheism, about their gods, became soon too gross to satisfy those who began in every country to emerge out of ignorance, and to cultivate and improve their reason. In vain did the philosophers and

\* VAL. MAX. l. 1. MACROB. somn. SCIP.



priests endeavour to soften them to such men as these, by all the mystery of their mysteries, into which SOCRATES would never submit to be initiated, that is, by their secret doctrine. Not only the unity of the Supreme Being, but the absurdity of supposing him to exist a system of matter like other material beings, was discovered, and the notion of a spiritual substance was established. Whether this notion was entertained first of the Supreme Being, and was applied afterwards to the human soul; whether it was entertained first of the human soul, and was applied afterwards to the Supreme Being; or whether the idea of spirit and spiritual substance was determined exactly either by antient philosophers, or by christian fathers, as we have determined ours, if even ours is as much determined as we suppose it to be, I shall not inquire at this time. All I mean to observe is, that an intellectual world of subordinate and of created gods, of daemons, of souls, and other spiritual inhabitants, being once assumed, as it was together with the unity of God, if that which is demonstrated may be said in any sense or on any occasion to be assumed, the philosophers did much the same thing in a metaphysical, as they and the priests had done in a mythological way. They made as many spiritual beings as they wanted, and they generated them as they could. The head of JUPITER opened, and PALLAS the goddess of wisdom came out of it, according to the mythologists. This image was too gross, and the fable too impertinent to be retained. PLATO therefore refined metaphysically upon it, and supposed, for in him it was mere supposition, a second god, the logos, the word, the wisdom of the first, an emanation proceeding from the first. When this metaphysical generation by emanation was once established in opinion, metaphysics peopled heaven as fast as ever physics, by the help of mythology, had done: and it is impossible to consider without astonishment, how these spiritual beings were multiplied from age to age, by pythagorician



and platonic philosophers, by jewish cabbalists, and by christian divines both orthodox and heretical. A new jargon grew up to express these chimerical notions, and very often to express things of which the learned in those days, as in ours, had not themselves any notion at all. Expansions and diffusions of the most excellent nature, which PYTHAGORAS had learned from the zoroastrian theology to be a pure and perfect light, and which some of the greek philosophers called an intelligent fire, processions, profusions, and extensions of the first simple substance, superior lights in the world of emanations, called sephiroth by the Jews, aeons male and female, supersubstantial and substantial beings, numbers, ideas, words, forms, souls that inhabit in heaven and in the stars, all these terms were used, I say, till they passed for terms of a real science. Thus metaphysics constituted a sort of polytheism, as mythology had done before: and to shew you how little advantage these refined doctrines had over the other, I will bring an instance which I find in Mr. SELDEN, and which is plainly an ingraftment on the metaphysical doctrines of PYTHAGORAS and PLATO; tho it be of a later date, as it must needs be, since it is taken from the Jews who had most probably no knowledge of chaldaic philosophy till they went into captivity, nor of greek philosophy till after the expedition of ALEXANDER. Nothing appeared more shocking in all the pagan mythology, than the carnal copulations of gods and goddesses with one another and with mortals, than their adulteries and their rapes, than gods begetting children and goddesses lying in: and yet we may see by a passage of PLUTARCH, in the life of NUMA POMPILIUS, that these opinions were not only entertained by the vulgar, but were matters of grave speculation and of theological dispute, as much as the incarnation of the Word has been among Christians: for he says that the egyptian doctors made this distinction; they held that a god might get a woman with child,  
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but that a man could have no carnal commerce with a goddess. Now these copulations were carried on between souls in the spiritual world, according to the cabbalists, those famous interpreters of jewish theology, tho in a more decent manner, and in lawful marriage, as we learn from SELDEN \*. "The cabbalists, he says, assert, that as a soul descends from heaven into the embryo of every man, so a new soul is sent from above into every profelyte of justice; that which he had whilst he was a pagan either vanishing or returning." This new demand of souls, you see, required a new supply: and these ingenious metaphysicians soon found one that was more than sufficient. They imagined four palaces in heaven, where the souls of innumerable holy women are married to the souls of holy men; "and, they add, that as in marriages here on earth, bodies copulate with bodies, so, in those celestial marriages, souls copulate with souls, light with light †." Would not this sample of cabbalistical knowledge make any learned divine grieve, that the seventy books of this kind, which ESDRAS had collected for the use of wise men, are lost?

METAPHYSICS not only succeeded physics and mythology in the manner here observed, and became as great a fund of superstition, but they were carried still farther, and corrupted all real knowledge, as well as retarded the progress of it. Metaphysicians have not been quite agreed about the nature and object of their supposed science. Those we have last mentioned may be called and distinguished by the title, if they like it, of pneumatic philosophers, since their object is spirit and

\* De jure nat. et gen. juxta discip. Ebraeor. l. 2. c. 4.

† Addunt ut in conjugis hujus mundi, seu terrestribus, corpora corporibus junguntur, ita in alterius illius, seu coelestibus conjugis, esse conjunctionem animarum cum animabus, luminis cum lumine.



spiritual substances; how ridiculous soever it be to imagine spirit less an object of natural philosophy than body. Those we are about to mention may be decorated with a greek name likewise, and be called ontologists or ontosophists; since their object is, being in the abstract, "ens quatenus ens." But the name that suits best all the parts of metaphysics, is that of the praeternatural science; because it is synonymous to chimerical science. Who, indeed, but the author of nature, can see and know to the utmost extent of it? And who that is not delirious, therefore, can presume to see and know beyond it? What principles can be laid, or how can any be laid, of a science that is supposed to be a first and universal science, and to contain the principles of all others, which are to be deduced from it? One might think that nothing can shew so marvelously the wanderings of the human mind, and the prevalence of imagination over all the rational faculties, as this inveterate habit of dogmatizing about spirit and spiritual substances, and even about God, the Father of spirits. But there is something still more absurd in the other part of metaphysics. In this, the foundations are laid in knowledge. Foundations narrow, and in no degree proportionable to the hypotheses raised upon them; but knowledge so real that it is intuitive, the knowledge that they have of their own spirits, minds, or souls, in a word of their own intellectual powers. In the other, the foundations are laid in a supposition which we know, or may know, intuitively to be false; for we may be as certain that the human mind cannot make the abstractions these philosophers pretend to make, as we are certain that we can walk or run but cannot fly: and yet this whole branch of philosophy is built on the supposition that the human mind can and does make them. Such were the numbers of PYTHAGORAS, if we know what they were: such were the ideas of PLATO, and such is that fantastic science which perverts the whole order  
of



of real science, by pretending to descend from scientific and axiomatical down to particular knowledge, and from universals to singulars, instead of attempting conformably to nature and reason the very reverse of this.

THE supposed abstract ideas, whether simple or complex, were wrought up, by warm imaginations, into eternal essences, incorporeal substances, independent and divine beings that resided in or with the supreme intellect, and this may be properly called the first apotheosis of folly \*; for the same men soon imagined a second. The second was that of the human mind or soul. The human mind or soul was of divine original, according to PYTHAGORAS and PLATO, and returned back to the soul of the universe when it left the body; to that soul which is of the same kind and nature, “ ad id quod ejusdem generis et naturae est †.” Now the soul contracting much impurity in its descent into the body, and whilst it continues in that prison, these philosophers taught that transmigrations of the soul thro several bodies served not only as some degree of punishment, but likewise to purge it from these pollutions: and this was the famous doctrine of a metempsychosis, at least of PLATO’S; for between his and that of PYTHAGORAS there seems to have been some difference. In one respect, the difference is obvious enough. The metempsychosis of PYTHAGORAS was I think general, and that of PLATO not. PLATO classed souls at their going out of the bodies they had informed into three sorts, the incurable, the curable, and the pure. The first went to the devil, as we should speak, at once. Transmigration served the purpose of the second, just as well as your purgatory, and prepared them to ascend to their antient habitations in “ domestica quasi — sedes §.”

\* Stultitiae apotheosis. BACON.

† PLATO.

§ PHOTIUS.

The



The last, having been purified before death, wanted no purification after it. For this reason it was that the philosophy we refer to, inculcated so much the necessity of abstracting the soul from matter, and of dying during life a philosophical death; the consequence of which was regeneration, being born anew, and putting off the old man to speak in christian phrase \*. Thus the soul might be accustomed to contemplate, in pure intellect, abstract forms and eternal essences; to retain or to recover by reminiscence it's former knowledge of real beings, "vere entium †;" to rise to that supercelestial place and the field of truth, where souls feed on divine ideas ‡. By such excursions as these, not unlike to those that are so ingeniously feigned in the world of DES CARTES §, the soul may know all things intuitively, like God, in this world, and become God in another.

— "ubi deposito conscendes corpore coelum  
"Immortalis eris divus ||."

EMPEDOCLES imagined his soul to be so pure, that a god might be said to dwell in him, and on that account called himself a god, "seipsum appellavit deum \*\*." PLATO softened this, by adding modestly, "quantum licet homini," as much as a man may be so: but that great pneumatic philosopher ATHANASIVS was bolder than PLATO, if he said, what I have seen somewhere quoted from his writings, that by a participation of the same spirit we are united to the Deity ††.

\* JAMBLICUS.

† Ibid.

‡ — In locum supra coelestem, inque campum veritatis — elevatas, divinis ideis pasci. PHOT.

§ Le monde de DES CARTES, a critical satire on the cartesian philosophy by father DANIEL the jesuit.

|| Carm. aurea.

\*\* SECT. EMPIRIC. adv. MATH.

†† Participazione spiritus conjungimur Deitati.



SECTION IX.

UPON the whole, we may venture to pronounce that metaphysicians have always proceeded on a false supposition, by neglecting the real phaenomena of the human mind, and by ascribing to it an imaginary power. We may venture to say, that their principles became prophanè and impious, when they deified their own ideas by the first apotheosis I have mentioned, and that they terminated in blasphemy, enthusiasm, and madness, when they deified their own souls by the second. Such philosophy as this, however, suited extremely well the genius, and, if I mistake not, the design of PLATO. He was much more a poetical philosopher than HOMER was a philosophical poet: and he had the worst grace imaginable when he banished the latter out of his utopia, whose writings, with no more help than his own require to fix the allegorical and mystical senses, would have done just as much good in his whimsical republic. If HOMER has done no good, he has done no lasting hurt to philosophy; whereas PLATO, and his scholar ARISTOTLE, did not only improve much error, but diverted men from the pursuit of truth: and this they did, not only in their own age, but have continued to do it at several periods, and in several degrees, down to ours. PLATO treated every subject, whether corporeal or intellectual, like a bombast poet and a mad theologian \*, “per ambages Deorumque ministeria.” ARISTOTLE, like an ontosophist and a dialectician, with all the cavil † of words and captious dispu-

\* ——— Tumidus poeta, theologus mente captus. BACON de interp. nat.

