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Essay IV. Concerning authority in matters of religion.

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ESSAY THE FOURTH:

CONCERNING

AUTHORITY

IN MATTERS OF

RELIGION.

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SECTION I.

ALL men are apt to have an high conceit of their own understandings, and to be tenacious of the opinions they profess; and yet almost all men are guided by the understandings of others, not by their own, and may be said more truly to adopt, than to beget, their opinions. Nurses, parents, paedagogues, and after them all, and above them all, that universal paedagogue custom, fill the mind with notions which it had no share in framing, which it receives as passively, as it receives the impressions of outward objects, and which, left to itself, it would never have framed perhaps, or would have examined afterwards. Thus prejudices are established by education, and habits by custom. We are taught to think what others think, not how to think for ourselves; and whilst the memory is loaded, the understanding remains unexercised, or exercised in such trammels as constrain it's motions, and direct it's pace, till that which was artificial becomes in some sort natural, and the mind can go no other.

WRONG notions, and false principles, begot in this manner by authority, may be called properly enough the bastards of the mind; and yet they are nursed, and preserved by it as if they were the legitimate issue; Nay they are even deemed to be so by the mind itself. The mind grows fond of them accordingly, and this mistaken application of self-love makes men zealous to defend, and propagate them by the same kind

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of authority, and by every other sort of imposition. Thus they are perpetuated, and as they contract the rust of antiquity they grow to be more respected. The fact that was delivered at first on very suspicious testimony, becomes indisputable; and the opinion that was scarce problematical becomes a demonstrated proposition. Nor is this at all wonderful. We look at original, thro intermediate authority, and it appears greater and better than it is really, just as objects of sight are sometimes magnified by an hazy medium. Men who would have been deemed ignorant, or mad, or knavish, if they had been our cotemporaries, are revered as prodigies of learning, of wisdom, and of virtue, because they lived many centuries ago. When their writings come down to posterity, posterity might judge indeed of their characters on better grounds than report and tradition: but the same authority, which shewed them in a half light, screens them in a full one. Paraphrases and commentaries accompany their writings. Their mistakes are excused, their contradictions are seemingly reconciled, their absurdities are varnished over, their puerilities are represented as marks of a most amiable simplicity, their enthusiastical rants as the language of the most sublime genius, or even of inspiration; and as this is frequently done with much skillful plausibility, so it is always aided by the strong prepossessions that have been created in their favor. The first traditional authorities that handed down fantastic science, and erroneous opinions, might be no better than the original authorities that imposed them. But they were sufficient for the time; and when error had once taken root deeply in the minds of men, tho knowledge increased, and reason was better cultivated, yet they served principally to defend and embellish it. Truths, that have been discovered in the most enlightened ages and countries, have been by such means as these so blended with the errors of the darkest, that the whole mass of learning, which

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we boast of at this hour, must be separated, and sifted at great expence, like the ore of a poor mine; and like that too, will hardly pay the costs.

It may sound oddly, but it is true in many cases to say, that if men had learned less, their way to knowledge would be shorter and easier. It is indeed shorter and easier to proceed from ignorance to knowledge, than from error. They who are in the last, must unlearn before they can learn to any good purpose; and the first part of this double task is not in many respects the least difficult, for which reason it is seldom undertaken. The vulgar, under which denomination we must rank, on this occasion, almost all the sons of ADAM, content themselves to be guided by vulgar opinions. They know little, and believe much. They examine and judge for themselves in the common affairs of life sometimes, and not always even in these. But the greatest and the noblest objects of the human mind are very transiently, at best, the objects of theirs. On all these, they resign themselves to the authority that prevails among the men with whom they live. Some of them want the means, all of them want the will, to do more; and as absurd as this may appear in speculation, it is best, perhaps, upon the whole, the human nature and the nature of government considered, that it should be as it is.

SCHOLARS and philosophers will demand to be excepted out of the vulgar, in this sense. But they have not a just claim to be so excepted. They profess to seek truth without any other regard; and yet the task of unlearning error is too hard for them. They set out in this search with the same prejudices, and the same habits that they who neglect it have, and they lean on authority in more cases than the others. If they improve and employ their reason more, it is only to degrade her

the more; for they employ her always in subordination to another guide, and never trust themselves wholly to her conduct, even when authority cannot have the appearance of authority without her approbation. The task of unlearning error, and laying authority aside in the search of truth, is not only hard in itself, but it becomes harder still by two considerations, as it implies a self-denial of vanity, and of ambition. Scholars are ostentatious of their learning, and tho he who has read much will not arrive at truth so soon, nor so surely, as he who has thought much, yet will he make a greater glare, and draw more admiration to himself. The man who accumulates authorities of philosophers, of fathers, and of councils to establish an opinion that must be founded in reason, and be agreeable to the common sense of mankind, or be founded in nothing, is not unlike the child who chooses a crown in several pieces of brass, rather than a guinea in one piece of gold. Thus, again, we must not imagine that we behold an example of modesty and moderation, when we see a whole sect of philosophers submit to the authority of one, as Pagans, Christians, and Mahometans did in their turns, and for many ages, to that of ARISTOTLE; whilst they dared to reason in no other form, nor on any other principles than those which he had prescribed. It is in truth an example of rank ambition. Such men, like the slaves who domineer in absolute monarchies, intend by their submission to a supreme tyrant to acquire the means of exercising tyranny in their turns.

THERE are innumerable cases in common life, and many in arts and sciences, wherein we must content ourselves, according to the condition of our nature, with probability, and rely on authority for want of the means, or opportunities, of knowledge. I rely on the authority of my cook, when I eat my soup; on the authority of my apothecary, when I take a dose
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of rhubarb ; on that of GRAHAM, when I buy my watch, and on that of Sir ISAAC NEWTON, when I believe in the doctrine of gravitation ; because I am neither cook, apothecary, watchmaker, nor mathematician. But I am a rational creature, and am therefore obliged to judge for myself in all those cases where reason alone is the judge ; the judge of the thing itself ; for even in the others, reason is the judge of the authority. My parson might reproach me very justly with the folly of going thro the journey of life without opening the eyes of my mind, and employing my intellectual Sight. But my parson grows impertinent when he would persuade me, like those of your church, to remain in voluntary blindness ; or like those of ours, to let him see for me, tho my eyes are open, tho my faculties of vision are at least as good as his, and tho I have all the same objects of sight before my eyes that he has before his.

RESIGNATION to authority will appear the more absurd, if we consider, that by it we run two risks instead of one. We may deceive ourselves no doubt. But is the divine, is the philosopher, infallible ? We shall not mean to deceive ourselves most certainly. But the divine, or the philosopher may intend to deceive us. He may find his account in it, and deceit may be his trade. Had these men that superiority over others, which some of them have assumed ; did the sublime objects of divine philosophy appear to them, tho they do not appear so to us, in the effulgence of an immediate and direct light, there would be some better reason than there is for a dependence on their authority, at least in one respect. We might own their knowledge sufficient to establish this authority, whatever we thought of their candor and sincerity. But God has dealt more equally with his human creatures. There is no such superiority of some over others. They who exercise their
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reason, and improve their knowledge the most, are dazzled and blinded whenever they attempt to look beyond the reflected light wherein it is given us to contemplate the existence, the nature, the attributes, and the will of God relatively to man. They who pretend to face, like so many intellectual eagles, the sun of eternal wisdom, and to see in that abyss of splendor, are so truly metaphysical madmen, that he who attends to them, and relies on them, must be mad likewise.

THE more important any subject is, the more reason we have to be on our guard against the impositions and seductions of authority, and to judge in the best manner we can for ourselves. The all-wise God has disposed the universal order so, that every man is, by his nature, capable of acquiring a certain and sufficient knowledge of those things which are the most important to him, whilst he is left to probability and belief about others: and yet such are the contradictions which reconcile themselves to one another in the heads and hearts of men, that even they who perceive the importance of the subject, and are not delivered over by a supine neglect to authority, are however deterred by an unreasonable timidity from the use of their own judgments, and are determined by an affection of their minds, in opposition to common sense, to deliver themselves over to the prevalent authority, whatever that be. Thus, they who invade the reason of mankind triumph, not by their own strength, but by the prejudices of the invaded. Their success may be compared to that of a certain prince who placed, it is said, cats and other animals, adored by the Egyptians, in the front of his army when he invaded that people. A reverence for these phantoms made the Egyptians lay down their arms, and become an easy conquest.

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THIS timidity is the less excusable, because the divine wisdom, as I hinted above, has been pleased to manifest to us a rule of inquiry and judgment in matters of divine philosophy and natural religion, that is sure, as far as it goes, and it goes most certainly as far as the same wisdom intended that our inquiries and judgments should proceed. It serves at once both to direct and limit them. God has shewn these great objects to us in a light reflected from his works, and proportioned to our nature. He has shewn them in no other, in the ordinary course of his providence. The way therefore to avoid fantastical, and to attain some degree of real knowledge concerning them, is to apply ourselves to a careful observation of the phaenomena of nature, corporeal, and intellectual, as nature is commonly distinguished. The true foundations of natural theology must be laid in natural philosophy. So they have been laid, in part at least, by antient and modern theists, and by the latter especially, since the wonderful discoveries that have been made by the improvement of experimental philosophy; discoveries that might send the wisest men of antiquity, sacred and prophane, could they arise from the dead with all their wisdom and all their learning about them, once more to school.

THE foundations * of theism have been laid wider, but they wanted no solidity before these discoveries. These new proofs,

* THIS note is added a great number of years after I had written what is contained in the text referred to, and after my opinions concerning the Supreme Being, and the proofs of his existence had been established in my mind; because I have lately found, in the history of the royal academy of sciences at Berlin for the year 1746, a dissertation written by a very ingenious man, a very good philosopher, and one with whom I have been long acquainted, that I cannot approve on many accounts. His avowed design is to deduce the proofs of God's existence from the general,

proofs, nay all proofs beyond those which every observing man is able to draw even from an unphilosophical view of the system

general, not any particular laws of nature, and to deduce those of motion and rest metaphysically from the attributes of the supreme intelligence.

To make way for this proof, he rejects or endeavours to weaken every other proof, on this pretence, that the attempt to establish truth on false reasonings is the greatest injury which can be done to it. I shall not take on me to examine his hypothesis, how little soever I like the deduction of a physical hypothesis from metaphysical principles, instead of establishing general, abstract, or, if you please, metaphysical axioms on particular experiments and observation.

MR. MAUPERTUIS lays no weight on the famous argument of DES CARTES taken from the idea of an infinite, all-perfect Being, which he supposes to be in the human mind; and MAUPERTUIS is in the right. He says little on the assumed universal consent of mankind to this great and fundamental truth, and he is not in the wrong. This consent is not such as it stands represented by many. It is general enough to shew the proportion which this truth bears to the universal reason of mankind, and I think it would prove no more if it was still more general. The actual existence of such a Being cannot be fairly deduced from it. He will not insist, he says, on the argument which may be drawn from the intelligence whereof we are conscious, to a first intelligence, infinite, and eternal, which is the original of all intelligence, and the first cause of all things; and yet I apprehend that he has given us none so good by the help of metaphysics, and mathematics, as this, which is plain and obvious to the conception of every rational creature.

THAT some theists have reasoned weakly from the phaenomena of nature to the existence of God is, I believe, true, as I am sure it is true that others would have made the doctrine of final causes ridiculous, if any thing could make it so, by the ridiculous application of it on every unworthy and trifling occasion. But we must not learn from hence to despise all those arguments which antient philosophers drew from the beauty, order, and disposition of the universe, on this smart conceit, that they knew too little of nature to have a right to admire it.

He is not satisfied neither with those which NEWTON, and much less with those which other naturalists have drawn from the same phaenomena. If he cites those of NEWTON, it is only to shew how weak and inconclusive even these are. NEWTON thought that the uniform motion of the planets proved itself necessarily to have been directed by choice, not by chance, and he shews the great probability of this doctrine. But then he thinks there remains probability enough on the other side, to hinder us from saying that this uniformity must have been necessarily the effect of choice, tho it should be granted, agreeably to NEWTON's system, that all the celestial bodies being drawn towards the sun, move in a vacuum. On the other hand he advances, that the force of NEWTON's argument being founded alone on the impossibility

tem of nature, are proofs "ex abundantia." I honor most sincerely those philosophers who have endeavoured to raise the thoughts

possibility of assigning a physical cause of this uniformity in his hypothesis, it will have no force with other philosophers. The uniformity of these motions will not appear inexplicable to those who admit a fluid matter, in which the planets are hurried round, or by which their motion is moderated. On this foot we are not reduced to the alternative of supposing either chance, or choice, and such an uniformity of motion will prove the existence of God no more than any other motion impressed on matter. This MAUPERTUIS says. But till the physical cause of the uniform motion of the planets has been explained intelligibly by the hypothesis of a fluid, we must remain where we were, and have recourse in one case, as well as in the other, to choice, or chance.