† ——— Verborum cavillatio — et captiosae disputationes, quae acumen irritum exercent. SEN. ep. 45.



tation, which serve to nothing more nor better than to exercise a vain and trifling subtilty of wit, and to prove equally well, for instance, that \* mice gnaw or do not gnaw cheese, which is an example that *SENECA* brings by way of ridicule on such philosophers as these, and which might have been applied very strongly to *ZENO* the founder of his sect, to *CHRYSIPPUS*, and all the heroes of the portic. But I choose to confirm, what I advance concerning the characters of these two philosophers, in better words and on a better authority than my own. My lord *BACON* observes, that almost all the antient naturalists, such as *EMPEDOCLES*, *ANAXAGORAS*, *ANAXIMENES*, *HERACLITUS*, and *DEMOCRITUS* subjected mind to things †. That is, they never lost sight of the phaenomena of the visible world, but made them the rule, as well as object, of their inquiries: and what is said about this object of physics, the corporeal world, will hold equally well about the other, the intellectual. But § *PLATO*, he adds, subjected the world to thought, and *ARISTOTLE* even thought to words: the study of philosophy turning into disputation and plausible discourse, and a severe inquisition after truth being laid aside. The meaning of all which is plainly this, that these men turned physics into metaphysics and logic; that in order to make, or to appear to make, which answered their end perhaps as well, important discoveries about the nature and truth of things, one of them had recourse to abstract meditation, which agitates the mind in a perpetual round, and can never terminate in certainty for want of a suf-

\* Mus syllaba est: mus autem caseum rodit: syllaba ergo caseum rodit. Mus syllaba est: syllaba autem caseum non rodit: mus ergo caseum non rodit. *Ibid.* ep. 48.

† ——— Mentem rebus submiserunt.

§ At *PLATO* mundum cogitationibus, *ARISTOTELES* vero etiam cogitationes verbis adjudicarunt, vergentibus etiam tum hominum studiis ad disputationes et sermones, et veritatis inquisitionem severiorem missam facientibus. *PARM.* Telef. et Dem. philos.

ficient



ficient criterion ; and the other, to an artful use of words by which a learned ambiguity is maintained, and the whole business of philosophers is to tie and untie these verbal knots \*. For these reasons, and surely they are decisive, the learned chancellor concludes, that their systems of philosophy ought rather to be rejected in the whole kind than to be refuted particularly, since they are the systems of men who affected to speak much, and who knew little †.

It was said, in the beginning of this essay, that the pretensions to science unattainable, which end always in fantastical hypotheses, might be excusable in those who made the first essays in philosophy, but were without excuse in those who succeeded them, in the course of philosophical generations. The reflection was levelled, and very justly, at PLATO and ARISTOTLE in a particular manner. To pass any such judgment on those who went before them would be very unfair ; because their writings are not in our hands, as those of these two philosophers are, if indeed the canon of ARISTOTLE'S be as well ascertained as that of PLATO'S, and because the little we can learn of their opinions has been delivered down to us in broken incoherent passages, in confused and inaccurate collections, and by men very often who did not understand them, or who had their reasons for misrepresenting them. To conceive this the better, we need only consider what informations we have of philosophical systems, more modern than those we speak of, and given us by men who were themselves philosophers. I might instance in many, but I will con-

\* Nectimus nodos, et ambiguam significationem verbis illigamus deinde dissolvimus. SEN. ubi sup.

† Quare hujusmodi placita magis toto genere reprehendenda, quam propriè confutanda videntur. Sunt enim eorum qui multum loqui volunt, et parum scire. BAC. PARM. &c.



tent myself to ask, whether he that should take all his notions of stoicism from VELLEIUS, or of epicureanism from BALBUS, or of both from the declamation of COTTA, would do much justice to the portic, or to the garden of Gargettus? These philosophies were absurd enough of themselves; but they were made more so by representation.

WE know, in general, that there were philosophers in Greece of great merit before PLATO and ARISTOTLE; that PLATO borrowed from them, as well as from HOMER, without any acknowledgments of the debt, and that ARISTOTLE did his best to defame or destroy their works: for ARISTOTLE, like an ottoman prince, as my lord BACON was fond of observing, endeavoured to put all his brethren to death, and succeeded in his barbarous design\*. Among these, and probably at the head of them, DEMOCRITUS may be placed. His great reputation gave occasion to silly people, as great reputations do sometimes, to invent a thousand silly stories of him. But of all these, no one was more impertinent than that of his putting out his eyes that he might meditate with less distraction, which PLUTARCH, in his treatise about curiosity, says was false, but generally reported. Another, which we find in PLUTARCH's table discourse †, is much more in character. DEMOCRITUS, having eat a fig which had a taste of honey, far from shutting his eyes and contemplating the first sweet, he started up from his table in haste to examine the tree and the place where it grew. His maid indeed saved him that trouble by owning, that she had put the figs in a honey pot. But his first, and as it were habitual, impulse was to make use of his eyes, and to examine the phaenomenon by observation and experiment,

\* — Illum scilicet, ottomannorum more, in fratribus trucidandis occupatum fuisse; quod et ei ex voto successit. De interp. nat. et alibi.

† Sympos. lib. 1. c. 10.

which



which he made the rule of his inquiries, the criterion of his opinions, and the foundation of all his philosophy. "Aetatem inter experimenta consumpsit," he passed his whole life in experiments.

DIODEGENES LAERTIUS witnesseth how averse PLATO was to this philosopher, and in truth PYTHAGORAS was more according to his heart. But it were to be wished, since PLATO was to have so great an influence on the progress of science, and since his spirit was to possess philosophers for so many ages, that he had taken his method of philosophizing from DEMOCRITUS rather than from the Samian. The Samian had been instructed, in his travels, in all the parts of philosophy, and he brought particularly the true solar system, no doubt, from his eastern masters. He brought likewise many of their superstitious customs and opinions, and involved, like them, all his doctrines, even the plainest precepts of morality, in mystery. He appears, by the accounts which we find of him in DIODEGENES LAERTIUS, in PLUTARCH, in PORPHYRY and JAMBLICUS, to have learned among the egyptian priests and the magi the great secret of pursuing ambition under the veil of learning, wisdom, and sanctity, and to have formed in his travels the project which he undertook at his return to execute the project of opening a school, founding a sect, instituting a religion, and governing all the greek colonies in Italy and Sicily. DEMOCRITUS travelled, like him, and went to the same schools. In this they were alike. But they differed much in the other respects, which could not fail to determine PLATO against DEMOCRITUS, and in favor of PYTHAGORAS. Neither of them were magicians, I suppose, any more than our learned friar, whom the ignorance of his age would have made to pass for such: and as the credulity of PLINY made him represent them and others to have been. But as DEMOCRITUS  
was



was no more a magician than every able naturalist, chemist, and mathematician, will appear in some ages, so he seems to have pretended to no supernatural science and power as PYTHAGORAS did, and much less, like him, to have been the delian APOLLO, or any other divine person clothed with humanity and conversing with men. In his disputes with the magi, he seems to have opposed real physics to imaginary metaphysics, and his knowledge of the animal, vegetable, and mineral world, to all their dreams about the intellectual and spiritual. What we know of the atomical system of this philosopher, whether he invented it, or LEUCIPPUS, or a certain Phoenician named MOSCHUS long before either of them, may seem little consonant to true theism: and yet his animated atoms, and his intelligent and divine species, may be reconciled to it, as well as some opinions that very orthodox divines have advanced. Philosophers may speak too little, and too much, of the Supreme Being and first cause of all things: and neither of old, nor in our days, has the due mean been enough observed. Now if it does not appear that DEMOCRITUS, whose object was not theology, and among whose works, the catalogues of which have been rather falsely lengthened than shortened, writ any treatise of that sort, we may suppose that he made too little mention, or no mention at all of the Supreme Being, without supposing him for that reason an atheist. Whereas PYTHAGORAS, who made theology his capital, reasoned always from heaven to earth, parcelled out the divine nature into a vast variety of beings, interested it and mingled it in every thing, and contrived to render physics a rhapsody of enthusiastical opinions and fables; of which proceeding the *Timaeus* in PLATO is a very strong and undeniable example. To conclude this comparison, I will only add, that if DEMOCRITUS did not acknowledge the unity of a first intelligent cause, and that was objected to him by a pythagorean platonist, for they  
grew



grew in time to be confounded together, one might ask that famous question, is it no matter “*utrum Deum neges, an infames?*” whether you deny or defame God? The ignorance may deserve pity. The defamation deserves abhorrence.

IF I have singled out these two, among the philosophers who preceded PLATO, and have dwelled so long on their different characters and different methods of philosophising, it has been to shew, the more sensibly by the contrast, how and thro what channels the wild metaphysics and all the prophane theology of the East has come down principally to these enlightened ages of the West, and how, by the pursuit of unattainable knowledge, philosophers have gone out of the true and natural road to truth into that which has led them into error, and must keep them in it, by corrupting science even in the first principles.

It is a very true observation, and a very common one, that our affections and passions put frequently a byass so secret and yet so strong on our judgments, as to make them swerve from the direction of right reason: and on this principle we must account, in great measure, for the different systems of philosophy and religion, about which men dispute so much, and fight and persecute so often. But it is not so commonly observed, tho it be equally true, that as extensive as this principle is in itself, since it extends to almost all mankind, the action of it in one single man is sometimes sufficient to extend the effects of it to millions. Many a system, and many an institution, has appeared and thrived in the world as a production of human wisdom raised to the highest pitch, and even illuminated by inspiration, which was owing, in it's origin, to the predominant passion, or to the madness of one single man. Authority comes soon to stand in the place of reason. Men come to defend



find what they never examined, and to explain what they never understood. Their system, or their institution, to which they were determined by chance, not by choice, is to them that rock of truth on which alone they can be saved from error\*: they cling to it accordingly, and doubt itself was this rock to the academicians.

WHAT has been said cannot be illustrated better than by the example of PLATO. He flourished, as we have observed, about two centuries after the commencement of the philosophical age in Greece; for I think that we must place the commencement at THALES, wherever we think fit to place the end of it. The ionic, the eleatic, the italic sects were already founded, and had made much progress and much noise in the learned world, by the public lessons, whether in regular schools or not it matters little, and by the writings and disputations of several great philosophers, by whom the honor of these schools had been supported, their different hypotheses improved, and their different methods of investigating truth defended. I have said before, that it is impossible to descend into the detail of these systems of philosophy with any assurance: and I will add, in this place, that I have never read any pretended explanations of them attempted by modern scholars, even in an intelligible manner, for this is not always the case, which might not have been for the most part altered, and sometimes contradicted entirely, on the authority of the very same fragments. One thing is certain, however, and we may affirm very safely, that the difference between attainable and unattainable, real and fantastic knowledge, and between the methods that led to one or the other of these, was not hard to be discerned after all the essays that had been made in every

\* — De rebus incognitis judicant, et ad quamcunque sunt disciplinam quasi tempestate delati, ad eam tanquam ad saxum adhaerescunt. Acad. quaest. 1, 2.

part



part of philosophy, and that were still making when PLATO arose. We may believe that there were some who did begin to discern it accordingly, how much soever their notions concerning the first philosophy had been corrupted, and the use of their reason had been perverted by egyptian and eastern prejudices. That ANAXAGORAS did, we cannot doubt; and the censure SOCRATES passes on him in the Phaedo, makes his panegyric on this head.