THIS philosopher thinks that the argument, drawn by NEWTON from the formation of animals, has no more strength than the former. He asks, whether, if the uniformity of some be a proof on one side, the infinite variety of others will not be a proof on the other side? Now surely these proofs are so far from being contradictory, that they coincide. The eagle, the fly, the stag, the snail, the whale, and the oyster are very different animals no doubt; and the immense variety of the different species of animals appropriated to different elements, and purposes, displays the magnificence of the animal world, and the infinite power of its author, as the uniformity of all those of the same species shews the design and wisdom of that Being who created them, and appropriated them to the same elements, and to the same purposes. When we compare an eagle to a fly, we find a proof of one. When we compare an eagle to an eagle, we find a proof of the other. In short the objection is founded in cavil, not in argument.

MR. MAUPERTUIS proceeds, and admits, but admits as if it were for argument's sake alone, that the proportion of the different parts and organs of animals to their wants, carries a more solid appearance; and he judges that they reason very ill, who assert that the uses, to which these parts and organs are applied, were not the final causes of them, but that they are so applied, because the animal is so made. Chance gave eyes and ears, and since we have them, we make use of them to see and hear. He thinks however it may be said, that, chance having produced an immense number of individuals, those of them, whose parts and organs were proportioned to their wants, have subsisted, whilst those who wanted this proportion have perished, and disappeared. Those who had no mouth, for instance, could not eat, and live; those who wanted the organs of generation could not perpetuate their species: and thus from the present state of things theists draw an argument, which will appear fallacious, when it is applied to the possible original of things.

To ridicule the proofs of this kind, he asks, a little too triumphantly, what it signifies to discover appearances of order and proportion, if after this discovery we are stopped in our reasoning by some untoward conclusion? He instances in the

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thoughts of men, by these discoveries, from the phaenomena up to the author of nature, instead of amusing the world, like

serpent, who can neither walk, nor fly, and yet saves himself from the pursuit of other animals by the flexibility of his body, which enables him to crawl away faster than many of them can follow him. The cold of the winter would chill him to death, if the form of his body, and the slippery smoothness of his skin, did not enable him likewise to creep thro holes that hide him under the ground. This is the discovery. The untoward conclusion follows, and he asks, to what purpose does all this serve? Why truly to none but the preservation of an animal, whose bite is sufficient to kill a man. Thus the philosopher endeavours to destroy one proof of God's existence, by begging the same question as the divine begs, when he would prove that God is unjust, because there is either physical, or moral evil in the world; that is, by assuming man to be the final cause of the creation.

THE great and respectable persons, such as father MALEBRANCHE, whose authority MAUPERTUIS cites against the order observed in the construction of the universe, and who were at a loss to comprehend how it could be the work of a Being infinitely wise and powerful, built their objections on the same assumption, and ran, as he observes, into many absurd systems. But I wave entering any farther here into the consideration of this assumption, and the use that is made of it, since I have taken occasion to speak fully about it in another place.

THE criticism he makes on that expression which closes the first of Mr. POPE's ethic epistles, "whatever is, is right," cannot be maintained. The proposition is not advanced as an argument to prove the existence of God, nor as a profession of faith, "un acte de foi." I presume Mr. POPE meant it as a reasonable consequence of what he supposed already proved, and that when design and wisdom were so evidently marked in all the works of God which are objects of human observation and knowledge, it became his creatures to conclude that the same wisdom and design were employed in the whole, tho human observation and knowledge cannot reach to the whole, and therefore that he was justified, as he was most certainly, in pronouncing that "whatever is, is right." To say that this axiom tends to submit all things to a fatal necessity, is not true. To say that it establishes submission and resignation to the divine providence, in opposition to the pride and presumption of philosophers and divines, is true. It is a truth which no man should be ashamed to own, and which every rational creature should be ashamed to contradict.

MAUPERTUIS himself admits enough to establish this truth, when he admits that intelligence and design are perceivable in a multitude of the phaenomena; and yet he does not give up the point. It is not enough, he says, to prove intelligence and design. To prove the wisdom of God, we must penetrate into the objects to which this intelligence and design were directed. Ability in the execution is insufficient. To shew his wisdom, we must prove his motives to have been reasonable. To what purpose do we admire that regularity with which all the planets move the same way,

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like many others, with metaphysical abstractions. But yet I think, that we wanted neither a BOYLE, nor a RAY, nor a DERHAM, nor a NEWYNTIT to convince us of the self-existence of an intelligent Being, the first cause of all things; and I am sure that we are much to blame if we want a BENTLEY, or a CLARKE, to put us in mind, for in truth they do no more, of the existence of such a Being. In short, natural theology rests on better foundation than authority of any kind, and the duties of natural religion, and the sins against it, are held out to us by the constitution of our nature, and by daily experience, in characters so visible, that he who runs may read them.

THESE revelations, for such they may be properly called, are made to the reason of mankind; and the same reason that collects them from the face of nature, is able to propagate the knowledge of them, and to find means of enforcing, as far as the general imperfection of our nature, and particular contingent circumstances admit, a conduct suitable to them. But men have not been contented to do this. They have imagined, or they have found in the frailty of the human nature, and the imperfection of the human state, an apparent necessity of going farther; of adding art to nature, falsehood to truth, and their own inventions for divine communications. In order to make the imposition pass, they have set authority in the place of reason. The religion of nature, and therefore of the God of na-

almost in the same plane, and in orbits nearly alike, if we do not see that it is better that they should move so than otherwise, that is, if we have not discovered the sufficient reason that LEIBNITZ requires in all cases where things may be done more ways than one? A reasonable man may content himself, without this sufficient reason, in many cases, and LEIBNITZ blundered grievously when he pretended to have found it in some. I doubt MAUPERTUIS has not succeeded better, in deducing the first and universal laws of nature from the attributes of an all-wise, and all-powerful Being, in order to shew, that since these laws, which are observed in the universe, are the very same which such attributes must have produced, such a Being must exist, and be the author of these laws. Happily we have no want of this demonstration.

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ture, is simple and plain ; it tells us nothing which our reason is unable to comprehend, and much less any thing which is repugnant to it. Natural religion and reason are always agreed, they are always the same, and the whole oeconomy of God's dispensations to man is of a piece. But religions, founded in the pretended revelations we speak of here, grow voluminous and mysterious, oppose belief to knowledge, and when they cannot stand a reasonable examination, escape from reason by assuming that they are above it. Many such religions have appeared in the world. We Christians reject them all, not only because they carry most evident marks of imposture, but because there can be no more than one true revelation, and that is undoubtedly the revelation we acknowledge ; for choosing of which however, and for rejecting the others, we must confess that we had no reason at all, or we must confess that the truth of a revelation is an object of reason, and to be tried by it.

RELIGIONS, instituted by men who thought themselves inspired when they were only mad, or by men who were thought to be inspired when they were only cheats, rest on the mere authority of their founder, maintained and improved by his disciples, and their successors. Reason had no share in examining the original pretended revelation, nor has much in examining the descent of the tradition that preserves it. How could reason have any share in examining and controuling the first, on which the last, and all the consequences of an imposture depend, among men ignorant and credulous, or who were prepared by superstition to believe revelation no uncommon event ? The enthusiast was not enough in his senses to reflect, that in order to be assured he had a revelation from God, it was necessary he should have not only a lively inward sentiment of the divine truth that he supposed revealed to him, but also a clear and
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distinct perception of the time and manner in which this supernatural operation was performed. The impostor was enough in his senses to know, that no one was able to prove he had not the revelations he pretended to have; because no man is able any more to perceive the perceptions of another man's mind, however occasioned, than to see an outward object by the eyes, or to hear a sound by the ears, of another. Believers in men of both these characters were never wanting; and far from examining, it became a merit not to examine.

He said it, was foundation enough for an article of faith in the pythagorean religion; and the same proof was sufficient to establish the religion of Foe that began in India, was propagated into China, and spread in several sects all over the East. The same observation may be made on other religions that have been imposed by the force of authority, no matter how acquired, on ignorant and superstitious people at first, and on those of more sense and knowledge, when the authority was grown too strong to be shaken. But christianity was not so imposed; and nothing can be more plain than this, that God submitted the authority of his revelation at the time he gave it, and therefore at every later time much more, to the reason of the creatures to whom he gave it.

When we consider the great and glorious purposes of this revelation, the manner in which, and the person, even the son of God himself, by whom it was made, and all the stupendous miracles in the heavens, and on earth, that were wrought to confirm it, we are ready to conclude that such a revelation must have left reason nothing to do, must have forced conviction, and have taken away even the possibility of doubt. This consequence seems so necessary, that if such events were stated hypothetically, the hypothesis would be rejected as defective
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and inconsistent, unless they were supposed to have had their full effect ; and yet in fact, an universal submission of all those who were witnesses of the signs and wonders that accompanied the publication of the gospel, did not follow. The learned men among the Jews, the scribes, the pharisees, the rulers of the people, were persecutors of christianity, not converts to it ; and the vulgar, as well as they, were so far from believing JESUS to be the Messiah their nation expected, or any divine person sent by God, that when PILATE inclined to save him, instead of BARABBAS a notorious criminal, the whole crowd cried out, " let his blood be on us and our children," and insisted, with a sort of mutinous zeal, on his execution.

WHAT are we to say now ? The Jew will insist that the miracles might be such as they are reported to have been, but that if they were such, they were wrought by the powers of magic, like those of APOLLONIUS of Thyana ; or by some secret charm like that of the true pronunciation of the name that consisted of four letters, the famous tetragrammaton ; and that his ancestors had reason therefore to reject the proofs drawn from them, instead of believing, that the God of truth had set his seal, as it were, to an imposture. The infidel will insist, that all these miracles were equivocal at best, such as credulous superstitious persons, and none else believed, such as were frequently and universally imposed by the first fathers of the christian church, and as are so still by their successors, wherever ignorance or superstition abound. He will apply to miracles, what BESSARION said of saints, and bid us judge of the antient by the modern. Thus will these men account for the little success which the gospel had, on the first publication of it : little, I mean, when compared with the authority of the preacher, whose divinity was sufficiently manifested under the disguise of humanity.

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SECTION II.

BUT I ask, what now will a good and reasonable Christian say? He will not alledge, I think, that the Jews were rejected, and the Gentiles called in: since his two antagonists would be ready to answer, that he set the effect in the place of the cause, and the cause of the effect, when he assumed, that the Jews refused to believe in the miracles and gospel of CHRIST, because they were rejected, instead of assuming that they were rejected because of their unbelief. Would he follow the example that has been set on other occasions? Would he reason from his notions, well or ill abstracted, of order, and of the fitnesses and unfitnesses of things to the conduct of God, call this reasoning demonstration, and when he found the phaenomena stand in opposition to it, as they would do evidently in the present case, since that universality of submission to the son of God was not paid, which ought to have been paid, according to all our ideas of order and fitness, would he have recourse to some bungling hypothesis to reconcile them? If he took this method, it would happen to him as it has happened to divines very often: he would strengthen the objection of the infidel, and not be able to solve it afterwards.

AN end to which the means are not proportioned can never be the end of infinite wisdom, seconded by infinite power. The means employed to establish and maintain the gospel have not been sufficient to do it independently of reason, and by the mere force of authority, from the first publication of it. The end and design therefore of infinite wisdom was not to subject human reason, how much soever it was in fact subjected by the first converts, to a revelation received implicitly, even on the authority of the son of God himself, and much less on any other.

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Reason was made so necessary to judge of this revelation, even at the time it was given, that if we suppose ourselves transported back to that time, and inquiring into the truth of this revelation on the very spot where it was made, we shall find, that far from being determined by authority in favor of it, our reason would have had much to do in comparing the various and contradictory testimonies, and in ballancing the degrees of probability that resulted from them. The contest between the first witnesses of christian revelation, and the rest of the Jews who witnessed against it, became a party contest, carried on with great zeal on the persecuted side, and great cruelty on the other. They disputed not only about the miracles that had been wrought, and were daily working among them, even about that decisive concluding miracle the resurrection of JESUS, but about the interpretation of their prophecies, which foretold the coming of the Messiah, and about the application of them to him. In such a confused state of things, on whose authority could any honest inquirer have depended? If he had weighed, or if he had counted suffrages, he would have been equally determined against the truth; and upon the whole he must have despaired of coming to a determination at all by any other way than that of employing the utmost sagacity of his mind, and judging for himself, unless it had pleased God to make him some particular revelation.

THIS advantage St. PAUL boasted that he had. The miracles of CHRIST and of his disciples made so little impression on him, tho he had not only heard of them all, but had been an eye-witness, at least, of that which appeared when St. STEPHEN was stoned to death, that he signalised his zeal against christianity till he himself became the subject of a most miraculous operation, and was called upon by JESUS in a short, but very

very pathetic expostulation *. In this manner he was converted; and in this manner every inhabitant of the earth, Jew or Gentile, learned or ignorant, might have been converted, as well as he. But it was not in the plan of providence to employ the immediate, particular, miraculous, and therefore irresistible authority of revelation in many cases: and all other authority, even that of miracles, occasionally wrought before some, and reported by others, being inadequate to universal conviction, the generality of men were left to embrace christianity or not, as their reason, right or wrong, weak or strong, should direct, and reason not being subdued by revelation, revelation was subjected to reason. St. PAUL was not in this case: his reason had been subdued effectually. But he dealt with other men as being in it. He argued, he expostulated, he appealed to their reason principally. He worked, indeed, now and then a miracle, as it was given him to work them; for his case in this respect may be compared to that, which a divine of the faculty of Paris, whom I have quoted elsewhere, assumed to be the case of all those who wrote the books of the old testament. One seemed to have had inspirations, and the others a power of working miracles occasionally, not constantly. PAUL, therefore, appealed chiefly to the reason of mankind in his several missions. On two of these missions, at least, it may be to our present purpose to make some reflection.

He preached at Antioch to the Jews and to the Gentiles: the former contradicted him, disputed with him, and raised a persecution against him and his companion BARNABAS. The apostles worked no miracles on this occasion, like men who knew how ineffectual the authority they procured was, for the most part, in the then ordinary exercise of that power. The last recourse was to reason: and when that failed, the apostles

* Acts of the Apost. ch. ix.

turned themselves from the lost sheep of the house of Israel to the Gentiles. The Gentiles were more docile, and free from the prejudices of the Jews about their prophecies, which only served to mislead them: reason had more effect on these; they rejoiced, they glorified the word of God, and they believed, that is, as many of them as were preordained to eternal life*; for it would seem, by this passage, that neither authority, nor reason, nor miracles, nor all these together were sufficient to make men profelytes to christianity without a previous designation, and divine election†. Let us follow St. PAUL from Antioch to Rome, where he succeeded a little better among the Jews. Those of Asia looked upon him as an apostate, and were the more averse to christianity, perhaps, for his preaching it. But the Jews at Rome had no prejudices against him, tho he was brought thither in chains. They had received no letters about him from Judaea; no one who came from thence had spoke any evil of him. They had heard, indeed, of a new sect which was every where opposed, and they were desirous to know his opinion of it §. They took a day to hear him, and they heard him with remarkable patience, for they heard him from morning to night. He was full of the holy ghost, he argued from the law of MOSES, from the prophets, and from every other topic, as we may assure ourselves, and omitted nothing that might persuade them to embrace the gospel. What was the effect? Some believed, and some believed not. The same may be observed of his proceeding at Thessalonica. He

* Crediderunt quotquot erant praeordinati ad vitam aeternam. Act. c. xiii.

† N. B. The opinion that God acts with men by arbitrary will, and by virtue of his absolute sovereignty over his creatures being once established; and in consequence of it, the doctrines of election, reprobation, and an eternal predestination; much of what has been said falls to the ground. Miracles were as superfluous as reason, where special grace was to operate, and both insignificant, where it was not to operate. I own myself unable to reconcile these apparent inconsistencies, and I leave that task to others.

§ Acts ch. xxviii.

went into the synagoge, he worked no miracles, but he reasoned with the Jews three sabbath days, &c.

To conclude on this head then, it is plain that the first publishers of christianity did not rest the cause primarily, or solely, on authority of any kind. It is plain that they submitted the gospel, and the authority of those who published it, to the examination of reason, as any other system even of divine philosophy ought to be submitted. The consequence was, that it prevailed, as other religions have done, and not with that universal assent which might have been expected from a religion given by God himself, and given to all the sons of men; from a revelation, their belief in which was to decide their eternal happiness or misery, and which omnipotence could have imposed as easily on all as on some, if infinite wisdom had so designed. Right reason is always on the side of truth: it is truth, and can never differ from itself. But right and wrong reason, the bona and mala ratio of CORTA, being nothing else than the result of a right and wrong use of our faculties, it is no wonder the imperfection of these faculties, and the prejudices and seductions to which we are exposed being considered, that the wrong takes often the place of the right, and passes for it. Why the natural order of things was preserved thus far in the case of a supernatural dispensation, why so many particular miracles were wrought ineffectually to the general avowed design of this revelation, and why the divine authority of it was not manifested to all concerned in it, that is, to all mankind, as the divine authority of the law was manifested to all concerned in it, that is, to all the Israelites, let us not presume to guess. In this manner christianity was first promulgated; and in this manner, therefore, it was right and fit that christianity should be promulgated.

BUT now, since the prerogative of reason was thus established over revelation originally, it is proper we should inquire how far this prerogative extends now, and whether it be lessened, or increased, by length of time. In order to this divines teach, that we must distinguish between the external and internal evidences of the truth, and divinity, of the christian revelation; by which I mean the testimony brought to prove the fact, that this revelation was made by God, and the character of the doctrines contained in it, whether worthy or unworthy, of a divine original. If they can establish the fact sufficiently, the second attempt seems little necessary; but it is for the honor of christianity to stand such examinations, as every pretended revelation declines; and our divines themselves exhort us so to examine; tho it must be confessed, that when the result of our examination is not strictly conformable to the doctrines they teach, they damn us for examining, according to that absurd prerogative which they exercise frequently of advancing general propositions, and of condemning them in particular instances. Let us not be so absurd. He who examines in a manner to shew, that whilst he refuses submission to the authority of man, as if it was that of God, he is careful not to reject the authority of God, as if it were that of man, does much more service to christianity than he who resolves all into authority, and builds his religion on his faith, instead of building his faith on his religion; that is, than he who assents to facts and doctrines, and a whole system of religion implicitly, without an examination of any part of it, instead of believing things that he can neither comprehend, nor examine, on the foundation of those which he comprehends, and has examined.

Of the two sorts of evidence that have been mentioned, the external comes first under examination; for nothing can be
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more ridiculous than that which has happened very often to philosophers and learned men, to examine the causes of things, to descant profoundly on their nature, and after that to find that the existence of these things was doubtful, or the non-existence certain. One of your divines would urge the authority of the church on this occasion, as sufficient to supply the want of any other proof, and to fill up the measure of probability, which he would call certainty. But he would urge it most absurdly, since he would prove in a circle the authority of the church by that of the scriptures, and the authority of the scriptures by that of the church. One of our protestant divines who unite in opposition to the authority of your church, and would be glad to erect an authority very like to it each in his own, would mince the matter a little, would rather insinuate than assert such an authority, and rather persuade than demand submission to it. He would allow, that in the full latitude of evangelical liberty, you have a right to examine the testimony in favor of christianity. But he would attempt at the same time to shew you, that it is much more easy, and full as safe to rely on the authority of so many pious, judicious, and learned men as have made it the business of their lives to examine the testimonies of this revelation, and have agreed to affirm the validity of them.

NEITZIER of these divines however would be so ridiculous, I think, as to deny that the external evidence of christian revelation has been diminished by time. They would own, that it has been so by the loss of many proofs, whereof time and accidents have deprived us. But I am apt to suspect, that if time and accidents had been more impartial, and had conveyed down to us all the proofs that were brought for it and against it, tho proofs would have been more abundant, the evidence would not have been greater, and we should be puzzled

led as much by contradictory, as we are by scanty, proofs. We have indeed the concurrent testimony of the sacred writers, and it has been asked, whether we have not as much knowledge of them as we have of several prophane writers whose histories pass for authentic? it has been said too by some of those, who corrupt oftener than they correct the text of antient authors, that it is by a multitude of various readings, and of critical emendations, that these authors have been restored. But the comparisons are by no means just; for a different proof is necessary of the competency of authors, and a different assurance of the sense of their writings, according to the different use that is made of the authority. We know that the memorials of men who had been captains in the army of ALEXANDER, and eye-witnesses of all that passed in his famous expedition, were in some instances different and contradictory. We have reason to suspect the veracity of CAESAR in some parts of his commentaries; and if we had the commentaries, of LABIENUS, or those of ASINIUS POLLIO, as we have the history of DION CASSIUS, we should have still more reason to suspect, or we should find more proofs, perhaps, of the errors. We read, however, the histories of ARRIAN, and even of QUINTUS CURTIUS, tho we do not know who the latter was; and the commentaries of CAESAR, as authentic histories. Such they are too, for all our purposes; and if passages which we deem genuine should be spurious, if others should be corrupted, or interpolated, and if the authors should have purposely, or thro deception, disguised the truth, or advanced untruth, no great hurt would be done. But is this the case of the scriptures? In them, besides all the other circumstances necessary to constitute historical probability, it is not enough that the tenor of facts and doctrines be true; the least error is of consequence. There was a time when the eastern and western churches had great disputes about the procession of the holy ghost; whether he proceeded from the father and
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the son, or from the father by the son. These disputes occasioned much disorder, tho the difference of a monosyllable was alone concerned. But other disputes had arisen before these, lasted longer, and devastated almost all Christendom by wars, persecutions, and massacres, tho the sole difference between the contending parties was about a single letter. One side affirmed, and the nicæan council decreed, that the son was *ὁμοούσιος*, that is, consubstantial with the father, “habens simul essentiam, id est, eandem essentiam,” the arians, most of them at least, would have acknowledged him to be *ὁμοιούσιος*, that is, of similar substance, “habens similem essentiam;” but the holy council adhered, and the arians were all damned for the difference of an iota. If the decrees of councils, therefore, and the several creeds that were made required so exact a precision of words and letters, and if the least mistake was of such fatal consequence, what must we think, what have we not reason to fear concerning that text on which they have all pretended to be founded, and wherein it is said, that there are thirty thousand various readings? When we meet with any record cited in history, we accept the historical proof, and content ourselves with it, of how many copies soever it may be the copy. But this proof would not be admitted in judicature, as Mr. LOCKE * observes, nor any thing less than an attested copy of the record. The application is obvious, and if it be reasonable to take such a precaution in matters that concern private property, and wherein the sum of ten pounds may not be at stake, how much more reasonable is it to neglect no precaution that can be taken, to assure ourselves that we receive nothing for the word of God, which is not sufficiently attested to be so. It may be said, it has been said by a very able writer, that “the ground of this proceeding in civil courts seems to be, that the original record, or an attested copy,

* Essay, l. 4. c. 16.

“ is

“ is capable of being produced ; and that therefore to offer
“ any distant proof might look as if some art were intend-
“ ed to corrupt matters, and to disguise the truth.” After
this, he asks, “ is it in the nature of things as possible and easy
“ to produce the originals, or attested copies of the scrip-
“ tures——as it is to do so in matters which come before a
“ civil court?” The evasion is not even plausible. The copy
of a copy is not refused in proof, solely because the original
or attested copy may be had, for this is not always the case,
but because the proof would be too distant whether they can
be had or no. The two cases therefore are not vastly, as this
writer affirms, nor at all different. If the rule may be thought
reasonable in the one, it cannot be thought, without absurdity,
unreasonable in the other. However it happens, the want of an
original, or of an attested copy, is a want of proof: and the
learned divine will be forced, if he is pushed on this article,
to confess this want of proof, or to supply it, which he is too
wise to attempt, by shewing that the scriptures we have are
attested copies of the originals. I might carry this very far,
if I would carry it as far as occasion is given to carry it. But
I will only say, that it would be much better to leave objections
unanswered, than to answer them no better ; and that I pity a
man of as good parts as Dr. CONYBEAR, who is obliged to such
drudgery. The authenticity of the scriptures has suffered much
diminution by length of time, and by other ways ; for which
reason divines would do better, perhaps, if they trusted, more
to grace and faith to supply this diminution, and less to their
own skill, in the establishment of the external proofs of a
traditional revelation ; tho I know that these external proofs
may be deemed to be in some sort “ con-
“ ditiones sine quibus non.”

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SECTION III.

BUT the prerogative of reason extends farther than the examination of witnesses, and other external testimony. There is another ground of probability to be established; and if this cannot be established, the credit of a revelation will not support itself on the other alone. This ground of probability is that which was mentioned at the same time with the former, and is called internal evidence. Divines found it high, and build much upon it; but their proceeding is, to my apprehension, alike absurd and licentious.

A DIVINE, who has a large stock of theological presumption, finds direct and evident proofs of a divine inspiration in the very style of the scriptures; in the sublimity of some parts, and in the simplicity of others: tho the same sublimity, and the same simplicity are to be found in uncanonical writings, and even in those of eastern nations that are not christian. He reasons magisterially, as if he was thoroughly acquainted not only with the human, but with the divine nature; as if his understanding bore so near a proportion to the wisdom of God, that he could discover it latent in the deepest mysteries, or under the veil of things seemingly so indifferent, or so common, that men of less sagacity would not suspect even human wisdom to have been employed about them; and finally, as if his extended genius was able to comprehend a whole oeconomy of divine wisdom from ADAM down to CHRIST, nay even to the consummation of things; to connect all the dispensations, and to shew the sufficient reason of providence in every particular instance on the same plan. This now is madness, or something worse than madness; and yet men are so accustomed

to reason in this method, and on these principles, that not only the learned and ingenious, who have some pretence to be so mad, pursue them, but every dabler in theology, who has no such pretence, and must pass for a fool or a knave whenever he grows extravagant, affects to reason in the same manner when he writes, or when he preaches; and talks as impertinently in the pulpit of the designs of God, and of the conduct of providence, as he talks of the political designs and conduct of his governors in the coffee-house. Thus the bible becomes a canvas, on which it has been the business of many to dawb, from the time when it was first spread before them. If it was agreed, that some out-lines may have been traced by the original painter: yet would it be manifest, that several particular figures, and the composition of the whole system is the work of bungling human pencils.