DEMOCRITUS passed his whole life, and he lived to be more than an hundred years of age, in a constant application to experimental philosophy. But few there were then, or will be at any other time, who prefer solitude to society, leisure to power, knowledge to wealth, and silent obscure truth to talkative and glittering error, as this philosopher did. If PLATO had followed his example, he might have made possibly a great revolution in the philosophy of his own age, and might have laid posterity under the obligation of learning from him the way to real, instead of being misled by him into chimerical, science. He might have stood like a polar star to direct future generations in their inquiries after truth, instead of becoming an ignis fatuus, that has danced before their eyes, and has led them into error. But those very dispositions of mind, and that very character which hindered PLATO from following this example, procured him all the reputation he acquired, and has enjoyed so long. In those days, as in ours, philosophers sought fame rather than truth, and the foolish applause of mankind could not fail to strengthen that natural bias.

THE greek philosophers, for the most part, resembled the greek historians mentioned by STRABO. PLATO did so most eminently. The historians, observing how fond their countrymen were of those who writ fables, turned history into ro-

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mance,



mance, and studied to make their relations marvelous and agreeable, with little regard to truth; in which they were encouraged after ALEXANDER's expedition into Asia, by the difficulty of disproving any thing they said of countries so remote. Just so did the philosophers in general, and PLATO in particular. They took their ideas and notions superficially and inaccurately from the first appearances of things, and examined and verified them as little as the others did facts. These ideas and notions were combined and compared by them as every man's fancy suggested: and they had, besides these, in the inexhaustible storehouse of fancy, as many "entia rationis" as might supply all their occasions. Thus the greek philosophy became a chaos of wild discordant opinions and hypotheses, concerning divine and human, intellectual and corporeal nature, which could neither prove themselves, nor be reconciled to one another. They were the various offspring of imagination. Of imagination that affected to rove in the divine sphere, that of possibility, and would not be confined to the human, that of actuality. These philosophical romances, in the light in which they appear to us, may be compared not amiss to AMADIS of Gaul, to PEIRCEFORREST, and the rest of those heroical legends, which were writ in defiance of history, chronology, and common sense, as the others were in defiance of nature, and real knowledge, which were the amusements of ignorant ages, and which are feigned so agreeably by CERVANTES to have turned the brains of DON QUIXOTE. I apprehend that few of them had even the merit which LA CALPRENEDE claimed in favor of his Cassandra; for he boasted that, among the fictions it contained, there was no one which might not be deemed true consistently with history: whereas in the antient philosophical hypotheses, how little soever we know of them, we know enough to be sure that there were many opinions advanced absolutely inconsistent with the nature of things, and with the dictates of  
right



right reason; such as were not only unsupported by either, but as were contradicted by both.

I HAVE touched already the principles from whence all this reasoning madness proceeded; for there is such a thing: and BUCHANAN used the expression "gens ratione furens," very properly. The man, who walked soberly about in the bedlam of Paris, and believed himself God the father, was certainly mad: and yet he reasoned extremely well when he assured the company that the other, who called himself God the son, was an impostor; because he who was the father knew him not, nor had ever seen him in heaven. Thus the philosopher, who is in such haste to arrive at general, that he neglects particular knowledge, and takes a bold leap from a few clear and distinct ideas to the first principles of things, how well soever he reasons, is mad. DES CARTES was mad, whenever he did so: and none but FONTENELLE would have made it a proof of his superiority over NEWTON, who did the very contrary. Ideas may be clear and distinct in the mind, and yet be fantastical; or have only metaphysical reality. But suppose them as real as you please, yet to make them proper materials of general knowledge, we must not attempt to leap, we must go step by step, and, by a slow gradation of intermediate connecting ideas, from particulars to generals. Besides, if we suppose all the ideas we have of both kinds to be in any case real, yet still they may not be sufficient, sufficient I mean in number. The stock we have may serve to establish one general axiom, but not another, more general, which we endeavour to raise upon it. In short, he, who imagines that he can extend general knowledge by the force of pure intellect and abstract meditation, beyond the foundations that he has laid in particular knowledge, is just as mad, in thinking he has what he has not, as he who thinks he is what he is not. He is just as mad as the architect

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would



would be, who should undertake to build the roof of the house on the ground, and to lay the foundations in the air.

It is not enough to say, that PLATO was an heroical poet; nor after LONGINUS, that he derived from HOMER, as from a great source, very many of his doctrines. He had the genius of those dithyrambic poets, who were said proverbially, and with allusion to their extravagant follies of imagination, never to drink water. He speaks with great respect of a divine fury, the principle of sublime metaphysical and theological knowledge; and he was so full of it himself, that no man, a little less delirious than MARSILIUS FICINUS, and a little less simple and bigot than DACIER, can read his writings, as those of a philosopher who sought truth in good earnest, and meant to instruct, rather than to amuse. FICINUS owns \*, speaking of the language of this philosopher, that “ he raves and rambles, observes no order like other men in his discourse, and appears rather to be some priest or prophet, who raves and expiates and transports others into the same fury, than a man who goes about to instruct.” QUINTILIAN † speaks to the same effect: and even CICERO, as partial as he was, is forced to confess, that his style was rather that of poetry than of prose. Let me add, that, when he sinks from these imaginary heights of enthusiasm and false sublime, he sinks down, and lower no writer can sink, into a tedious socratical irony, into certain flimsy hypothetical reasonings, that prove nothing,

\* Ad LAUR. MED. prom.—furit enim interdum atque vagatur, ut vates, et ordinem interea non humanum servat, sed fatidicum et divinum; neque tam docentis personam agit quam sacerdotis cujusdam, atque vatis, partim quidem furentis, partim verò caeteris expiantis, et in divinum furorem similiter rapientis.

† Multum enim supra prosam orationem, & quam pedestrem Graeci vocant, surgit, ut mihi non hominis ingenio, sed quodam delphico videatur oraculo instructus. l. 10. c. 1.

and



and into allusions that are mere vulgarisms, and that neither explain nor enforce any thing, that wants to be explained or enforced.

As the founder of the academy drew the grotesque of his theology and metaphysics principally on the canvass, that HOMER and PYTHAGORAS had spread for him, so it seems to me, that he proposed much the same objects of ambition to himself, as the Samian did. I do not mean to make any ill-natured reflections on his voyages into Sicily, nor on his intrigues with DION, nor to insist on those which have been made. If he took a great sum of money, it was to buy books. If he rode into Syracuse in a gilded chariot, drawn by four white horses, and with all the pomp of a triumph, it was to humor the tyrant he meant to reform. If he obtained a district of country in Sicily, as PLOTINUS did some centuries afterwards in Italy, it was with the same design, to set mankind an example of the most perfect form of government. But still we must not think him as free from ambition, as SOCRATES seems to have been. He took warning indeed from the examples of PYTHAGORAS and of SOCRATES. One taught him to moderate his political, and the other his philosophical zeal. But still, with all this apparent moderation, he had an ambition as real as any other, though compatible with moderation, and even leaning on the appearances of it, as on so many necessary supports. There is an ambition that burns as hotly under the mantle of a philosopher, or the cowl of a monk, as in the breast of an hero, and that exerts itself as effectually, and often as hurtfully to mankind as the other. The cell of BERNARD, or that of HILDEBRAND, even before he got the papacy, was a scene of as much intrigue, and as many ambitious projects, as that of FERDINAND the catholic, or of CHARLES the fifth. If the characters of DIONYSIUS the elder and the younger did not suffer



fer PLATO to regulate the government, and exercise legislation in Sicily, nor the dotage of the athenian commonwealth in his own country, he acquired however a much greater dominion, than that of Syracuse or of Athens, and held a much nobler and higher rank than that of tyrant or of archon. He could not persuade his countrymen: to attempt to force them he thought unlawful. He retired therefore into the academy, and exercised in that retreat, like BERNARD in his monastery, a far greater power, quietly and safely, than any that princes, or the principal men in commonwealths could boast of, with all the trouble and danger to which they stood continually exposed in their public life. His reputation, and the authority founded on it were such, that appeals were made, and ambassadors sent to him from different people, who solicited him to give them laws; a favor he bestowed on some, and refused to others. In another part of the resemblance between BERNARD and him, the saint indeed outdid the philosopher very much. He acquired immense wealth to his order, as well as to his particular convent. Whereas PLATO left nothing but his philosophy to the philosophers of his sect, in general: and tho he increased the revenues of the academy, and tho the custom of obtaining further acquisitions of wealth by the testamentary dispositions of persons who desired to encourage this school, prevailed from his time; yet all this would have been but a mite in the bernardine treasury.

IN the last part, which I shall mention, of resemblance between these two theologians, the pagan had vastly the advantage over the christian. The order of the monks, instead of maintaining a superiority over other orders, was soon lost in the crowd of them; or if distinguished, was distinguished only by ignorance and luxury, and the pomp of their principal men. Whereas the sect of philosophers did not only eclipse  
all



all those that were more antient, but outshine and outlast all that were cotemporary or of later institution. It spread into Asia when ALEXANDER carried his arms thither, and into Egypt under the auspices of his successors. Platonism returned back, as it were, to those nations from whom the doctrines of it had been derived originally, altered indeed, but easily known, and therefore eagerly embraced by the true parents; because of the many allegorical, aenigmatical, cabbalistical, mystical features which it retained of the family.

I DO not believe that PLATO was an enthusiast, in any other sense than you poets affect to appear such, when you call for inspiration and boast of the divine fury: and I could sooner persuade my self that he was never in earnest, than that he was always so; for which opinion I shall give you my reasons on some other occasion. But sure it is, that he has made enthusiasts in all ages, and in all churches; in the christian church particularly, the most seraphic saints, and the most extravagant heretics: of all which I shall have occasion to speak more at large elsewhere; for as this philosopher had a place frequently in our conversations, the mention of him will return frequently in these essays; which are repetitions a little extended of the former, and which claim some of the liberty allowed in the former.

PLATONISM flourished in Italy as well as in Greece, in Asia, and in Egypt: and the extravagant encomiums of SOCRATES, PLATO, and their school, which we find so often repeated by TULLY, would be alone sufficient to shew us how highly this philosophy was esteemed in the roman commonwealth. But tho it was held in this esteem, I think that it had received at that time a blow which made it no longer fit to be propagated with success, as it was then taught. It was become a philo-  
sophy



osophy for sophists and rhetors only; and the dogmatical varnish, which had imposed at first, being taken off by ARCESILAUS and CARNEADES, there remained nothing in it on which the minds of men, that seek naturally to be determined and fixed, could rest with complacency. Cuppeity and tableity, those ridiculous abstractions, which DIOGENES laughed at PLATO for supposing, had passed in the world; but to make men doubt of the existence of the cup and the table, was impossible.

THE most absurd system, that is dogmatical, will prevail sooner and longer, and more generally, than that of the second or third academy, or that of PYRRHO did, which arose about the same time; and the dullest stoician, that ever was, would have persuaded men to assent to this proposition, "the world is a wise being\*," as readily as to this, in a bright sunshine, "it is now light," much sooner than CARNEADES would have persuaded them to lay aside all claim to decision, and to confound true and false in the class of probability †. It is not worth while to enter into any nice distinction that may be made between these philosophies. It is enough for our present, or any other reasonable purpose, to consider them all together as the systems, if they can be called systems, of men who entertained a perpetual suspension of mind, denied that any certainty was to be had, and disputed, at most, about probability. Such a man as TULLY, who was ostentatious of his eloquence, might very naturally take, as he did, this part upon him §. He protests in his academical questions

\* Nec magis approbabit nunc lucere — hunc mundum esse sapientem. Cic. Acad. Quaest.

† Philosophiam — quae confundit vera cum falsis spoliat nos judicio. Ibid.

§ Si aut ostentatione aliquâ adductus, aut studio certandi, ad hanc potissimum philosophiam me applicavi, non modo stultitiam meam, sed etiam mores, et naturam condemnandam puto.

against



against any imputation of ostentation indeed; but there will be no uncharitableness in laying much more weight on what fell from him in the second tusculan, where he confesses, that the custom of disputing for and against every thing pleased him much, because it was "maxima dicendi exercitatio." In short, altho the academicians chose a much more easy task, when they undertook to refute the stoicians and the epicureans, and every other dogmatic sect, than that of defending the apparent dogmas of their master would have been; yet it seems to me, that they could not have stood long on that foot, nor have acquired the fame, which those madmen, who succeeded them in the profession of platonism, acquired.

ANTIOCHUS, the third in succession from CARNEADES, and the last in the direct academic line, began to deviate from the principle and conduct of ARCESILAUS improved by CARNEADES; and, under pretence of reviving the old academy and genuine platonism, he taught dogmatically the doctrines he found in PLATO, and blended them with those of the portic and the lyceum. From this time, the false sublime of PLATO began to speak more strongly than ever to the imagination, to the affections and passions, and, aided by the quibbles of ZENO, and the subtilties of ARISTOTLE, in a short time after to the prejudices of mankind. I speak thus generally, because platonic philosophy, which had been confined to schools in Greece, in Asia, and in Egypt, or had been cultivated by a few particular genii at Rome, became fashionable and spread more than ever, when it had re-assumed the gawdy dress of which it had been stripped in the academy, for seven generations of philosophers at least. If the roman ladies were not platonic in love, they were such in philosophical speculation: and the emperors ADRIAN, ANTONINUS,

VOL. IV.

U

and



and MARCUS AURELIUS, for instance, were as fond of the philosophical gown, as of the imperial mantle. JULIAN was so, not long after them, to a degree of fanaticism.

## S E C T I O N   X .

WHEN I come to speak of authority in matters of religion, of the christian particularly, it will be proper to shew how platonism was incorporated with it: how the former served to deck out the artificial theology grafted on revelation, and how the latter served to perpetuate the former. Here I consider platonism relatively to the effects it has had on science in general; and as to them, I say, that they have perverted the use of reason, and corrupted the first elements of human knowledge, or substituted such as are fantastical in the place of such as are real. These first elements of human knowledge are the ideas we acquire, according to the established order of human nature, from the very dawn of life. As we grow up we learn of course to examine, to compound, and to compare these in some degree or other, and sufficiently for our ordinary use in the stations and circumstances of life wherein we are placed. If all this be not very accurately done, as it is not always, and perhaps seldom, there arises very rarely any great inconveniency from it. But the case becomes extremely different in matters of higher concern, in those of philosophy, and of the first philosophy especially. The more complex, and the more abstract our ideas and notions are, the more likely are we to frame or retain them ill, the consequence of which must be error on the most important subjects that can exercise the human mind. What shall we say then of a writer, who has not only propagated on these subjects fantastical ideas and notions for real, with an imposing air, but has attempt-  
ed



ed to turn mankind out of the way of framing any others on every subject? Shall we say, that he was the philosophical HOMER? We shall trifle egregiously if we do. Allusion, allegory, metaphor, and every part of figurative style is the poet's language. Figments of imagination are his subject. The philosopher may sometimes employ the former cautiously, and under much controul: the latter never. Reason must be his guide, and truth alone his subject. When they are not such, tho he keeps the name, he goes out of the character. He is guilty of fraud. PLATO was eminently guilty of it, and the taint has descended, like that of original sin, to his posterity.

ALL his lineal successors have followed the example he set them in several forms, according to their several talents. They attempted it even in physics. But error of this kind has not been established, nor fixed, nor sanctified. Corporeal nature affords a public standard obvious to sense, and by which every man may try the ideas and notions of another, whether they be fantastical or real; and for this reason physical knowledge has been in almost a constant course of improvement, the errors have been from age to age corrected, and the sensible phaenomena, which are the objects of it, being numberless, it has been vastly extended, as well as ascertained, in these latter ages. Since the revival of experimental philosophy, speculative whimsical naturalists have imposed no more than OVID, who did not mean, nor than LUCRETIVS, who did mean to impose, their physics for true philosophy.

PLATO did his best to disgrace this criterion, and to persuade men not to trust to it, even to verify their simple ideas of sensible objects. Metaphysics suited his purpose better, just as an half light suits better than a full light the purpose of one who has



falſe wares to vend. We have indeed in our minds a criterion of ſpiritual nature, and of matters purely intelligible. But this criterion is not as public, and as common to all men, as the other. However fantaſtical, inadequate, or confuſed and obſcure the ideas and notions of another man may appear to me, he is at liberty to affirm, that they appear quite otherwiſe in his mind: and tho I may not believe him, I cannot contradict him. What can I ſay to a myſtic, who boaſts of ſpecial grace, and divine illuminations; or to a metaphyſician, who pretends to make incomprehenſible abſtractions, and to clamber up PLATO'S myſtic ladder from opinion to knowledge, the knowledge of immaterial forms, more than this, I perceive no ſuch illuminations, I can make no ſuch abſtractions, I have no ſuch ladder? Theſe divines and philoſophers are ſtopped, like their fellow-creatures, on the very outſkirts of the intellectual world, notwithstanding their boaſts: and if they related nothing of it more than what they have felt, ſeen, and known, they would relate nothing more than other philoſophical travellers. But as they pretend to have gone farther, they may well pretend to have felt, ſeen, and known more.

PLATO was ſuch a traveller, and the father of philoſophical lying to us, who are not acquainted with thoſe who preceded him. Thoſe who preceded him might neglect an exact determination of ideas, and a ſteady uſe of words, the ſigns of theſe ideas, which is no more than all philoſophers are apt to do. But he is to us the firſt who taught men, inſtead of diſtrusting, to renounce their ſenſes in the ſearch of truth; and, inſtead of taking their ideas from the outward impreſſions, and inward ſuggeſtions of nature, to take them from an aſſumed region of ideas which never exiſted out of delirious brains. This doctrine, that poisons ſcience to the very roots, is in part ſo  
abſurd,



abfurd, and in part fo notoriously false, that we may juftly wonder how he could miftake the truth in one cafe, and affirm, if he really meant to affirm, and expected to be believed, directly againft it in the other. That we cannot have knowledge of fenfible objects, abfolute knowledge, a knowledge of the effences of the fubftances, is moft true; not for the reafon he gives, becaufe they are in a perpetual flux, always generating, never exifting: but becaufe we cannot difcern by our fenfes their inward conftitutions and firft qualities, nor any thing more than their effects on us. Such knowledge is relative to our ftate, and would not be the fame in another. It is human knowledge: no more. But ftill it is one kind of knowledge, and very fufficient for us. I have not an opinion, I know that I am warmed or burned: and if christianity had been never publifhed, I fhould have known, not believed myfelf to be a man, not a cock. As MALEBRANCHE, who was transported by the delirium of PLATO, by that of DES CARTES, and by his own all at once, made ufe of faith to realife fenfitive knowledge; fo PLATO found in the intellectual world the forms and effences of fubftances, as well as the ideas and notions that we have of mixed modes and relations. All thefe, according to him, were fixed and permanent, eternal exemplars and divine entities, and therefore the fole objects of fcience. Reafon was placed between the objects of intellect and of fenfe. The “ firft belong to God, and to fome “ of the elect among men \*.” When reafon rifes up to the firft, it acquires the knowledge of things divine: When it defcends to the latter, it is filled with the errors of opinion. Science is therefore “ a comprehension of things divine by reafon †.” I take the fubftance of what is here faid from MARSILIUS FICINUS, to whole expofition of PLATO’S meaning there can be no

\* Intellectus autem Dei proprius, et paucorum admodum electorum hominum.

† Divinarum rerum certa comprehenfio. MARS. FICIN. ep. in theaeteturum.

objection



objection made: and I add, that if I took the whole, the jargon would be still more surprizing.

WHAT man, who was not in the delirium of a metaphysical fever, and who turned his eyes coolly and soberly inward, has not seen that we know nothing of sensible objects but what our senses discover to us, and our memory retains of them after they are discovered: and that all those ideal entities, the abstract forms of them, are the bold fictions of imagination? Who ever reflected on the operations of his mind, and did not perceive, that all his ideas, or complex notions of mixed modes and relations, are the creatures of the mind, who puts them together for her use as experience and observation direct, nay arbitrarily if she pleases; that he never discerned them any where but in his own mind; that they are of mere human production, and that, as they are often variously combined or compounded by different minds, so they are seldom preserved in any mind steadily and invariably? Shall we be afraid then to say, that the doctrine of ideas in PLATO is absurd and false, and that he has by teaching it corrupted the first elements of knowledge? It is manifest that he has done so: too manifest to be denied, and for this reason his admirers have endeavoured rather to accustom mankind to the absurdity, by their constant imitations of it, than to defend it.

NOTWITHSTANDING all that has been observed, and much more that might have been observed, to shew the fallacy and impertinence of a philosophy that has been so long admired, this philosophy has rolled down a torrent of chimerical knowledge from pagan and christian antiquity, with little opposition, and scarce any interruption, to the present age; for which reason it is as necessary to expose the futility of this philosophy now, as it would have been many centuries ago. Not only pagan,  
but



but christian theology has been derived from PLATO in great measure; and, as strangely as that may sound, even from HOMER too, if he imitated HOMER as much, and borrowed as much from him as LONGINUS and others of the antients affirm. There is a certain marvelous which dazzles and seizes the mind, the philosophical as well as the unphilosophical; and the man who thinking he understands, admires his own understanding, as well as the man who admires, because he does not understand. This gave a great lustre to the platonic philosophy: and is employed in season and out of season, so as to run thro almost every part of it. But there is something more to be observed. PLATO affected to write so equivocally and so inconsistently, according to the different subjects, and different characters of interlocutors, whom he introduces in his dialogues, that he might pass either for a dogmatist, or a sceptic. The latter academy took this hint: but they followed a middle course, denying certainty to the dogmatists, and maintaining probability against the sceptics: in which middle course they could not, however, have maintained themselves long, as it has been observed already. The latter platonicians therefore assumed the doctrines of their master to be dogmatical, taught them with all their own improvements as such, succeeded better, and lasted longer. Thus has the fame of this school been preserved, and the philosophy been propagated, under different forms to one uniform purpose, to seduce men out of the precincts of real knowledge.