FROM a motley system thus framed, the pretended internal evidences of divine revelation are drawn, and they are often drawn in such a manner, that he who might yield to external proofs is shocked at these, instead of being confirmed by them. How should it be otherwise, when these proofs are not brought even as they are found in this motley system, and when they take the appearance, for they have often no more, of proofs, not from the plain text and tenor of the scriptures, but from the amplifications and conjectures of divines? These amplifications and conjectures take away the force of the proof, such as it is, by shewing too visibly that they are amplifications and conjectures; for it is not lawful to proceed in cases where divine, as in those where human knowledge, wisdom, and authority are alone concerned. In these, our endeavours to improve what we find are not only lawful, but laudable; and it is no more reasonable that the authority of those men, who have gone before us, should fix the bounds of our inquiries, than

than it is that our authority should fix those of the men, who are to come after us. Human science would have been long ago at a stand, if a contrary practice had prevailed universally, as we see it is, and has long been, in those particular countries where the contrary practice has so prevailed. But what is commendable in one case, is blameable in the other. We have no more right to add to the word of God, than we have to alter it: and the same revelation which gives us divine knowledge, in what proportion soever it be given, and how little soever it may satisfy our curiosity, and our imaginary want, confines it likewise. The human master may tell us all he knows, and we may carry knowledge much farther on his instructions, and on our own strength. But the divine master tells us no more than he judges it fit we should know, and every step we attempt to make beyond his express revelation, and on our own strength, is a step we make in the dark, exposed to err, and sure not to know.

THO I think that the internal evidences of a divine revelation neither are, nor can be, such positive proofs as they are pretended to be; yet am I fully persuaded that reason ought to examine the inward character of a revelation, as well as the outward testimony. Negative proof will supply the want of positive proof: and thus a sure and a real criterion will be found, instead of one that is equivocal at best, and imaginary. I will not perplex the argument by considering how far a conformity to the general experience of mankind is to be exacted in an history that relates principally to supernatural events; but I may insist that there is another conformity, a conformity to all we know of the Supreme Being, and of the law of our nature, so very essential to a revelation that pretends to come from God, that if any one thing repugnant to this knowledge be found in any history, or system of doctrine, they ought to be

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rejected,

rejected, whatever proofs external or internal they may boast of a divine original. Tho we hold no very exalted rank among the intellectual creatures of God, yet has he been pleased to give us faculties by which we are able, in using them well, to demonstrate all that he has judged necessary for us to know in our natural state, and without supernatural assistance, concerning his existence, his nature and attributes, his providence over his creatures, and their duties to him and to one another. We ought to acknowledge, with the utmost gratitude, the advantage of such a rank in the order of beings: and shall we dare to assume for true any facts, or any doctrines that are evidently inconsistent with this knowledge, however even good men may endeavour to reconcile in opinion, by frivolous discourse, things that are irreconcilable in nature, or whatever authority be employed to impose them? God forbid that we should. Right reason will never advise us to do so, and if any pretended revelation required that we should, it would prove itself to be false, for that very reason.

NATURAL revelation, so I will call it, produces knowledge, a series of sensitive and intuitive knowledge from the first principles to the last conclusions. The system of things that are, that is, the phaenomena of nature, are the first principles; and reason, that is, a real divine illumination, leads us from one necessary truth to another thro the whole course of these demonstrations. In all these cases we know; we do not believe. But in the case of supernatural revelation, when it is traditional, we can have nothing more than opinion, supported by human authority, and by decreasing probability afterwards. The divine authority grows less and less apparent, whilst the obligation of submission to it is reputed still the same. But the certainty of natural revelation suffers no diminution. It is always original, and equally capable of forcing our assent in all times and places, because the principles

ples by which it is manifested are equally objects of human sense and intellect, in all times and places. The missionary of supernatural religion appeals to the testimony of men he never knew, and of whom the infidel he labors to convert never heard, for the truth of those extraordinary events which prove the revelation he preaches: and it is said that this objection was made at first to AUSTIN the monk by ETHELRED the saxon king. But the missionary of natural religion can appeal at all times, and every where, to present and immediate evidence, to the testimony of sense and intellect, for the truth of those miracles which he brings in proof: the constitution of the mundane system being in a very proper sense an aggregate of miracles.

UPON the whole, let us suppose the historical and traditional authority, urged in proof of a revelation, to be carried as high as the nature of things will admit, on a concurrence of all the conditions necessary to establish such a probability as ought to stand in lieu of certainty, in every other case, and as may induce us, in this case, to believe even in instances that are not at all conformable to general experience; yet must we not receive it for true till we are sure, on the most careful examination, and analysis, that it contains nothing unworthy of the majesty of the Supreme Being, nothing inconsistent with the demonstrated truths of natural religion. Profane history may contain such things as are not conformable to general experience, and be nevertheless credible in all other respects. But sacred history, the history of a divine revelation, that contains any one thing unworthy of the Supreme Being, or repugnant to the religion of nature, and to the most evident dictates of reason, ought to be rejected with indignation, and will be so by every man who is afraid to blaspheme. There are many occasions on which we cannot discover the whole truth, and

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on which, however, we are very able to discern what implies contradiction with some self-evident, or demonstrated truth. This may be one of those, and on this we shall be sure not to err, if we persuade ourselves that the same God who gave us reason to arrive at certainty in some cases, and at probability in various degrees in others, never designed that we should oppose probability, in any case, to certainty, nor believe against knowledge. Dr. BARROW, in a discourse concerning the virtue and reasonableness of faith, after begging the question long, and talking in a theological cant more worthy of PAUL than of a man like him, as he was bound by his profession to do, talks like a philosopher, and a man of superior sense. He says, that "if we seriously weigh the case, we shall find that to require faith without reason is to demand an impossibility; and that God therefore neither doth, nor can enjoin us faith without reason." Now I ask, if we are not obliged to believe without reason, can we be obliged to believe against it? He says, "that no man can believe he knoweth not what nor why;" and therefore that he who "truly believeth must apprehend the proposition, and must discern its connection with some principle of truth, which, as more notorious to him, he before doth admit." Now let me ask again, can any man be said to apprehend a proposition which contains a mystery, that is, something unintelligible; or any thing more than the sound of the words? Will not the argument against believing become still stronger, if a proposition is repugnant to any principles of truth, which we have before admitted on evident demonstration? I am proud to have doctor BARROW on my side, and will therefore conclude, as he does, that the man, who pretends to believe otherwise, "doth only pretend to believe out of some design, or from affection to some party; his faith is not so much really faith as hypocrisy, craft, fondness, or faction."

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THIS being premised, let us own that when a revelation has passed successfully thro these trials, when it has all the authenticity of human testimony, when it appears consistent in all it's parts, and when it contains nothing inconsistent with any real knowledge which we have of the supreme all-perfect Being, and of natural religion, such a revelation is to be received with the most profound reverence, the most intire submission, and the most unfeigned thanksgiving. Reason has exercised her whole prerogative then, and delivers us over to faith. To believe before all these trials, or to doubt after them, is alike unreasonable; for nothing can be more absurd and contemptible, than what St. AUSTIN somewhere or other, for in his works I have read it, advances about believing first, in hopes of understanding afterwards; which is a proposition much like that which CALVIN*, as absurd and as dogmatical a father as AUSTIN, maintains, when he makes the authority of the scriptures to depend on the inward testimony of the spirit alone, and then mentions the proofs proper to establish the authenticity and divinity of these books, as props, "admiracula," that may help to support the faith they could not have raised.

SECTION IV.

IF such absurdities as these have induced some to ridicule all religions that assume themselves founded on divine revelation, there are those who take occasion from the effects of them to form objections of a graver kind, and of greater consequence. These men would have it believed, that all such religions are incompatible with civil sovereignty; because they introduce a

* Vid. CALVIN's Inst. l. i. c. 8.

private

private conscience that may be, and often is, contrary to the public conscience of the state; and not only set up private judgment in opposition to that of the legislature, but inforce the dictates of it by a greater authority, even by that of God himself. The Jews were unfociable members of the great commonwealth of mankind: and the same private conscience which determined them to the exercise of every kind of cruelty on other nations and other religions, made them rebels to government, even to their own, upon some occasions, and frequently persecutors and assassins of one another. They thought themselves authoris'd by their religion to commit such barbarities as even they, perhaps, if they had had no religion would not have committed; and zeal for it, that is, private conscience, inspired a sanguinary rage that might be called, very justly, religious madness. To subdue those, and reduce them to a state of servitude who do not receive the coran, is a first principle that made innumerable countries the scenes of slaughter and misery. MAHOMET, who taught it, practis'd it; and his successors have exercised the same violence, as far as they have been able to carry their arms. But this violence is not confined to those whom they call infidels, for the sects of Omar and Aly detest each other as much as they both do christianity: and the doctors of Mecca gave as good a bull to MIRIWEIS to satisfy private consciences in taking arms against the sophy, as any pope ever gave to justify rebellion, and the deposition of a lawful prince*.

BUT to leave judaism and mahometism, and to speak of the christian religion, against which the objection is particularly directed, and which I mean particularly to defend; it must

* N. B. A manuscript in the king of France's library writ at the time, and on the spot, gives an account of a journey which MIRIWEIS made to Mecca for this purpose, before he invaded Persia and dethroned the sophy.

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be confessed, that from the time it made any figure in the world, it appeared divided into sects that even heathen persecution could not unite: and that from the time it became an established religion, it deluged the world with blood, at the suggestion, as well as under the pretence, of private conscience. Whatever sect prevailed, by ecclesiastical cabals, or by court intrigues, out of which the ladies * were not always excluded, that sect dictated one public conscience in the religion of the state. Another sect that prevailed at another time, or in another place, by much the same means, dictated another; and of this we need no other proof than the several revolutions from athanasianism to arianism, and from arianism to athanasianism. One alone could prevail at once, and as there were many, there was always a resistance of private to public conscience more or less open, and which broke out in mutiny or rebellion on one side, and in massacres and persecutions on the other, very frequently. How it happened, I know not. Let divines tell that, or rather let us forbear to pry over curiously into the secret dispositions of providence. But so it has happened, that the christian religion has been attended by the same course of accidents as are common with it to every institution purely human. The best of these answer their end in part only from the first, and whilst the impression of the force, that set them a going, lasts; and never fail to slacken afterwards, or to take new impressions from contingent events, by which they degenerate, and become insensibly new institutions under old names. A man who denies this, or who does not confess like CHARRON †, that “after all, nothing shews more “than religion the weakness of humanity,” is too ignorant, or too disingenuous to deserve an answer. But as government

* IF IRENE had a determining influence over the fathers of the second nicæan council, there is room to think that another theological princess took part with EUSEBIUS of Nicomedia in the first.

† De la Sagesse.

is not to be banished out of society, and anarchy to be introduced; because government, instead of securing the peace, and procuring the happiness of states, is often the cause of all their disorders, and of their final subversion: so neither is religion to be banished out of government, because, instead of strengthening and supporting, it serves often to weaken and to dissolve those that are the most firmly established.

WHAT is here said of religion in general, is eminently true of christianity in particular. Tho this religion was born, if I may say so, in a desert, and educated by a sect of the most obscure people in the roman empire, and tho it seemed calculated in many instances to be rather the institution of an order of reformers, than of a national governing religion; yet no religion ever appeared in the world, whose natural tendency was so much directed to promote the peace and happiness of mankind. If it has had a contrary effect, it has had it apparently, not really. Theology is in fault, not religion. Theology is a science that may be compared justly to the box of pandora. Many good things lie uppermost in it. But many evil lie under them, and scatter plagues and desolation thro the world. If we cannot shut the box, it is of use, however, to know that the box is open; and to be convinced the more of this truth, let us make a general analyse of christianity, and then observe, as generally, the rise, progress, and effects of theology.

SECTION V.

IN the first place then, christianity is founded on the universal law of nature. I will not say that christianity is a republication of it. But I will say that the gospel teaches the great and fundamental principle of this law, universal benevolence; recommends

recommends the precepts of it, and commands the observation of them in particular instances occasionally, always supposes them, always enforces them, and makes the law of right reason a law in every possible definition of the word beyond all cavil. I say beyond all cavil, because a great deal of filly cavil has been employed to perplex the plainest thing in nature, and the best determined signification of words according to the different occasions on which they are used.

I SHALL attempt perhaps, at some other time, to expose more fully the solemn trifling that has been employed, on this subject, if what will be here said should not be thought sufficient, as I believe it ought to be.