## SECTION XI.

NOT only curiosity was indulged, but vanity was gratified by it. An identity in nature, or a cognation, as the learned CUDWORTH



WORTH calls it, of the divine and human mind being once established, it is no wonder, that the bounds of attainable and unattainable knowledge were confounded, and became undiscernible. The farther we carry our discoveries concerning the animal system, wherein we have our place, the more proofs we find that all the parts of it are full of life, and sense, and intelligence, in an inconceivable variety of degrees, but in some degree or other: and MALEBRANCHE had reason to say, "les petits animaux ne manquent pas aux microscopes, comme les microscopes manquent aux petits animaux." Now the moral effect of such a survey as this should be, both a greater adoration of the Supreme Being, and a greater humiliation of ourselves, who are so closely connected with the rest of the animal kind. But the prophane assumption we speak of here, which had its foundation in the platonic and pythagoric systems, tends to lessen our admiration and adoration of the Supreme Being, or at least the humiliation of ourselves, by taking our thoughts off from the sensible connection between us and other animals, and by applying them to an imaginary connection between the divine and human nature. There are no anthropomorphites I think left, but there have been men among the most devout theists of paganism, and there are those among christian philosophers and divines, who join God and man as absurdly by a supposed similitude of intellect, knowledge, and manner of knowing, as those heretics did by a supposed similitude of figure. Vanity has not only maintained this absurdity among the followers of PLATO, but spread it among those of different sects. I will not turn to the extravagant passages of this sort, that are to be found in the writings we have of the latter pythagorician platonists. I will mention one only from those of St. AUSTIN, which happens to occur to my memory, and may serve "instar omnium." Nothing is superior to the human soul, says that father, but God.  
 " Nihil



“ Nihil est potentius-----nihil est sublimius. Quicquid supra  
 “ illam est jam creator est.” This doctrine the saint learned,  
 as he learned that of the divine logos, from PLATO, or from  
 those madmen, the disciples of PYTHAGORAS and PLATO. In  
 short, the vanity of the human heart indulged itself in this kind  
 of flattery so much, that even the stoics borrowed the same no-  
 tions. Human reason is, according to SENECA, not only a por-  
 tion of the divine spirit immerfed in body, the same in God  
 and in man, with this sole difference, in him it is perfect, in  
 us capable of perfection \*; but it was an axiom of that school,  
 that the soul is divine, and all divine natures are the same †.

PHILOSOPHERS being thus drawn, in their own conceit, out  
 of that class of beings in which the creator had placed them,  
 and having placed themselves, according to their own good  
 pleasure, and without any other claim to it than arbitrary as-  
 sumption, in a sort of middle state, at least, between God and  
 man, in which too they pretended themselves able to place  
 others by certain metaphysical nostrums, these mountebanks  
 and their zanis were easily induced to imagine, that since their  
 souls were immortal, and participant of the divine nature, they  
 were capable of knowledge of all kinds, and of wisdom more  
 than human, even whilst they wore the garb of humanity.  
 Believing themselves wrapped up in pure intellect, whilst  
 they were in truth transported by mere imagination, they as-  
 sumed their knowledge, like their nature, to be divine. Clogged  
 by bodies, and confined for a time to this inferior system, they  
 could not enjoy the full prerogatives of their own, nor attain  
 complete absolute knowledge. But still they enjoyed and ex-

\* In corpus humanum pars divini spiritus versa ----- diis hominibusque commu-  
 nis. In illis consummata est. In nobis consummabilis.

† Divinorum una natura est.



exercised these prerogatives in a good degree, clogged and confined as they were, when they abstracted their souls from their bodies, by spiritual exercises and profound meditation, and rose by this abstraction in pure intellect up to contemplate the divine ideas, and to know, if not as much as God, yet in the same manner, and much more than other men. PLOTINUS, who was so ashamed to wear a body, that he would never suffer any picture of it to be drawn, had been ravished more than once, as PORPHYRY affirms, to an union with the supreme intelligence, and he himself had been so once. It was not hard for such philosophers to believe, and to make it believed, that the knowledge unattainable by others was attainable by them, and that whilst ordinary persons, incumbered by body, and groveling on earth, acquired with much pains a little particular knowledge, they had the metaphysical secret of rising to universals.

SUCH as these were the men, who issuing from the schools of pythagoric and platonic philosophy, disturbed the progress of real knowledge, and by flattering the vanity of the human mind, turned it to fantastical. Heathens adopted these notions the more easily, because they had already adopted those of genii, of daemons, of celestial and supercelestial gods, who formed a chain of intelligence from the human up to the supreme. Christians too might adopt them the more readily, because they had other as undetermined ideas of cherubim and seraphim, of thrones, principalities, powers, and virtues, of archangels and angels, of three hierarchies, and nine choirs of celestial spirits, figments of crackbrained enthusiasts, such as DENYS the areopagite, and the scholar of St. PAUL, if in truth there was any such person, and if some pious knave did not forge the book and an author for it. These notions might serve, as well as those of the heathens, to form an intellectual chain,  
and



and a short gradation of intelligence from God to man. But orthodox Christians had no need of any such chain. They knew by the scriptures, that the correspondence between God and man was often immediate and even intimate and familiar with his elect, and with such purified souls as were prepared for it. They found in the old testament one example of a patriarch translated very corporeally into heaven, and one in the new of an apostle ravished thither, he knew not how. But the whole tenor of the sacred writings represented the Supreme Being, in frequent conference with his creatures, God covenanting, or making bargains with man, and man with God; God holding the language of man, reasoning, arguing, expostulating, in a very human manner, animated by human affections, and appealing to human knowledge. In short, they believed farther, on the same authority, that the word, the wisdom of the father, the very God, had been incarnated here on earth, assumed an human body, lived like a man with men, and died at once by their hands and for their sakes. It could not be hard surely for those who believed all this, and who were accustomed to think in this manner of the divinity, to be persuaded, that God knew by the help of ideas, like man, so close was the analogy between their natures, that there were two regions of ideas, the one of ideas of sense, the other of ideas of pure intellect; that the former being nothing more than representations of appearances, and relative solely to the system in which they arose, nothing more could be acquired by them than probability, and opinion founded on it, sufficient indeed for vulgar use, tho not so for philosophical purposes; but that minds illuminated by philosophy could rise to the higher region in which alone certainty and scientific knowledge were to be acquired by contemplating those intellectual ideas, abstract natures, eternal essences, incorporeal substances, and all the objects of metaphysics.



FROM such fantastical notions we know, that men set out in search of fantastical knowledge above two thousand years ago, and how much sooner we cannot say. In hopes of reaching unattainable, they neglected attainable knowledge, scorned to confine themselves to that, to which they were confined by the author of nature, and attempting to rise above the level of humanity, they sunk below it; for they surely are below it, who imagine themselves to be what they are not, to have knowledge where they can have none, and to want it where it lies open to their industry.

IT would have been no agreeable attempt in those days, nor is it a welcome one in these, to fix the bounds of attainable and unattainable knowledge. The philosophers we speak of are as ridiculous in a quite contrary sense, as the learned mandarins of the Chinese. The mandarins had decided, that China, a part of Tartary, the other states that lay round them, and the neighbouring islands contained the whole world. They knew no other, they inquired after no other, and were astonished therefore when the jesuits shewed them a map of the two hemispheres. The philosophers remain unacquainted with their own country, and inquire little about it, or about those that lie nearest to it. They are wholly taken up with imaginary countries at an immense distance, where they never were, and concerning which they can have no intelligence from any that have been there. But the absurdity of absurdities is this. They pronounce dogmatically, and they pretend to demonstrate when they speak of these unknown countries, and they sink into doubt and hypothesis when they speak of their own.

COULD philosophers have been persuaded to analyse the human mind, to examine intuitively the faculties of it, and to  
compare



compare them with the objects of their inquiry, the extravagant notions spoken of might have been soon exploded, the progress of fantastical knowledge might have been stopped early, and that of real knowledge might have been advanced without interruption.

BUT the ill star of knowledge contrived to render this impracticable. It has been said, that ARISTOTLE was an ungrateful scholar to his master PLATO. It may be so. But this obligation, at least, the master had to the scholar. The scholar raised a mist that hindered men from discerning, as they might have done sooner or later, the absurdity of his philosophy: and this mist continued thickening before the eyes of men for many ages. The Romans were far from correcting and improving the greek philosophy. They contented themselves to translate and imitate: and the same fervile manner of philosophizing was followed after the resurrection of letters. A ridiculous veneration for PLATO revived with them: and ARISTOTLE maintained in the schools the empire he had usurped every where during the dark ages of gothic, of arabian, and of ecclesiastical barbarity. The antient fathers of the church had recommended these two philosophies sufficiently to more modern doctors, by their example and writings. But ARISTOTLE had helped to defend what PLATO had helped principally to establish, and as defence grew more and more necessary from age to age, so the reputation and authority of ARISTOTLE, which were great in the mahometan, seemed to rise above those of PLATO in the christian schools of philosophy: or at least to be more employed in them. I am not ignorant that many passages of the fathers and other christian writers may be cited against the peripatetic philosophy. But these passages serve only to multiply proofs, that these venerable persons were apt to contradict one another, and even themselves.

Cardinal



Cardinal PALAVICINI was very angry with father PAUL for saying, when he speaks of the sixth session of the council of Trent, wherein so much use was made of the distinctions of the *stagyrite*,\* that without this assistance “we should have had many articles of faith the less.” The cardinal denies the fact so little, that he justifies the proceeding by the example of those antient councils, who did the same when they distinguished so nicely substance, person, and hypostasis. I know not whether it be true, tho I incline to believe it if MELANTHON said it, that the ethics of ARISTOTLE were read publicly in some churches instead of the gospels. But every one knows, that he and his philosophy have been spoken of by great divines and most devout persons of the christian and mahometan churches, in terms so hyperbolic, that they are blasphemous.

By such combinations of circumstances, and by others that were favorable to the aristotelian philosophy, a jargon of words, that seemed to explain, without explaining, and the rules of a dialectic, that seemed to prove, and that did prove indifferently either in favor of truth, or of error, took up the whole attention of philosophers, and rendered it impossible for them to make any advances in learning and knowledge. All the rational powers of the strongest minds were so misapplied, that giants employed themselves in picking straws; and men, whose intellectual sight might be compared to that of LYNCEUS, wandered about in a metaphysical and logical mist, always in search of truth, finding it seldom, and mistaking often even error for it. Fantastical ideas, new invented words, and new applications of old words put into a quaint syllogistical form, made up the sum of the mirabilia, the inopinata, and the paradoxes of the stoics. Much in the same manner

\* Noi mancavamo di molti articoli di fede. Hist. del con. trid. l. 2.

did



did schoolmen proceed in subtilising their ideas and notions, and in turning and winding them by rules of art, without any concern to compare them with nature, and to verify and fix them by what is. The consequence has been, that altho much of the cant of the schools is laid aside, yet many fantastical or undetermined ideas and notions, and many unmeaning words, or words of vague signification, which grew into use, or were confirmed in use then, impose still; and that even some of our finest writers banter themselves and others with them. It must not be imagined, that he who reasons, or seems rather to reason closely and consequentially, has therefore truth always on his side. To be sure of this, we must be sure that his words have ideas and notions perceivable by us, attached to them; we must be sure that all these are steadily employed, and we must be able, by a careful analyse of the ideas and notions, where there is the least room for doubt, to discern whether they are fantastical or real, and adequate and complete, clear and distinct, or the contrary, relatively to the subjects about which they are employed. If we do this, we shall be neither seduced by declamation, nor deceived by argumentation. Some writers impose, as fairies and enchanters in romances are said to have done; but if we do this, their charms will be broke, and either nothing, or something extremely absurd or weak will appear, where a stupendous and solid pile presented itself to our first sight. If we neglect this, not only *MALEBRANCHE*, or the bishop of Cloyne, those excellent poets, may lead us agreeably "per ambages deorumque ministeria," thro such mazes of error as none but the brightest genii are able to contrive; but your ghostly father, if you had one, might undertake to convince you by dint of logic, that when he affirms the same body to be at the same instant in different places, he is far from affirming, that the same body is and is not in the same place.

S E C-



## S E C T I O N   X I I .

IT will sound oddly to some ears, that the right use of reason, and the right conduct of the understanding in the investigation of truth, and the acquisition of real knowledge, is a very late discovery; and yet nothing is more certain. It was not near so soon after the resurrection of letters, as it might have been expected, that the fantastical and fashionable philosophy of PLATO and ARISTOTLE began to be exploded. Little by little, however, there arose men, who made this use of the light that increased gradually in the orb of science. There were some essays made, faintly, diffidently, and occasionally at first, like those of men, who emerging out of darkness, were dazzled as well as enlightened, or of men who were sensible that they might suffer for saying, that they had seen what they had seen, or that they knew what they knew, in opposition to the confirmed prejudices of mankind. Others followed with greater assurance, like men born in the light, whose eyes were able to bear a greater effulgence of it, and who besides this had less, for even they had something to fear from ecclesiastical, abetted by civil power. One of these, and the first that deserves to be named in this roll, was our VERULAM, that astonishing genius, who durst form the design of rebuilding science from the foundations. I presume not to say how near he brought this design to bear, nor how practicable he left it. But this I may say, that the foundations were ill laid before his time, and that he laid, on the rock of nature and truth, such as can alone support this building. The meanest cottage, that art ever raised, can rest on no other safely, and the most stupendous pile of philosophical systems may rest on these immoveably. Whatever esteem  
he



he was tempted to think, by a review of their scattered remains, that the more antient philosophers of Greece might deserve, he considered the works of PLATO and of ARISTOTLE, which have been alone preserved, as the bane of philosophy. They had been followed fervently from their own age to his, by which means they had stood as barriers against all improvement, and the poisonous springs they had opened continued to infect all the streams of knowledge. He attempted, therefore, to depose these tyrants in philosophy, and to draw men off from the enthusiasm of one, and the sophistry of the other, from the contemplation of confused and ill abstracted ideas and notions, and from a wanton, not to say a fraudulent, use of words, to the contemplation of nature, and a strict regard to things. The very first aphorism of the *novum organum* states the only true object of human knowledge, and limits that which every man may be said to have acquired, to what he has discovered of nature by observation and experience\*.

HUMAN knowledge, to be real, must be derived from, and tried by what really is, according to my lord BACON and to truth: and he was so far from indulging the licentious use which philosophers make of that dangerous power of the mind, the power of imagining what may be, and of erecting hypotheses into systems of knowledge, that he insists on the necessity, not that we should doubt of every thing, but that we should examine every thing, that we should purge our minds of all those idols, as he styles them, those false and superficial notions that are taken from vulgar opinion, and at best from philosophical rumor, which were the foundations of platonism, tho PLATO used some sort of induction, and of peripateticism;

\* Homo naturae minister, et interpres tantum facit et intelligit, quantum de naturae ordine, re, vel mente, observaverit: nec amplius scit, aut potest.



and finally, that the mind being thus prepared to receive the direct or reflected rays of truth, we should not reject, but assist and controul sense in a course of learned experience, abstract our notions from things with the utmost accuracy, and proceed, as far as we can proceed, in the same manner, to aphorisms and axioms more and more general.

WHILST the fame of this great man was fresh, and his works were in every learned hand both at home and abroad, DES CARTES arose, another luminary of the philosophical world, and I could easily suspect that my lord BACON'S writings were not unknown to him; for as little as it is pretended he used to read, he did not disdain to borrow from authors of inferior note, of the same country: and they who repay with ample interest, like DES CARTES, into the common stock of learning, need not be ashamed to borrow sometimes. The french philosopher, like the english, made clear and distinct ideas the necessary materials of knowledge. But then, as he left this important article too general and too loose, so whilst he built up truth with one hand, he laid a foundation for infinite error on the other. He disarmed the scholastics; but he furnished arms to the mystics. Besides clear and distinct ideas, he admits a certain inward sentiment of clearness and evidence. The word sentiment is applied in the french language so variously and so confusedly, that it becomes often equivocal. But since it is distinguished, on this occasion, from idea, it must be meant either to signify that immediate perception which the mind has of some self-evident truth, in which case it is not a principle of knowledge, but knowledge itself, intuitive knowledge; or else it must be meant to signify that apparent evidence wherewith notions and opinions enter into the mind of one man, that are not accompanied with the same evidence, nor received in the same manner, in  
the



the mind of another. Now in this case, the lively inward sentiment of DES CARTES is nothing better than that strong persuasion, wherewith every enthusiast imagines that he sees what he does not see, hears what he does not hear, feels what he does not feel, and, in a word, perceives what he does not perceive. If any thing else be meant by sentiment, thus distinguished from idea, as a principle of knowledge, I confess my self unable so much as to guess what it is. But notwithstanding this, DES CARTES holds an high rank among those benefactors to mankind in the advancement of knowledge, who freed human reason from the chains of authority. He improved natural philosophy by geometry, and geometry by algebra: in which respect, he shewed the way to our NEWTON.

GASSENDI was another of these reformers of philosophy, and the restorer of the atomical doctrine. He exposed, even to ridicule, the dialectics of ARISTOTLE: he disarmed the peripateticians of these enchanted weapons, and would have completed, by his victories over them, the subversion of their long established empire, if he had not apprehended, with reason, enemies much more formidable than mere philosophers, because armed with ecclesiastical and civil power. It is this fear, which has hindered those who have combated error in all ages, and who combat it still, from taking all the advantages which a full exposition of the truth would give them. Their adversaries triumph, as if the goodness of their cause had given them the victory, when nothing has prevented their entire defeat, and reduced the contest to a drawn battle, except this, that they have employed arms of every kind, fair and foul, without any reserve; whilst the others have employed their offensive weapons with much reserve, and have even blunted their edge when they used them.



If it was my design to speak of all those, who have advanced real knowledge in all its parts, since the resurrection of letters, beyond such of the antients, at least, as we are acquainted with, the roll would be a long one. But my intention being to speak of those alone, who have studied the human mind, rectified, or pretended to rectify, the errors of it, and thereby improved, or pretended to improve, our reason, I shall content my self to mention two that are the best known to me. Mr. LOCKE, and the author, perhaps I should say authors, of the logic of Port royal.

THE first steps towards a right conduct of the understanding, and a just discernment of unattainable knowledge, and of that which is attainable, in different kinds and degrees, are an accurate analyse of the mind, a careful review of the intellectual faculties, as well separately as in their cooperations, and an attentive observation of the whole intellectual procedure, natural and habitual, as it has been hinted already. When this is well and truly done by any writer, the reader will feel consciously that it is so; for he will perceive the phaenomena of his own mind to be such as they are represented, and he will recollect, that the same things have passed there, tho he has not always, or at all observed them. This happens to me when I read the essay on human understanding. I am led, as it were, thro a course of experimental philosophy. I am shewn my self; and in every instance there is an appeal to my own perceptions, and to the reflections I make on my own intellectual operations. I know that this method is disagreeable to some, and I am not surpris'd that it should be so. There are those who think they do not want it: and they are those who want it most. There are those likewise who fear it; because they apprehend that analyse of ideas and notions,  
that



that comparison of them with the real nature of things, and that steady precision in the use of words, which would reduce many a dogmatic system to pass for nothing better than a fanciful hypothesis, as it really is.

THE logic of Port royal will suit such persons as these, and especially those of the second sort much better. In whatever language or country this treatise had been published, it would have appeared to be not an art of thinking, but an art of thinking conformably to christian doctrines, and to those of Rome particularly. It is contrived to mangle and distort human reason, so as to proportion it, I do not say to revelation, but to theology; tho' theology should be proportioned to reason: and I add, that if reason could be made by abuse to serve the purposes of this theology, it might be made by no greater, nay by the very same abuse, to serve the purposes of any other, pagan or mahometan. Now this proceeding is unfair: and he who holds it means to deceive, not to instruct. The true art of thinking must be the same among all mankind, since their intellectual system, and the things of nature from which their ideas and notions ought to be abstracted, are the same. But if this example was followed, the art of thinking would vary, as the different metaphysics of MENCIVS and DES CARTES, or the different theologies of the bonzes and the jesuits, vary. Art should direct practice: but thus, practice would direct art. There would be one art of thinking for Christians, one for the doctors of Mecca, one for the literati in China, and so on.

THO I give, on this occasion, a preference to BACON and to LOCKE over DES CARTES and the author of the logic of Port royal, it is not from so mean and contemptible a motive as this would be, that they were englishmen. The advancement



ment of knowledge, and the improvement of reason are of common concern to all rational creatures. We are all of the same country in these respects: and he who thinks and acts otherwise is a promoter of faction in the great commonwealth of learning. As much as I admire these two philosophers, I am not blind to their errors; for even I, who have no telescopic eyes, can discern spots in these suns. I can discern a tincture, and sometimes more than a tincture, in BACON, of those false notions which we are apt to imbibe as men, as individuals, as members of society, and as scholars, and against which he himself is very solicitous to put us on our guard. I am convinced, more by his example than by what he says, that these false notions render the admission of truth into the mind more difficult, and the hold of error more strong. I can discern, in Mr. LOCKE, sometimes ill abstracted and ill determined ideas, from which a wrong application of words proceeds, and propositions to which I can by no means assent. I confess farther, that I have been, and am still, at a loss to find any appearance of consistency in an author who published a commentary on the epistles of St. PAUL, and a treatise of the reasonableness of christianity, which he endeavours to prove by fact and by argument, after having stated, as clearly as he had done, the conditions and the measures of historical probability, and after having written, as strongly as he had done, against the abuse of words. I think that neither BACON nor LOCKE have kept up entirely to their own rules. But I think these rules are established by them more truly than by any others.

THAT they are not so, in one very considerable instance, by DES CARTES, I have observed already, and shall not seek for any other in that respectable author. But the charge I have brought against the logic above mentioned is so very heavy, and this fault among others runs so evidently thro the whole book, that



that I think it necessary to produce some examples of it. To produce them will be sufficient. I shall make few or no reflections on them. Turn, if you please, to the fourth chapter of the first part, and to the fourteenth of the second, which treat of the ideas of things and the ideas of signs, and of the propositions wherein the names of things are given to their signs. You will soon see how far this writer was from meaning any improvement to human reason, by all the trifling matter he puts gravely and dogmatically together.

THAT we have ideas which are made sometimes to stand as signs of other ideas is true, and so we have ideas which are made to stand in the relations of cause and effect to other ideas. But the ideas of both these kinds may be considered unrelatively, and they become ideas of signs, or causes, or effects, by an occasional act of the mind, which joins them sometimes properly, and sometimes improperly in these relations to others. The idea of respiration, like that of spontaneous motion, is one of those that compose our complex idea of every animal. It is a part of the idea, not a sign of the whole. It cannot be the sign of any particular animal, because it is common to all animals. It cannot be the sign of animality, or the supposed abstract idea of animal, because we have no such idea. It cannot be the sign of that confused crowd of ideal animals that the mind represents to itself, whenever we endeavour to think of animals in general, any more than the sign of any particular animal. They all imply it, and they may be said to be so many signs of respiration, just as well as respiration to be a sign of them.