WITHOUT entering therefore into metaphysical and logical refinements, concerning fitnesses and unfitnesses, resulting from the supposed eternal relations of things, which determine, according to some writers, the will of God himself; without amusing ourselves to distinguish between natural differences that arise in this manner, and moral differences that are said to arise from will alone, let us observe, that not only self-preservation, but a desire to be happy, are the immediate or improved effects of a natural instinct, the first in the whole animal kind, the last in the human species at least. As soon as men's appetites and passions are awake, they are determined by these to indulge every agreeable, and to abhor every disagreeable sensation; for pleasure which is temporary, and therefore not real happiness, passes for it, and is alone the object of appetite and passion. But as soon as their reason is formed, they discover the momentous difference between pleasure and happiness. Experience and reflection bring them acquainted with the system in which they are placed, and with the essential, I do not say eternal differences of things according to the con-

stitution of it, by which some tend to their pleasure, some to their happiness, some to both, and some to neither; or to the very contrary, to pain and misery. By these consequences they distinguish natures, and on these essential differences reason establishes the principles necessary to promote and secure the human happiness of every individual in the happiness of society. These principles are called, very properly, the laws of nature; because, altho it be true that the Supreme Being willed into existence this system, as he did every other, and by consequence all the relations of things contained in it, yet it is not this will that imposes in a state of nature, and among men who have no knowledge, perhaps, of their creator; it is in truth the constitution of the system alone that imposes these laws on mankind originally, whatever power made the system, or supposing it to have been never made; and when they are thus imposed, they determine the will of our species as effectually, and oblige as strongly, as the most powerful principle of human nature can determine and oblige human creatures.

I do not say that they have their effect absolutely, nor constantly. Appetite, passion, and the force of immediate objects are often too hard for reason, even among those who hearken the most to her voice: and no wonder they should be so, since they are too hard for revelation. If the law of nature, collected by human reason from the essential differences of things, cannot procure a perfect obedience from those who profess themselves subject to it, without the assistance of civil laws, and political institutions, nor even with this assistance; so may we see even in every christian country, that the will of God, declared in his works, and in his word, cannot determine the rebellious will of man to conform to it in any near degree, even where it is enforced by the terrors of present, as well as future punishments, that are held out to the transgressors of it.

it. If we consider effects, the law of nature is as much a law as the law of the gospel, and creates as really an obligation in choice to prefer good to evil. If we consider original institution and authority, it will not indeed correspond in the mind of a fratonic philosopher with his notion of an human law imposed by will, but he will be under no necessity of applying that notion to it. He may think, and call it a law imposed on him by the operations of a superior, tho unintelligent power, the course of which he cannot alter, and must therefore conform himself to it in order to be happy; and something of this kind even GROTIUS * was forced to allow, a little unwillingly, when he said — “ et haec quidem — “ locum aliquem haberent etiamfi daremus — non esse “ Deum.” The morality of actions does not, I think, consist in this, that they are prescribed by will, even the will of God; but in this, that they are the means, however imposed the practice of them may be, of acquiring happiness agreeable to our nature. Morality regards manners, and the conduct of human life, and therefore I see as little reason to deny that atheists may have knowledge of the morality of actions, as I do to deny that the practice of this morality is enjoined by a law in the sense of obliging and binding; for if it should be said, that it cannot pass for a law in this sense, because every man’s own reason imposes it on him, and he cannot be at once the obliger and the obliged, the binder and the bound, I should think the sophism scarce worthy of an answer; or should content myself to inform the sophister, that there may be obligation without a law by will, and a law by will without obligation, and then leave him to ponder on the matter.

BUT now, tho the law of nature be a law in a strict and proper sense, and as really promulgated by God in his works as

* De jure belli et pacis. proleg. 2.

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it would have been in his word if he had spoke to his creatures, how much wrangling soever may be made by men who frame and change definitions just as their different purposes require; yet is this law more completely, and more effectually such to a thief than to an atheist, and Mr. BAYLE's famous paradox can never be received for truth by common sense, nor by good policy. The same use of sense and reason shews to both the constitution of nature, the essential differences of things, and the obligations that have the force of laws derived from thence. But the former rises from a knowledge of the phaenomena to a knowledge of the God of nature, and in the law he discovers the lawgiver. The atheist sees it is his interest, the thief sees it is his duty, to observe this law, and he adores the divine wisdom and goodness that have blended together so marvelously, and so graciously, his greatest interest and his greatest duty. Every kind of knowledge, whereof our nature is capable, combines to shew the thief, that God speaks to man in his works, and signifies his will by them. He can neither be in doubt whether it is God who speaks, nor be at a loss to understand the divine language. An atheist who has much imagination, much elevation of mind, and a great warmth of inward sentiment, may, perhaps, contemplate the differences of things in abstract consideration, and contrast the beauty of virtue and the deformity of vice till he falls in love, if I may use the expression after TULLY, with the former, and grows to abhor every appearance of the latter. He may create, in this manner, in himself, as it were, an artificial moral sense; for to assume any such natural instinct is as absurd as to assume innate ideas, or any other of the platonic whimsies. But how much more lively must this sense be in the thief, who knows not only that virtue is the perfection of his nature, but that he conforms himself by the practice of it to the designs of infinite wisdom, and co-operates in some sort with the Almighty?

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As a knowledge of the essential differences of things may lead men who know not God, to a knowledge of the morality of actions, so do these essential differences serve as so many clues by which the thief may guide himself thro all the intricacies of error and of disputation, to a knowledge of the will of God. Since infinite wisdom, that must always proportion means to ends, has made happiness the end or instinctive object of all his human creatures; and has so constituted them, and the system in which he has placed them, that they can neither attain to this happiness, nor be secure in the possession of it by any other means than the practice of morality, or the social virtues; it is demonstrated, that God wills we should pursue these means to arrive at this end. We know more certainly the will of God in this way, than we can know it in any other. We may take the word of man for the word of God, and in fact this has been, and is still the case of many. But we can never mistake the works of God for the works of men, and may be therefore assured that a revelation, evidently manifested in them, is a divine revelation. But tho natural religion is an object of knowledge, and all other religions, even that of the gospel, can rest on nothing more than probability, yet may that probability be such as will and ought to force our assent. He therefore who thinks that the christian religion is founded on such a probability, may affirm that the gospel, tho he does not think it, in propriety of speech, a republication, is a confirmation of the law of nature, and renders this a law beyond all cavil about the term.

SANCTIONS of this law are implied in the theistical system; because it assumes, and to be sure very justly, that the general happiness, or misery, of mankind depends on the observation of this law, and that the degrees of one and the other bear al-
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ways a proportion to the exercise, and to the neglect of public, and private virtue, in every community. But these motives are such as particular men will be apt to think do not immediately, nor directly concern them, because they are apt to consider themselves as individuals, rather than as members of society, and to catch at pleasure without any regard to happiness. To give an additional strength, therefore, to these motives, that are determining in their own nature, but not so according to the imperfection of ours; decisive to our reason, but not so to our appetites and passions, the ancient theists and polytheists, philosophers or legislators, invented another; that, I mean, of future rewards and punishments represented under various forms, but always directed to the same purpose. This motive every man who believes it may, and must, apply to himself, and hope the reward, and fear the punishment for his secret as well as public actions, nay for his thoughts as well as his actions. What effect this motive had in remote antiquity we cannot say, but it had lost its force long before the institution of christianity. The fear of hell particularly was ridiculed by some of the greatest moralists; and to shew how little it was kept up in the minds of the vulgar, we may observe that *TULLY* * treated it in some of his public pleadings as he would have avoided scrupulously to do, whatever he thought of it himself, if this fear had been at that time prevalent even among the vulgar.

* ——— quid tandem illi mali mors attulit? nisi forte ineptiis et fabulis ducimur, ut existimemus apud inferos impiorum supplicia perferre. ——— actum esse praecipitem in sceleratorum sedem atque regionem. Quae si falsa sunt, id quod omnes intelligunt; quid ei tandem aliud mors eripuit, praeter sensum doloris? pro *CLUENTIO*. ——— Ut aliqua in vita formido improbis esset posita, apud inferos ejusmodi quaedam illi antiqui supplicia impiis constituta esse voluerunt: quod videlicet intelligebant, his remotis, non esse mortem ipsam pertimescendam. *Orat. 4. in CATILIN.*

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THE future rewards and punishments are not original nor direct sanctions of the law of nature, because not coeval with it, yet they became such when the christian revelation was made. They are original sanctions of christianity, and christianity which includes, was designed to enforce, the law of nature. We may, therefore, be allowed to wonder, and to seek the reason, why the law of nature, thus enforced, has served so little to correct the manners of men, and to promote the peace and happiness of the world? Why christianity has served, on the contrary, to determine men to violate the very law it confirms, and has opened a new source of mischief wherever it has prevailed? I said above, that theology is in fault, not religion. We shall see this verified in every part of the analysis we make of christianity. A few reflections will shew it to be so in this part, where we consider the gospel as a system of natural religion.

SECTION VI.

THE law of nature then, or natural religion, as it is the most important, is the plainest of all laws; and if the heavens do not declare the will, as well as the glory of God, according to an observation my lord BACON * makes in a chapter that contains some of the idols of the den, and of the theater particularly, sure I am, that the earth, and the inhabitants of it, declare both. The will of God has been revealed in his works to all those who have applied themselves to the contemplation of them, even to those who did not discover him in them, from the time that men have used their reason; and where reason improved, and knowledge increased, morality was carried as high in spe-

* De Aug. Scien. lib. 9. chap. 1.

culatation, and in practice too, by some of the heathen worthies, as by any of the christian saints; even as high as the very precept which the chancellor * quotes, and which he declares, a little rashly, to be more than human, and above the light of nature, since it was taught by some who had no other light. Notwithstanding this, divines, who cannot bear, that the will, any more than the existence, of God should be deduced from his works, the clearest and the most authentic of all revelations, affirm against fact and reason both, that men may have indeed some true notions of virtue and vice, and of good and evil, by the light of nature, but that the moral law is too sublime for reason to attain to every part of it; and on this affirmation, a great deal of theological policy has been established. Thus they give too another instance of their inconsistency, for nothing is more common than to find in their writings, nay in the course of the same argument, the religion of nature extolled as a perfect, and vilified as a most imperfect system. Had these reverend persons been content to teach the duties of natural religion with evangelical simplicity, as CHRIST himself did in his sermon on the mount and elsewhere, they might have taught additional duties, and theological virtues apart; and they might have enforced the whole, if they had pleased, by the heaven they promised, and by the hell they threatened.

Thus they might have preserved natural religion in the genuine purity of it. Instead of perplexing and corrupting it, they might have enabled every one to be his own casuist, and have made good men as well as Christians. But this method, which would have enlarged the kingdom of God, would not have enlarged, nor fortified, the theological empire. To do

* Diligite inimicos; benefacite his qui oderunt vos—quae certe verba plaustum illum merentur, nec vox hominem sonat; si quidem vox est, quae lumen naturae superat. ib.

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this the more effectually, it was necessary to maintain the insufficiency of human reason, tho God thought it so sufficient, that he left the whole race of mankind, a few patriarchs and the chosen seed excepted, several thousand years under no other conduct. It was necessary to boast the necessity of a revelation that might supply the defects of reason, tho this revelation remains, and has remained, from the time it was made, unknown to the far greatest part of mankind. It was necessary to make even the moral law a mystery, and such a mystery as could not be, on many occasions, unveiled without a profound knowledge of theology; which is a science that their order has imagined, and has reserved to itself. In this respect, the christian priesthood has been wiser than the heathen. The heathen priests were wholly employed in teaching silly ceremonies, and celebrating the pompous rites of superstitious worship. They left the care of teaching the principles, and inculcating the obligations of morality to philosophers; at least in the times with which we are best acquainted, this was the state of religion among the pagans. But from the most early days of christianity, it has not been thus in the christian church. The persons, whom we repute commissioned to instruct others in revealed religion, have assumed the sole right of deciding in all cases concerning natural religion, that is, in almost all the most important affairs of public and private life.

By these means, and by these men, the moral law has been so intermixed with theology, and both of them have been so extended, and so perplexed, that the two plainest things in the world, and which would not have been fitted to the purpose of them, nor by consequence worthy of their author, if they had not been plain, the law of nature and the law of grace, have been rendered voluminous, intricate, and contentious to such a degree, that the life of man is scarce long enough to attain a

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knowledge of them. Divines, who are supposed to have this knowledge, are therefore consulted like oracles, and till their decisions, like those of the others, and for some of the same reasons, began to lose their credit, their authority in the direction of private conscience was absolute, and extended from the prince to the peasant, who were alike under their influence. When they had decoyed mankind out of the plain into a wood, they who had planted the wood were necessary guides in it. Much ill use has been made of this authority, and much color given by it to the objection against religion, which we consider here. So much, that I apprehend there is no way to do right to christianity, but that of imputing, as we do, consequences that cannot be denied, to the corruption of religion by theology. This corruption has gone so far, that altho it be of the last absurdity to affirm, that any law can alter, much less contradict, that of nature, yet have men presumed to dispense with the observations of this law, to distinguish it away, to decide in direct opposition to it, and shamelessly to advance, that the bishop of your church, for instance, has a power to alter the very nature of things. "Jure potest contra jus discernere." Nay, BELLARMIN presumed to say, that if a pope should injoin vices and forbid virtues, the christian church would be obliged to believe vices good and virtues evil, or would sin against conscience. "Nisi vellet contra conscientiam peccare." BELLARM. de Pont.