BUT be this as it will, about which it is silly to bestow many words, let us observe that this author, who pretends to teach men how to think, endeavours to impose on them very grossly, as grossly as if he had imagined that they could not think at  
all



all without his help. Having amused his readers with the hypothesis of ideas of signs, made such by nature in some cases, and by institution in others, that are sometimes certain and sometimes probable, all which is very proper to perplex the thoughts of young logicians; he slides in, as evident examples of what he advances, such as have not even an apparent connection with it. He distinguishes most nicely between signs that are joined to things, and signs that are separated from them. Symptoms, he says, the signs of sickness, are joined to sickness. Let it be that they are so in nature, and in our ideas, however this matter might be otherwise explained. But then he adds, as if all these were things analogous, “ thus “ the ark, the sign of the church, was joined to NOAH and “ his children, who were the true church at that time: thus “ our material temples, the signs of the faithful, are often “ joined to the faithful: thus the dove, the sign or figure of “ the holy ghost, is joined to the holy ghost: thus the “ washing of baptism, the sign or figure of spiritual regeneration, is joined to this regeneration.” In speaking of signs that are separated from things, he is not so profuse of examples. He produces one only, but that as appositely as any of the others. It is taken from the sacrifices of the mosaic institution, which were, he says, so many signs of Jesus Christ offered up in sacrifice.

I MIGHT conclude my extracts here. But since it is of use to shew how great reason there is to guard against the fraud, as well as madness, of philosophy, it may be proper to mention a few more passages of the same absurdity or ridiculous importance out of this famous book. We are told then farther, that “ a thing may hide and discover another thing at the same “ time. It may be thing and sign at the same time, and may “ hide as thing, what it discovers as sign. Hot ashes, as a thing,  
hide



" hide the fire ; as a sign, discover it. The forms that angels  
 " borrowed, as things, hid them ; as signs, discovered them.  
 " The eucharistical symbols, as things, hide the body of  
 " Christ ; as signs, discover it." Again, we are taught, that  
 " the nature of a sign being to excite in the senses the idea of  
 " the thing figured by the idea of the thing figuring, as long as  
 " this effect subsists, that is, as long as this double idea is  
 " excited, the sign subsists, even tho the thing be destroyed  
 " in it's own nature. Thus, it is of no moment whether the  
 " colors of the rainbow, which God has taken for a sign  
 " that he will destroy mankind by a deluge no more, be real  
 " and true, provided that the same impressiion be always  
 " made on our senses, and that they (can he mean our senses?)  
 " make use of this impressiion to conceive the promise of God.  
 " Just so, it is of no moment that the bread of the eucharisty  
 " subsist in its proper nature, provided that the image of  
 " bread, which serves us to conceive in what manner the body  
 " of Christ nourishes our souls, and how the faithful are  
 " united one with another, be excited constantly in our senses."  
 One may now safely challenge the ablest professor in bedlam  
 to crowd more nonsense into fewer words, and yet it is faith-  
 fully extracted from a book which is put into the hands of  
 young men, as I remember that it was into mine, in order  
 to improve their reason, by teaching them a right determi-  
 nation of their ideas, and a right conduct of their understand-  
 ing.

To say the truth, tho experimental philosophy has been vast-  
 ly improved by the moderns, and tho a true conduct of the  
 understanding may be said justly enough to be a new discovery  
 in general, yet the same reformers, who have rooted up a  
 monstrous crop of old errors, have left some of these, and have  
 planted others. The first philosophy particularly has been



over-run with both: and learning has finished the round, which ignorance began. In the darkness of ignorance, superstition prevailed: in the light of knowledge, overweening curiosity, the offspring of self-conceit, as self-conceit is of pride. Both are natural to the human mind, and each of them developed itself into activity at different times, and in that state of things that was proper to it. Superstition first: for ignorant, uncivilised people, who are fierce to their fellow creatures, are timid and docile under every apprehension of superior power. Of these dispositions in favorable conjunctures, the persian ZERDUSHT, whoever he was, the indian FOE, and the arabian MAHOMET, knew how to profit: and the magi, the bonzes, and the doctors of Mecca, were not at liberty, if they were inclined, to frame their notions of the first philosophy, according to nature and truth. They were to think on the principles their masters had laid. These were to be asserted, not examined. Fact was to be bent, and common sense perverted, into a conformity with them. Puerilities and vulgarisms were to be taken for marks of a divine simplicity, and the ravings of enthusiasm for the mysterious language of inspiration. If the case has not been quite so bad in the christian world, yet I will undertake to shew you, in another of these essays, as I endeavoured to do in one of our conversations, that the superstitions of ignorant ages, and the fantastical knowledge of those that were more learned, have produced some as extravagant opinions in theology among Christians, orthodox and heretics, as any we can reproach to the mahometans, or even to the pagans, and that they work their effect even at this hour.

ALL errors, even those of ignorance and superstition, are hard to remove when they have taken long hold of the minds of men, and especially when they are woven into systems of religion.



religion. But there are some from which men are unwilling to depart, and of which they grow fond, for a reason that has been often touched. As men advance in knowledge, their self-conceit and curiosity are apt to increase, and these are sure to be flattered by every opinion that gives man high notions of his own importance. What contradictions and inconsistencies are not huddled together in the human mind? Superstition is produced, by a sense of our weakness; philosophical presumption, by an opinion of our strength; and superstition and presumption contribute alike to continue, to confirm, and propagate error.

A SYSTEM of philosophy, which had not contained a system of theology, as well as of politics, would have been held in no esteem among the ancients. Many such were formed, but with these considerable differences between the two sorts. Errors in rules of policy and law were easy to be corrected by experience, like errors in natural philosophy. Nay the first were so the most, because how little regard soever philosophers might have to experience in either case, the truth would force itself upon them, or others; in one by the course of affairs; whereas it must be sought, to be had in the other. But when it was sought, it was obtained. Errors in theology and metaphysics could not be thus corrected; neither easily, nor at all, among men who seemed tacitly agreed to admit and confine themselves to no criterion in these sciences, neither to the phenomena of their own spirits in their doctrines about spiritual nature, nor to the works of God and the conduct of his providence in their speculations about his attributes.

ANOTHER difference between systems of theology and those of politics and laws has been, and always must be, this, that the latter may be various, nay contrary to one another, and yet



be such as right reason dictates; provided they do not stand in opposition to any of the laws of our nature. But in theological reasonings, and those which are called metaphysical, the various opinions may be all false, or if they are not all so, one alone can be true. This consideration should have had two effects. It should have rendered philosophers and divines more cautious in framing opinions on such subjects, and less positive in maintaining them from the beginning: and when they found a multitude of questions arise, which were indeterminate for want of a sufficient criterion, they should have ceased the pursuit of unattainable knowledge, and have confined themselves to the improvement of that which God has judged sufficient for us, and has given us the means of acquiring. The very contrary has happened to such a degree of extravagance, as must seem delirious to every one who is not in the same delirium. Can he be less than mad who pretends to contemplate an intellectual world, which he assumes, in the dull mirror of his own mind; of which he knows little more than this, that it is both dull and narrow? Can he be less than mad, who perseveres dogmatically in this pretension, whilst he is obliged to own that he arrives with many helps, much pains, and by slow degrees, to a little imperfect knowledge of the visible world which he inhabits, and concerning which he is therefore sober and modest enough to reason hypothetically? In a word, can he be less than mad, who boasts a revelation superadded to reason, to supply the defects of it, and who superadds reason to revelation, to supply the defects of this too, at the same time? This is madness, or there is no such thing incident to our nature: and into this kind of madness the greatest geni have been the most apt to fall. A St. PAUL, profound in cabalistical learning; a St. AUSTIN, deep read in PLATO; a father MALEBRANCHE, and a bishop of Cloyne. Elevation of genius makes them giddy: and these men, like those who are  
born



born in the purple, imagine they can do every thing they have a mind to do, because they can do more than others. The mistake has been fatal to both; to these heroes in philosophy, as well as to the others. Tho all men are not placed on the same level, there is a level above which no man can rise: and he, who compares the nature of his mind with the nature of things, will be sure to find it.

I HAVE now thrown upon paper all that occurs to my present thoughts, or all that I have leisure to digest and extend, of what has been thrown out in many conversations concerning the folly and presumption of philosophers, the rise and progress of their boasted science, the propagation of error and superstition, and the partial attempts that have been made to reform the abuses of human reason. It has amused me in writing, I wish it may amuse you in reading, and be of instruction to us both. Regular treatises and complete systems you do not expect from me: nor should you have them, if I had a much higher opinion of my own capacity than I have. My superiors in knowledge and parts would do better perhaps, if even they were content to write essays, that they might improve, correct, or reject, as I am always ready to do, on farther observation, reflection, and information. In the mean time, what has been now said may be sufficient, as I think, to establish the general proposition, that there would be more real knowledge, and more true wisdom among mankind, if there was less learning, and less philosophy.

P O S T-







# POSTSCRIPT

TO THE

## SECONDESSAY.

**H**AVING observed, in the foregoing essay, how absurdly and presumptuously philosophers reason upon a supposed analogy of the human with the divine mind, whilst they scorn to look downwards, and to observe the real analogy that there is between the mind or soul of the whole animal kind, the human species included; it has come into my thoughts to add the reflections that follow as relative to the same subject.

You may see in TULLY\*, that the stoics, who observed the internal and external constitutions of men to be very differently affected according to the different climates, concluded from thence, that there were creatures of more sublime natures in purer air, and filled unknown spaces with these unknown inhabitants. I am far from embracing this hypothesis; but it seems to me, that there is a probability sufficient to force our assent to another, which has prevailed less, because it is founded on a degree of astronomical knowledge that few persons have now, or had antiently; whereas the former is a mere wild assumption of imagination. The hypothesis I mean, is that which we find in the cosmotheoros of Mr. HUYGENS, and from which FONTENELLE has borrowed the materials of his pretty book of the plurality of worlds. Tho I give this hypothesis

\* Cic. de Nat. Deor. l. 2.



so modern an original, because it is best known and sufficient for my purpose, I am not ignorant that it had been advanced before, and that ORPHEUS, as well as Mr. HUYGENS, peopled the planets. We have reason to think he did, by those verses which PROCLUS has preserved, and in which the thracian bard speaks of houses and cities in the moon. But how old or how new soever this hypothesis may be, it assumes, you know, that the planets of our solar system, and the same may be assumed of those of a multitude of other solar systems, which the immensity of the universe contains, are worlds that have an analogy with ours, and the habitations of animals that have an analogy with us. The analogy must be, no doubt, very remote, in such a vast variety of positions, constitutions, and laws of nature: but still there may be, and there are very probably, relations both physical and moral between all these numberless worlds and systems of worlds, as between various parts of one stupendous whole, and the habitations of ten thousand times ten thousand millions of intellectual corporeal beings, who live, like us, under the providence, general or particular, of the incomprehensible Creator of all things.