MORAL theology, which contains a super-ethical doctrine, as some grave divines have ridiculously called it, rendered the system of ethics in the writings of the antient fathers, and doctors of the christian church, more confused, less consistent, and often less moral than we find it established in those of the heathen, altho no system can be more simple and plain than this of natural religion as it stands in the gospel. I do not pretend

pretend to criticise the offices of St. AMBROSE, tho he was a faint not very unlike our BECKET ; but I will suppose, that no man presumes to compare them, in any respect to those of TULLY, and I will advance that TULLY would have blushed to own some of the moral doctrines of St. AUSTIN, tho St. AUSTIN was after St. PAUL, the great author of theological systems. This abuse of reason, and of revelation both, was never pushed so extravagantly, however, as it was by the school divines. These men, who sat ruminating in their cells on the very little they knew by experience and observation, and whose minds, therefore, were void of the true materials of knowledge, worked up, in place of them, all the " entia rationis," chimeras of imagination that have no subsistence out of it, and pass under the name of metaphysics ; all the useless definitions, frivolous distinctions, vain subtilties, and captious argumentations of logic. By them, casuistry came into vogue, which has been called in french " l'art de chicaner avec Dieu : " as logic has been called " l'art de chicaner avec les hommes ; " and we may call the whole tribe, as BUCHANAN called the scotch and irish scholastics particularly,

" Gens ratione furens, et mentem pasta chimaeris."

Some divines have made men enthusiasts, by straining the obligations of natural and revealed religion both so high, that they become almost inconceivable, and quite impracticable. Others again, scholastic divines and casuists especially, have so relaxed all these, and taught men so many ways of compounding, as it were, with God, that they are left at liberty, on many occasions, to indulge the excess of their passions. According to the first, a good Christian is an ideal man that never existed out of idea, as much as the sage of the stoics. According to the last, the worst of men may be good Christians on earth, and saints in heaven. In short, they have divided

vided the two laws that are intimately united in the gospel, have set them in opposition, and have very often made the violations of one pass for lawful means of promoting the other. The natural effect of religion is to help reason to subdue our passions, and of theology to help the passions to subdue reason and religion both, not only by indulgence to them, but by irritating the worst and most furious of them. History is full of such examples; and irreligious persons make use of them, unjustly, against christianity.

SECTION VII.

THERE are two other parts besides this of natural religion, into which christianity may be analysed, and which have been corrupted alike by theology. Duties superadded to those of the former, and articles of belief that reason neither could discover, nor can comprehend. As impracticable as some, and as incredible as others may seem, the duties required to be practised, and the propositions required to be believed are concisely and plainly enough expressed in the gospel, in the original gospel properly so called, which CHRIST taught, and which his four evangelists recorded. But they have been rendered, since they were first published, and they began to be so as soon as they were published, extremely voluminous and intricate. The duties, external duties at least, have been multiplied by ecclesiastical policy, that profited of the natural superstition of mankind. The articles of belief have been multiplied, and complicated by cabalistical notions taken from the Jews, and by metaphysical refinements taken from heathen theology. Children suffer often for the sins of their fathers. But in this case, the rule is inverted. The gospel gave birth to christian theology, and the gospel suffers for the sins of her licentious offspring; of that ecclesi-

ecclesiastical order, I mean, who affecting to be called the religious, have proved themselves to be the most irreligious society that was ever formed, and the most hurtful too, as he who compares, thro the whole series of their own history, the little good, with the infinite mischief they have done, must confess.

It is common, and yet astonishing, to observe with how much solemnity and confidence almost all those, who teach and defend christianity, presume to affirm any thing, tho never so evidently false, that they imagine may serve to recommend it, and how by these means they do hurt, even where they intend to do good. They do hurt, most certainly, to the cause of religion; and the end is, in this case, so far from sanctifying the means, that the means disgrace the end. One artifice that they employ continually, is to confound, as much as they can, the want of power in the heathen world to reform the manners of men, by promoting effectually the practice of natural religion, and the want of a sufficient knowledge of this religion. That the heathen sages wanted this power is true, and that the apostles, saints, and doctors of christianity have not had it, even with the help of a particular revelation, is true likewise; but it is as false to say that the former had not a sufficient knowledge of natural religion, as it would be to say that Christians have it not. The great book of nature lies open before us, and our natural reason enables us to read in it. Whatever it may contain, that cannot be thus read, cannot be called natural religion with any precision of ideas, or propriety of words; nor will the example, that has been brought, of men who assent readily to truths consonant to their reason, which they receive from others, and would have found it hard to discover themselves, be made applicable to the present case, so as to destroy the distinction. Mr. LOCKE should have seen this.

this sooner than any man, and one would think a reflection so obvious should escape no man. He did not, or he would not, make it. He seems to me, in the latter part of his treatise concerning the reasonableness of christianity, not only to confound the want of sufficient means to propagate, and the want of sufficient means to know the religion of nature, but to play so loosely in his expressions between this religion and the christian, that it is hard to distinguish sometimes what he intends; whether he intends means of propagating or means of knowing; to what sense he confines natural, and to what revealed religion. Thus much, however, is very clear: he asserts the insufficiency of "human reason, unassisted by revelation, " in it's great and proper business of morality." Human reason, he says, " never made out an entire body of the law of " nature from unquestionable principles, or by clear deductions. Scattered sayings, — incoherent apophthegms of " philosophers and wise men — could never make a morality — could never rise to the force of a law." These assertions now are in part, and in part only, true. But when he comes to contrast this supposed imperfect knowledge of the religion of nature, which the heathen had, with that supposed perfect knowledge which is communicated by the gospel, what he advances stands in direct contradiction to truth. It is not true, that CHRIST revealed an entire body of ethics, proved to be the law of nature from principles of reason, and reaching all the duties of life. If mankind wanted such a code, to which recourse might be had on every occasion, as to an unerring rule in every part of the moral duties, such a code is still wanting; for the gospel is not such a code. Moral obligations are occasionally recommended and commanded in it, but no where proved from principles of reason, and by clear deductions, unless allusions, parables, and comparisons, and promises, and threats, are to pass for such. Were all the precepts of this kind,

kind, that are scattered about in the whole new testament, collected, like the short sentences of antient sages in the memorials we have of them, and put together in the very words of the sacred writers, they would compose a very short, as well as unconnected system of ethics. A system thus collected from the writings of antient heathen moralists, of TULLY, of SENECA, of EPICTETUS, and others, would be more full, more entire, more coherent, and more clearly deduced from unquestionable principles of knowledge. Nor must we think that this takes off from the dignity, the authority, or the utility, even in moral doctrines, of revealed religion. The law of nature was sufficiently known, and the teachers of it, who made no pretence to any divine mission, had pressed it on the minds and consciences of mankind, the sole way they could press it, by arguments drawn from the reason of things. Revelation was not given to do what reason could do alone. It was not given to convince men of the reasonableness of morality, but to enforce the practice of it by a superior authority.

If there was any thing like a complete system of morality in the gospel, we should find it in the fifth, sixth, and seventh chapters of St. MATTHEW, since they contain a sermon preached by CHRIST himself, not on any one particular doctrine, but on the whole duty of man. What now do we find in them? Many excellent precepts of morality, no doubt, intermingled with, and enforced by several considerations drawn from his own revelations, and yet such as the law of nature enjoins, or implies, and as have been practised by philosophers, and other good men among the heathen. Some of these, and some others that we find interspersed in the gospels, are such as may be reckoned of the kind of those which St. AUSTIN calls “*fublimiora praecepta*,” not so much positive duties, as instances of greater purity and christian perfection, and rather recom-

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mended than commanded. Thus, for instance, wherever marriage has been instituted, adultery has been forbid. It was so by the mosaic law, it is so by the law of nature; for tho marriage be not directly instituted by this law, yet every wrong, every invasion of another man's property, and every injustice is forbid by it. Now the gospel carries this duty much farther, and declares, that "whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after" her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." The law that forbids the commission of a crime, does certainly imply that we should not desire to commit it; for to want the desire, or to be able to extinguish it, is the best security of our obedience; tho he who is unable to extinguish it, and yet abstains from the sin, has in the eye of reason a greater degree of merit. Reason commanded what a man may by the force of reason perform. Revelation commands what it is impossible to obey, without an assistance unknown to reason. Thus again, murder is forbid by the law of nature, but even anger is forbid by this; and universal benevolence, that great principle of the first, is strained by the last to a love of our enemies and persecutors: a precept so sublime, that I doubt whether it was ever exactly observed any more under the law of grace, than under the law of nature, tho some appearances of it may be found, perhaps, under both, and at least as many under one as under the other. These sublime precepts, which are peculiarly christian, and seem designed to characterise christianity, have not been observed by the professors of it, either antient or modern. The quaker who says yea yea, and nay nay, and doth not swear at all, does not willingly part with his coat as well as his cloak, nor give away one because the other has been taken from him; neither does the good man neglect to lay up some treasures on earth, where moth and rust corrupt, and where thieves break thro and steal. It has occurred to me often, that the same reason may be given for these sublime precepts, which

which TULLY gives somewhere for the severer doctrines of the stoics. Men will always stop short of that pitch of virtue which is proposed to them, and it is therefore right to carry the notions of it as high as possible. Whether this reason will be admitted or no, I cannot tell. It seems to me the best that can be given, "*et valeat quantum valere potest.*" In all cases these sublime precepts are so little inconsistent with the law of nature, that they are this very law carried beyond the original terms of it.

THERE are besides these general duties, and others of the same kind commanded, or recommended by the gospel, some that seem directed to the Jews only, and some that seem directed more immediately to the disciples of CHRIST. Of the first sort is that injunction which restrains divorces to the case of adultery; whereas by the law of MOSES, as well as by those of other legislators, a man who did not like his wife, nor care to cohabit with her, might give her a letter of divorce, and turn her out of his doors; for which express leave is given in Deuteronomy *. Of the same sort are those directions which tend to render the worship of God more intellectual, and the practice of good works less ostentatious. The heathen fasted and prayed, and exercised charity as well as the Jews. But the divine worship of both consisted in a multitude of external duties, and in pompous rites and ceremonies; and the Jews are taxed particularly with hypocrisy, and with an affectation of doing acts of charity in public, in the streets, and the synagogues, in order to gratify their vanity, and to be applauded by the public. Of the second sort are certain duties enjoined in this sermon, and in other parts of the gospel, which seem fit enough for a religious sect, or order of men like the essenians, but are by no means practicable in the general society of mankind. To resist no injury, to take no care for to-morrow, to neglect provid-

* Chap. xxiv.

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ing for the common necessities of life, and to sell all to follow CHRIST, might be properly exacted from those who were his companions, and his disciples in a stricter sense, like the scholars of PYTHAGORAS, admitted within the curtain; but reason and experience both shew that, considered as general duties, they are impracticable, inconsistent with natural instinct, as well as law, and quite destructive of society. They have not been therefore considered as such. They have been laid aside, and nothing more than a pretended observation of them has been kept up by some of the monastic orders.

IF this now be, as it is most certainly, a true, tho general and short representation of the moral duties contained in the gospel, and added to those of natural religion, both which consist in piety towards God, and benevolence towards man, will any disciple of the philosopher of Malmesbury presume to maintain, that the objection raised against religion has the least force on account of them, or that they render it inconsistent with civil sovereignty? He who should maintain it, would fall below notice, and not deserve an answer. But if the objection be levelled against the numberless duties superadded to those of the gospel, instead of being levelled against the few that have been superadded by the gospel to those of natural religion, it will be unanswerable. Those of the former sort have been so increased, especially in matters of rites, of ceremonies, and of external devotion, by the authority of the church, and in the course of ages, that they overload and stifle, as it were, true religion; nay that they substitute in lieu of it a carnal religion, such as that of the Jews, and those of paganism were. That the religion instituted by MOSES was such in outward appearance, "in frontispicio quidem," says SPENCER, our divines admit. But they assert that inwardly, "in penetrati," it was divine and mystic. The heathen said the same of theirs; and

and in truth, if theirs were not very divine, they were very mystical. Christianity has completed the round, and has been brought back, in many countries at least, from the simplicity of the gospel to the pageantry and superstition of heathen and Jewish observances.

THE sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper are certainly divine ceremonies, since they were instituted by CHRIST himself; and they may be said to be mystical too, because they are intended to be visible signs of something invisible. Baptism, or washing, is necessary to cleanliness and health, in warm countries especially. But it was soon adopted by those who instituted religions, and applied it to inward, as well as outward purification. It was so among the heathen, it was so among the Jews, it is so at this day among the idolaters in the Indostan, and among the Mahometans. The heathen had their public and private purifications, and we know, by other proofs besides the acknowledgment of St. AUSTIN, that baptism was one of them. We know too, that the pagan ceremonies of purification had a spiritual meaning, and were intended to keep up a sense of religion in the minds of men. "Castè jubet lex adire ad deos," says TULLY *, "animo videlicet — nec tollit castimoniam corporis." The Jews employed several kinds of baptism. They baptised even their household goods. Every kind had a mystical signification, and the proselytes to the law of MOSES, who were baptised as well as circumcised, were understood to be regenerated as well as purified. The proselyte became a new man by this ceremony, retained nothing of his former state, and even his parents ceased to be reputed such. The precursor of CHRIST instituted a baptism of repentance; and even CHRIST himself, who had not certainly any need of repentance, insisted to be baptised in the Jordan, as he

* Lib. 2. de legib.

was after some modest resistance on the part of JOHN. He was not only baptised before he began his mission: but he instituted this ceremony at the close of it, when he ordered his disciples to "baptise all nations in the name of the father, the son, and the holy ghost."

THE communion or the sacrament of the Lord's supper is another, and the only other, religious ceremony instituted by the same divine authority. We hear something of symbols of bread, and symbols of the cup, which cup was of water, that were used in the mysteries of MITHRAS, and in others. There is, I think, no room to suspect that the christian communion bore any allusion to those rites in it's institution, whatever it did afterwards. But the Jews had their passover, and in imitation of that feast, as well as on occasion of it, CHRIST instituted his supper. One was designed to preserve the memory of the exode, before which a destroying angel passed over the houses of the Israelites, and put the first born of the Egyptians to death. The other was designed to preserve the memory of the death of CHRIST, which was then near, which he assured his disciples had been foretold by the prophets, and would be effectual to the redemption of mankind, and to the remission of sin. No institutions can be imagined more simple, nor more void of all those pompous rites and theatrical representations that abounded in the religious worship of the heathen and the Jews, than these two were in their origin. They were not only innocent, but profitable ceremonies, because they were extremely proper to keep up the spirit of true natural religion, by keeping up that of christianity, and to promote the observation of moral duties, by maintaining a respect for the revelation that confirmed them. But they were soon perverted by the fathers of the church, who trusted so little to the providence of God for the propagation of this religion, that

that they employed the lowest tricks of human policy for the purpose. They added another stage of external observances, if I may say so, in the progress of converts to christianity, and modelled the ceremonies of it on the plan of those heathen mysteries, against which they declaimed so bitterly; for the good men were apt to be bitter, as well as inconsistent. Baptism was the ceremony of purgation that preceded initiation. Neither children nor others were admitted to it, till by exorcisms, and the blowing of the priests upon them, the impure spirits were driven from them. Blowing was the first, washing the second part of this purgation. They who had gone thro both were fitted to receive the influences of grace. They were the catechumens, the initiated, who partook of the first and least mysteries: and the complete or perfect Christians were those, who not only partook of the greatest, the communion, but were let into the whole secret of it. This third stage was that of consummation, according to christian as well as heathen theology: and it would scarce be possible to believe, that the greatest saints and doctors of the church had talked so much blasphemous nonsense, and employed so much artifice about it, if their writings were not extant, and if we did not see in them, that deification in another life was promised to those who received the christian sacraments with faith; as it had been promised to those who went piously thro all the mysterious ceremonies of heathenism. It would be scarce possible to believe that even ATHANASIUS, as well known as he is by his creed and by other circumstances, could have had the front to assert, that men are united to the godhead by a participation of the spirit, "*participatione spiritus conjungimur deitati*;" which participation is the effect of these sacraments, of that particularly, which was called "*magnum et pavendum mysterium*," and the sacrament "*eminentiae gratia*," as it was then, and as it is at this hour. It would be tedious to descend into a greater detail here. If
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you have a mind at any time to do so, you may consult, among other writings, the sixteenth exercitation of CASAUBON against BARONIUS, where you will find enough to satisfy your curiosity, and more than enough to raise your surprise. All I shall say more concerning these two religious ceremonies, instituted by CHRIST, is this; baptism has been kept at no very great distance from the simplicity of its original, and the little alteration that has been made, leaving it as much a sign as it was before, and, no doubt, as effectual as it was before to every other purpose, renders the ceremony more decent by sprinkling only with water, according to the practice of the western churches, than it would be by a total immersion, according to that of the primitive church, and of the oriental churches, if I mistake not, even at this time. But the other institution has been so disguised by ornament, and so much directed, in your church at least, to a different purpose from commemoration, that, if the disciples were to assemble at easter in the chapel of his holiness, PETER would know his successor as little as CHRIST would acknowledge his vicar, and the rest would be unable to guess what the ceremony represented, or intended.

It would be still more tedious to descend into an enumeration of all the impositions, which the church has laid on the christian world. New powers, new rights, new duties, new sins, new ceremonies, new observances to be practised from the birth to the death of every man, all tending to the profit of the clergy, none founded on the plain authority, and many established in direct contradiction to the spirit, and to the letter of the gospel. Judaism and paganism gave occasion to them. They were derived from thence. They are no parts of the christian system: CHRIST had no share in their institution. The manner indeed in which the gospel was published, and much more the manner in which it was propagated, might lead designing,
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enthusiastical, and superstitious men, to graft all these foreign branches on the stock of genuine christianity. CHRIST himself was, in outward appearance, a Jew. He ordered his disciples, and the crowds that followed him, to observe and do whatever the scribes and pharisees, who sat in the chair of MOSES, should direct *. He only warned them against the examples that these men gave, who did not practise what they taught, "dicunt enim et non faciunt." He was a better Jew than they, and he exhorted others to be the same. It is true that he commissioned his apostles to teach and baptise all nations †, when he gave them his last instructions. But he meant no more, perhaps, by all nations, than the Jews dispersed into all nations, since he had before that time forbid them to go into the ways of the Gentiles, and into the cities of the Samaritans §. He sent them rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and declared this in a very remarkable manner to be the object of his own mission, by the language he held to the canaanite woman. She endeavoured in vain to move his compassion. He told her it was not fit to take the bread of the children and give it to the dogs ||: nor did he relent and cure her daughter, till he was overcome by her importunity and her faith.

THESE declarations of JESUS before his crucifixion, and the charge he gave to his disciples after his resurrection, might embarrass them a little, and might cause some difference of opinion among them at their first setting out. So it happened: and tho a predilection for the Jews, and a strong attachment to the observances of the law, might have been expected from St. PAUL, a zealous pharisee, who had been bred at the feet of GAMALIEL, rather than from St. PETER, a poor ignorant fisherman; yet St. PAUL distinguished himself as the apostle of the Gentiles, and alledged, that the gospel of the uncircumcision

* MATT. chap. xxiii.
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† Ibid. xxviii.
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§ Ibid. x.

|| Ibid. xv.
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was committed unto him, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto PETER *. It is probable, that the first had made a reflection early, and had seen it confirmed by experience, as soon as he entered on his apostolical mission, that escaped the second. The reflection I mean is this, that the contempt and averfion in which both the nation and the religion of the Jews were held by the rest of mankind, would make it much more easy to convert the Gentiles at once to christianity, than to make them Jews first, in order to make them Christians afterwards. The council of the apostles and the elders at Jerusalem, to which PAUL and BARNABAS were deputed from Antioch, where the dispute about circumcising the gentile converts had been carried even into mutiny, was of the same mind. Nay St. PETER † himself spoke on that side of the question, how much soever he trimmed when St. PAUL withstood him to his face §, and reproved him for his dissimulation, and the bad example he gave.

It is evident, that indulgence to the Jews and to the Gentiles, in order to gain both, was a fundamental principle of apostolical conduct from the first preaching of the gospel. PETER conversed and eat with the Gentiles at Antioch, till the arrival of certain Jews made him separate himself from the former, fearing them which were of the circumcision: and PAUL, who reproached this prince of the apostles so harshly for his hypocrisy, if he did not dissemble to the elders the doctrine he taught to the Gentiles, did at least dissemble so far to the public, when he came to Jerusalem and joined in the most solemn act, that the most rigid observers of the law could perform, as to express a zeal for observances he did not much value, and for a law he thought abrogated; for that was the case, and that doctrine is inculcated throughout his epistles. In short, he carried his indulgence so far, or he dissembled so far, that he

* Gal. ii.

† Acts xv.

§ Gal. ii.

became as a Jew to the Jews, that he might gain the Jews, and to them that are without law, that is, to the Gentiles, as without law, that he might gain them too*. We have his own word for this, and he boasts of it.

By such prudent conduct, the gospel was successfully propagated, and converts flocked apace into the pale of christianity from these different and opposite quarters; from which it is no wonder that they brought along with them several of their former usages, rites, and ceremonies.

ABSTINENCE from things strangled and from blood had been constantly observed by the Jews, and was one of the conditions imposed by the christian church on the Gentiles received into it. This condition was confirmed by the apostolical constitutions, and enforced, I believe, by penalties more severe, in some of the imperial. It remained long in general practice among the Christians of the East, and is perhaps even now practised by several of those churches. But in the West it was soon abandoned, and will not be revived again by the zeal of our acquaintance Dr. DELANY. Abstinence likewise from all kinds of nourishment, or the most rigorous fasting on solemn occasions, had been observed in the jewish church, and is observed still by the christian churches of the East; for as to those of the West, they cannot be said to fast, when their manner is compared with that of the others, or with that of the Mahometans: they may be said rather to feast very often, and only to change one kind of luxury for another.

THESE observances were of mere pagan or jewish original. Others were of a mixed kind. MOSES had made the destruction of idolatrous worship a principal object of his law; and the

* 1 Cor. chap. ix.

zeal against images was great among the Jews. But they made a distinction, which the casuists of the upper Egypt did not make, I presume, formerly; and which those of Mecca would not admit now. Images carved or embossed were held in horror, but a flat figure, either painted or embroidered, was allowed. A passage which I have read, quoted from MAIMONIDES *, is very express and very clear on this subject. Pictures being thus introduced from judaism, statues soon followed from the pagan worship: and the western churches, if not the eastern, who kept more nearly to the jewish customs, were furnished like heathen temples. Confession of sins was in use among the heathen, so it was among the Jews, so it was, and so it is among Christians, and several forms of it have been prescribed. Penance and expiation followed both in the pagan and jewish churches: they were derived into the christian, and they have been often costly in all three. One sort of penance obtained in the two last indeed, which I do not remember to have obtained in the first, that of flagellation: a sort of penance which has been since applied, as the learned MEIBOMIUS assures us, to a very different and unholy purpose. In the synagogue it is said, that the penitents flogged one another, but your church, like a more indulgent mother, allows every one to flog himself, and to proportion the penance to the tenderness of his conscience, and the tenderness of his skin.

BUT to what purpose should I mention any more of these particulars? A multitude of such ceremonies, not to say superstitious rites, have been adopted by the christian church, tho neither commanded, nor even recommended by the gospel. For this reason, the apostles do not seem to have been very in-

* LUD. com. ad hist. aethiop. Sed hoc capiendum de imagine, quae protuberat, quales sunt figurae ac sculpturae in palatiis, et his similes. Talem igitur si quis fecerit, vapulat. Sin autem figura sit depressa, vel coloribus expressa, uti illae, quae in tabulis mensivè fiunt, aut quae intextae operi textorio, pro licitis habentur.

tent about these, or any other forms of external service. They seem to have distinguished rightly between the end and the means: the end immutable, as a religion given by God must necessarily be: the discipline, or means of supporting it, mutable, as the ordinances of men must be according to the vicissitude of circumstances, and the fluctuation of human affairs. But their successors did, and have done ever since, the very reverse of this, and it is astonishing to observe what a bustle they made, and what contests they had about the time of keeping easter, and other points of discipline and ceremony which the apostles had not thought of importance enough to deserve their decision, nor even their notice. All these fluctuated therefore extremely in the same churches, and varied in different churches, during the first ages of christianity, and especially until the synagogue was honorably buried *, if it can be said to be so even at this day. I interpose this doubt, not only because there remains a tang of judaism among several of the eastern sects, which will not appear strange to those who know that the christian church of Jerusalem judaised during a succession of fifteen bishops, but because the western sect, your pretended catholic church, instead of asserting evangelical freedom from the bondage of the mosaical law, or rather whilst she asserts it, has introduced many things from this very law, and has the front to justify them on the authority of it, under a new dispensation that takes all authority from it, according to St. PAUL. Ointment, holy water, incense, tapers, the consecration of altars, and the celebration of jubilees, are of this kind. But I think that your doctors would not sound so high this authority, if these things were alone concerned. There are others which import them more, and which they have been obliged to establish on jewish authority, for want of any better; and it is for the sake of such institutions that they have deemed it

* ——— Donec synagoga honorificè sepulta fuerit. Card. Bon. de rebus litur. l. v. expedient.

expedient to accustom men to respect this authority on other occasions, on such particularly as relate to the immediate service of God, of which custom, not reason nor revelation most certainly, has made them to pass for essential parts. The divine right of tithes was established by the law of Moses. By virtue of that law, the christian priesthood claim it. The nasi was the pontiff of the Jews, and the head of their church. From hence an argument the more for the supreme authority of the pope. Councils are derived from the sanhedrin, and the whole system of the hierarchy and of ecclesiastical regimen from the constitution of the jewish church. I take no notice here of the share which paganism had in all that has been mentioned, either immediately or mediately thro judaism. Enough is said for my present purpose: and observations of that sort will be more necessary under another head.