SHALL we be so absurd and so impertinent now as to imagine, that all these creatures of God, tho corporeal like men, are confined to the same degree of intelligence, or even to the same manner of knowing? Or rather than believe that they are in these, and perhaps in other respects, superior to us, shall we assert that there are no such beings, and deny that they exist, tho we discover some of their habitations? Philosophers who lived before the invention of microscopes, might have asserted just as well, that the "minima naturae," imperceptible by their minuteness, as these beings by their distance, did not exist. We cannot discern a gradation of beings in other planets by the help of telescopes, as we observe such  
a gra-



a gradation by the help of microscopes in our own; but the gradation of sense and intelligence in our own, from animal to animal, and of intelligence, principally, up to man, as well as the very abrupt manner, if I may say so, in which this evidently unfinished intellectual system stops at the human species, gives great reason to believe, that this gradation is continued upwards in other systems, as we perceive it to be continued downwards in ours. We may well suspect that ours is the lowest, in this respect, of all mundane systems; since the rational is so nearly connected, as it is here, with the irrational: and there may be as much difference between some other creature of God, without having recourse to angels and archangels, and man, as there is between a man and an oyster.

WE are not able to conceive any manner of knowing, which we have not: and yet certain it is, that there may be many such. But even if we assume arbitrarily, that there is no other manner of knowing, as those prophane divines do who confine that of God himself to knowledge by ideas; yet will it be still evident, that other creatures of God may enjoy the same faculties that we have in a more perfect manner. It is easy to conceive, for instance, that there may be animals whose senses can penetrate the inmost constitutions of substances, and who, having ideas of their real essences, know the first general principles and causes, where we know nothing more than some particular effects. There may be minds wherein ideas and notions once received or framed, never fade nor vary. Such minds may discern, at one glance, and by immediate intuition, the agreement or repugnancy of all their ideas and notions. The solution of the most difficult problem may be to them as easy, as the comparison which shews the equality of twice two to four is to us. In a word, there may be, and it implies no contradiction to suppose that there are, creatures in other systems



of animal being tempered with finer clay, cast in nobler moulds, than the human, and animated by spirits more subtle and volatile than ours, whatever theirs or ours are. It were to be wished that philosophers, who are so intent on the least probable hypotheses, would contemplate this, and would compare the manifest imperfections of their own nature with the possible, nay probable, excellencies of other animal natures. They might avoid one extreme into which they are apt to fall, by looking down on inferior beings; and another, by looking up at superior. This double view would teach them neither to undervalue human nature, as some have done; nor to over-rate it, which is the folly of more.

WHAT has been here said concerning the intelligent inhabitants of other planets is purely hypothetical. It can pass for nothing more. But I am sure that it is much more consistent, and more conceivable than the other system, which prevails in our days, as it did in those of old. The system of an intellectual world, a world of immaterial ideas and of spiritual natures. Neither is it liable to have such absurd notions and practices grafted upon it, as have been grafted on the other. The inconsistency of maintaining, like PYTHAGORAS, that the human soul is a portion of the Deity, "particula divinae aerae," and, at the same time, that there are other spiritual beings between God and man; or like St. AUSTIN, that there is no mind existent between the human and the supreme mind, "nec ulla natura interposita," and, at the same time, that there are intelligences superior to man, and inferior to God; the inconsistency of these opinions, I say, is equal, and equally obvious. But on the other hand, to deny, that there is any affinity between the supreme and created intelligences is very consistent with this assumption, that the chain of intelligence from man upwards, thro many orders of created intellectual beings,



beings, is immeasurably long; tho the uppermost link of this chain is not supposed to be fastened to the throne of infinite wisdom, nor to be nearer to it than the lowermost. Again: Since our planet is inhabited by corporeal intellectual beings, the hypothesis that assumes the other planets to be so likewise, is much more conceivable, than that of legions of angels, of daemons and genii, and of pure and impure spirits, which pagan theology invented, and Jews and Christians adopted. Whether we suppose these beings immaterial, according to the present mode of opinion; or whether we suppose them, as the antients both heathens and Christians did generally, to be fine material substances, like that whereof they made the human soul, or wherewith they thought proper to cloath it in it's separate state, and of which TULLY says in his tusculans, " tanta ejus tenuitas, ut fugiat aciem;" whichever we suppose, this hypothesis stands on no other foundation, philosophically speaking, than that of a mere possible existence, of such spirits as are admitted for divers theological uses. The other hypothesis is founded on what we know of actual existence. We are led to it by a plain, direct, and unforced analogy. We know that there are habitations: and we assume that they are inhabited.

THE first might appear plausible, as it did in those ages when poets and philosophers, as well as the vulgar, imagined that the Supreme Being who spoke, to use a common expression, and the universe was made, and every act of whose will is sufficient to destroy it again, stood in need, like some earthly monarch, of ministers to attend his throne, of messengers to convey, and of troops to execute his orders: when they looked on the visible world, as on a great palace whose floor was the earth, and whose ceiling or upper story was the sky\*,

\* Cujus coelum laquear, et terra pavementum.



and when, in consequence of such fantastical notions, they supposed the upper story, or heaven, to be the habitation of gods, and of other celestial persons, as the lower story, or earth, was that of men. But it is time that these wild imaginations should have no longer any place in the first philosophy. As far as revelation realises and sanctifies them, they must be employed by the divine: and he has in revelation a sufficient authority for employing them. The philosopher, whose object is natural theology, has not the same; because the reality of such existences cannot be deduced from any knowledge he has of nature, and because he cannot be justified in going beyond the bounds which this knowledge prescribes. Faith and reason, revealed and natural knowledge, ought to be always distinguished; lest one should be confined, and the other extended too much: and divines and philosophers should keep in their distinct provinces.

Thus they proceed, for the most part, in matters of natural philosophy. The modern philosophers, tho' very good Christians, communicate the wonderful discoveries that have been made in corporeal nature, and concerning the true system of the universe, without any regard to their repugnancy to the mosaic history of the creation, and to almost all the notions of the sacred penmen, which were plainly those of an ignorant people and unphilosophical ages. When such of these philosophers, as are divines, endeavour to reconcile to philosophical truth these apparent contradictions to it, they do but shake the authority of the scriptures, and shew most evidently how necessary it is to keep theology and philosophy each on it's proper bottom, and to avoid at least, by comparing these different systems, to demonstrate that they are irreconcilable. St. AUSTIN and others paid, as divines, no regard to cosmography, and flatly denied the antipodes. The inquisitors at Rome denied



denied that GALILEI saw what he said he saw, and punished him very consequentially for saying that he saw it. Several divines follow the same method. They enter into cosmographical disquisitions no more than St. AUSTIN, nor into astronomical any more than the roman inquisitors, but content themselves to take the history of the creation according to the literal and obvious sense, as they find it related in the book of Genesis, and as they would take any other journal or historical relation. They who have done otherwise, and have found, upon trial, that this relation, thus understood, could not be reconciled to nature, reason, philosophy, nor natural theology, for natural theology teaches us to think of God in a manner very opposite to the ideas which MOSES gives of the Supreme Being and of his operations, have made use of two expedients little favorable to the mosaic history: for some have assumed it to be in this part wholly mythological, and others, unable to wrest natural philosophy into an agreement with it, have so wrested the text into a seeming agreement with their philosophical theories, as to make it plain that this text may be applied to any hypothesis, with some ingenuity, a skill in languages, and a knowledge of antiquity. — But I stop here, a digression that might carry me insensibly a great way, and that was intended only to shew, that since men have not admitted, in favor of revelation, a system of physics that is inconsistent with philosophical truth, there is no reason for admitting, in favor of the same revelation, a system of pneumatics, that is so too: whereas an hypothesis that has some foundations of probability in natural philosophy may be admitted, for this reason by the philosopher, and even by the divine for another reason; because it is not inconsistent with revelation. If it be said that the pneumatical system, which establishes so many orders of spiritual beings, is not inconsistent with any knowledge that we have of nature; that it is properly a system, because



because it is established on revealed authority; and that if we consider it in a philosophical light alone, and merely as an hypothesis, it is better founded than the other; since we may assume, that there is a world of spirits, from what we know of our own spirit by a more direct and easy analogy than that by which we assume, that the planets are inhabited by corporeal intelligent animals: if this be said, the answer is obvious and decisive. That there are such spiritual beings, as the authority of revelation is brought to prove, may not be inconsistent with some philosophical truths, but is so with others. Let it be, that any knowledge we have of natural philosophy does not contradict this system, yet is it suspicious to the first philosophy, because unnecessary; and inconsistent with it, because the reasons for the generation, to speak like the heathen, or the creation, to speak like Jews and Christians, of this unnecessary world of spirits, the supposed manner of their existence, and the uses to which they are put, or suffered to put themselves, with a multitude of other circumstances, stand in opposition to several truths of the first philosophy or natural theology, and have served only to promote polytheism, superstition, and idolatry. These dogmas then, for if they are revealed they cease to be hypotheses, must be solely maintained on the authority of the scriptures.

If the divine keeps on that ground, he cannot be defeated. He may own his inability to answer the objections, and to solve the difficulties opposed to him; or may refuse more prudently still to give any attention to philosophical reasonings, by urging, that a time will come, a time appointed of the father, when every knot will be untied, and every seeming repugnancy of reason to revelation will be reconciled: and that he is contented, as the philosopher ought to be, to wait for that time. The rabbi might defer his answer till ELIAS comes: the Christian



ftian till the Meffias comes in his glory, and till the confummation of things. In the mean while, a fort of truce fhould take place between the divine and the philofopher. The former fhould forbear the vain attempt of bending reafon to fupport revelation in this cafe, which is often done in many others, and almoft always with notable prejudice to the latter. The philofopher fhould forbear to invade the province of the divine, on this condition; and fhould content himfelf to affert and promote natural theology, without oppofing it to fupernatural. Both of them might thus concur in receiving the hypothefis of planetary worlds, which does not require to be contrafted with the other, nor fhould have been fo by me, if I had not thought it neceffary to fhew at the fame time, that there are probably finite created intelligences vastly fuperior to the human, and that there is however no fuch gradation of intelligent beings, as raifes the moft elevated of them a jot nearer to the fupreme intelligence than the loweft. I oppofe this theological fyftem, and I defend the philofophical hypothefis, the rather, becaufe by thefe means we may combat the pride and prefumption of metaphyficians in two moft flagrant instances, in the affumption of a gradation of the fame intelligence and knowledge from man to God, as I have faid already, and in that by which man is made the final caufe of the whole creation; for if the planets of our folar fyftem are worlds inhabited like ours, and if the fixed ftars are other funs about which other planets revolve, the celeftial phaenomena were no more made for us than we for them. That noble fcene of the univerfe, which modern philofophy has opened, gives ample room for all the planetary inhabitants, whom it leads, and even conftains us to fuppofe. Where the fpirits of the other fyftem refide was a queftion eafily answered, when fuperftition and hypothefis made up the fum of theology and philofophy. But it is not fo eafy to be answered now. Are the good and pure fpirits in heaven? But  
 where



where is heaven? Is it beyond all the solar systems of the universe? Or is it, like the intermundia of EPICURUS, in expanses between them? Are the evil and impure spirits in hell? But where is hell? Is it in the center of any one planet for every system? Or is it in the center of every planet? Do others wander in air? or reside latent in every element? Are they confined invisibly, like those that the Chinese imagine, to certain countries and cities, to rivers and lakes, to woods and mountains? Or is it their employment to attend on particular men, the guardian angels of some, or the devils and the tempters of others; for temptation is ascribed to the evil spirits still, tho' possession is so no longer, I think, out of Spain and Portugal, and other countries, where religious ignorance prevails as much as in them, if any such there are? — Tantum —

E S S A Y