LET those now, who object to religion on account of external duties, rites, ceremonies, and ecclesiastical institutions, learn to be more just in their censures. Let them learn to distinguish rightly between those things which the gospel requires, and those which the church imposes. If they do not make this distinction, their objections are trifling, and if they do make it, they may have the concurrence of every sincere and intelligent Christian along with them; for reasons which are not theirs indeed, since they are intended to strengthen and confirm, not to weaken nor explode religion. When we consider how strong the impressions of sense are, and how they are apt to controul that which should controul them, we may find, perhaps, very sufficient reason to incline us to approve in general the use of ceremonies and the pomp of external service in religion. To keep up a sense of it in the minds of men, there seem to be but two ways. To strike the senses frequently by public and solemn acts of religious worship, and to heat the
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brain by notions of an inward operation of the spirit, and of a sort of mystical devotion independent of outward forms, or even inconsistent with them. One of these leads to superstition, the other to enthusiasm. Both are silly; but the last is bad in this respect: it is less governable and less curable. Superstition is folly. Enthusiasm is madness. It is good to be on our guard against both. But I am to speak in this place of the first alone, and as to that, the solemn magnificence of a church, the grave and moving harmony of music, the pomp and order of ceremonies decently performed, the composed looks, and the mystical vestments of the priests who perform them, all this, I think, cannot fail to inspire an awful respect, and to maintain a devout attention of mind in the generality. Here and there a man, perhaps, may take these ceremonies, and those who perform them, for what they are, and not be imposed upon by them, either before or after the celebration of such rites as these. But during the celebration of them, whilst the spectacle is before his eyes, and the sound in his ears, I think that the same impressions will be made in some degree even on such a man as this. You and I knew BETTERTON and Mrs. BARRY off the stage, as well as on it, and yet I am persuaded neither of us could ever see JAFFIER and BELVIDERA without horror and compassion. I do not pretend to decide in the dispute about the pomp of external service. I only speak according to what I have felt. But tho I do not take part, on the whole, for the use or disuse of church ceremonies, it may be allowed me to declare against the abuse of them all, as a friend, not as an enemy to religion. It is certain that this abuse has defeated the very end to which they were directed, or which served as a reason for the introduction of them, and has substituted something, which is not religion, in the place of it. Our spiritual guides have run into very wild extremes. Some have shewed a great disregard to good works,

works, and have talked of justifying faith alone, as the sole means of salvation, and in contradistinction to good works, like the scotch presbyterian parson, who assured his brethren from the pulpit, that immorality had destroyed it's thousands, but morality it's ten thousands. Others have insisted much on good works, but they have confounded the nature of them. They have rather meant, by good works, the practice of arbitrary duties, which ecclesiastical discipline has established, or ecclesiastical authority recommended, and which are beggarly elements indeed, than the practice of those moral duties which reason prescribes as well as revelation. How much they prefer the former to the latter, may appear by the universal practice of most christian countries. In some, the man who stabs his enemy goes to confession, and his conscience is never at quiet till he has purchased absolution by money, or by penance, or by both. The woman who lies in the arms of her adulterer will leap out of bed, and knock her forehead, and beat her breast, at the tinkling of a little bell in the street. Nay in the country where I have passed so many years of my life, where bigotry is less prevalent, generally speaking, than in others of the same communion, the poor man who has eat an egg in lent, when eggs have not been permitted by the bishop, and who had perhaps nothing else to eat, cannot be absolved of this heinous sin by the same priest that might absolve him for neglecting the worship, or offending against the law of God. The former sin is of a blacker dye than these, and he must have recourse for absolution to an higher authority; which is an imitation of the Jews likewise, among whom any offence against the ritual law was punished more severely than crimes much more grievous in their nature, as I believe it has been observed already after Dr. SPENCER. But enough has been said concerning duties added by the gospel to natural religion, and duties added by the church to those
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of both. It is time to speak of articles of faith, which make a third and last part of the analyse of christianity.

SECTION VIII.

IT is this part that has furnished matter of strife, contention, and all uncharitableness, even in, as well as from, the apostolical age. It is this that has added a motive the more, and one that is stronger than any other, to animosity and hatred, to wars and massacres, and to that cruel principle which was never known till Christians introduced it into the world, to persecution for opinions, for opinions often of the most abstract speculation, and of the least importance to civil or religious interests. It is this, in short, whose effects have been so fatal to the peace and happiness of mankind, that nothing which the enemies of religion can say on the subject will be exaggerated beyond the truth. But still the charge they bring will be unjustly brought. These effects have not been caused by the gospel, but by the system raised upon it. Not by the revelations of God, but by the inventions of men. We distinguished before between the original and the traditional proofs, and we must distinguish here between the original and traditional matter of these revelations. The gospel of CHRIST is one thing, the gospel of St. PAUL, and of all those who have grafted after him on the same stock, is another.

I WILL not say, that one article of belief alone is necessary to make men Christians, the belief that JESUS was the Messiah promised to the Jews, and foretold by their prophets. This may be the primary, but it is not the sole object of our faith. There are other things doubtless contained in the revelation he made of himself, dependent on, and relative to this article,

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without the belief of which I suppose that our christianity would be very defective. But this I say; the articles of belief, which CHRIST himself exacted by what he said, and by what he did, have been lengthened immeasurably, and we may add both unnecessarily and presumptuously by others since his time. The system of religion, which CHRIST published, and his evangelists recorded, is a complete system to all the purposes of true religion, natural and revealed. It contains all the duties of the former, it enforces them by asserting the divine mission of the publisher, who proved his assertions at the same time by his miracles, and it enforces the whole law of faith by promising rewards, and threatening punishments, which he declares he will distribute when he comes to judge the world. Besides which, if we do not acknowledge the system of belief and practice, which JESUS, the finisher as well as author of our faith, left behind him to be in the extent in which he revealed and left it, complete and perfect, we must be reduced to the grossest absurdity, and to little less than blasphemy.

THESE reasons, which cut up the root of artificial theology, deserve, for that reason, to be more fully explained. If we do not acknowledge them, we assume that the son of God, who was sent by the father to make a new covenant with mankind, and to establish a spiritual kingdom on the ruins of paganism, and the reformation at least of judaism, executed his commission imperfectly; we assume, that he died to redeem mankind from sin, and from death the wages of sin, but that he left them at the same time without sufficient information concerning that faith in him, and that obedience to his law, which could alone make this redemption effectual to all the gracious purposes of it; since we might rise to immortality indeed by the merits of his passion, but this resurrection might be to damnation too, unless an entire faith in him, co-operating with our imperfect obedience,

obedience, justified and saved us. In short, we assume, that they who were converted to christianity by CHRIST himself, and who died before the supposed imperfection of his revelation had been supplied by the apostles, by PAUL particularly, lived and died without a sufficient knowledge of the terms of salvation, than which nothing can be said more abominable. Natural religion may be collected, slowly, perhaps, tho sufficiently by natural reason, from the works of God, wherein he manifests his will to mankind. But a religion, revealed by God himself immediately, must have been complete and perfect from the first promulgation in the mind of every convert to it, according to all our ideas of order: and if we consider it as a covenant of grace, the covenant must have been made at once, according to all these ideas, and all those of justice. No new articles of belief, no new duties, could be made necessary to salvation afterwards, without changing the covenant: and at that rate how many new covenants might there not be? How often, I say it with horror, might not God change his mind?

WILL it be urged, as an answer to what has been said, that the explanations and additions, which have been made, were made by the same authority that made the original covenant, in order to ascertain the terms, and to secure the effect of it, and that there is therefore no reason to find fault that they were made? But if this should be said, instead of removing one absurdity and profanation, it will only serve to advance another. The force of the objection rests on the very assertion contained in the answer, on the sameness of the authority. If the additions were not said to be made by the same authority, they would be entitled to little regard, and the objection would vanish. But since they are said to be so made, and since they make a change in the covenant, for a covenant is changed by additional conditions, tho the original remain still in force, the

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objection is confirmed by the answer; and a farther absurdity arises from it, or the same absurdity appears in a new light. If it was necessary that the apostles, who were filled with the holy ghost, or other inspired persons, should publish by the assistance of the spirit any knowledge necessary to salvation, which JESUS had not taught, or explain the covenant of grace more perfectly than he had done, it follows, that the third person of the trinity was employed to assist the second in making a more full and perfect publication of the gospel, which comes too near the case of poor mortals, who want this assistance to receive and practise the gospel as they ought, and to whom it is given to supply the imperfection of their nature. Upon the whole, have we not reason to distinguish with an holy fear between the original system of christianity, and the very best, if that could be ascertained, of all those discordant systems into which the pure ore of the gospel has been so often melted down and cast anew, during seventeen centuries, at different times, and every time with such a mixture of human alloy, that no one of them can carry, without fraud, the image and superscription of our heavenly CAESAR?

CHRISTIANITY, as it stands in the gospel, contains not only a complete but a very plain system of religion; it is in truth the system of natural religion, and such it might have continued to the unspeakable advantage of mankind, if it had been propagated with the same simplicity with which it was originally taught by CHRIST himself. But this could not have happened, unless it had pleased the divine providence to preserve the purity of it by constant interpositions, and by extraordinary means sufficient to alter the ordinary course of things. Such a constant interposition, and such extraordinary means, not being employed, christianity was left very soon to shift for itself, in the midst of a frantic world, and in an age
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when the most licentious reasonings, and the most extravagant superstitions, in opinion and practice, prevailed universally under the respectable names of theology and metaphysics; and when the Jews themselves, on whose religion, and on the authority of whose scriptures christianity was founded, had already gone far in corrupting both, by oral traditions and cabalistical whimsies, by a mixture of notions taken from the chaldaic philosophy during their captivity, and from the grecian philosophy since the expedition of ALEXANDER. The traces of these mixtures are discernable. Those of greek origin most manifestly; and among them, those of platonism are so strongly marked, that it is impossible to mistake them. This philosophy was the very quintessence of the theology and metaphysics, which PLATO, and PYTHAGORAS before him, had imported into Greece. It had been extracted by the intense heat of the warmest imagination that ever Greece produced, and had contributed more than any other system of paganism to turn theists into enthusiasts, and to confirm that fondness for mystery, without an air of which no doctrine could pass for divine. What effect all these circumstances had on christianity, and how they served to raise an intricate, voluminous, and contentious science on foundations of the greatest simplicity and plainness, it may be worth while to examine more particularly, and in such a detail as the nature of these essays, which are not designed to be treatises, and my confined knowledge of antiquity, permit. The extent of one and the other will be sufficient, perhaps, for our purpose.

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SECTION IX.

MEN have accustomed themselves to talk so vaguely about mysteries, that the very meaning of the word is become a mystery. The whole new testament has been called the gospel, and the whole gospel a mystery. Both very improperly; for the first confounds what should be always distinguished in favor of the original system of christianity: and the second is absurd in the highest degree, since nothing can be conceived to be more so than to predicate two contradictory terms of the same subject. To affirm that a thing is and is not existent at the same time, is just as reasonable as to affirm, that the gospel is at once a revelation and a mystery, a thing shewn and a thing hidden. That there are many ambiguous expressions, and many dark sayings, in the gospel, that there are many doctrines, which reason would never have taught, nor is able to comprehend now they are taught, cannot be denied. Nay the utmost human endeavours have been, and must be always, employed in vain to reduce the intire plan of divine wisdom in the mission of CHRIST, and the redemption of man, to a coherent, intelligible, and reasonable system of doctrines and facts. Is it strange that it should be so? It could not be otherwise. Two of the evangelists recorded, as witnesses, what they saw and heard in this extraordinary conjuncture, and two others what they were told about it. Not the whole indeed; for then the world could not have contained the books that would have been written, but as much as was necessary, and even a little more than was strictly so, to account for the establishment of the spiritual kingdom of CHRIST, as it is called improperly enough, and to explain the laws of it, and the conditions of admission into it. If a great prince should arise in any country, make an intire revolution in the constitution of it,

it, reform some, and abolish others of the antient laws and customs, and establish a new government on new principles of government, would it not be sufficient for the people to know his right in general, and the measures of their obedience in particular? Would they complain, if some things essential to neither, and scarce relative to the latter, were obscurely mentioned in any of his declarations or constitutions, that they wanted a complete system of the government to which they submitted themselves, and were therefore obliged to supply on their own authority what they had not received on the authority of their legislator. I think they would make no such complaint. Reasonable men I am sure would not. To such, the whole would appear plain enough, and they would resolve to believe and obey it in the obvious and literal sense, whilst a few busy, over-curious, and designing politicians might render what was plain, intricate, and two or three dark expressions the subject of perpetual dispute, and irreconcilable division, by their refinements. Thus the peace of society might be broken, and the very end of government be defeated, not by any want of necessary information, but by an affectation of knowing more than the legislator thought it necessary that they should know. Such as I have represented these politicians in civil government, such have divines and metaphysicians shewn themselves in religion: and it is full as unjust to charge the mischiefs that have followed in one case, on religion, as it would be to charge those that would follow in the other, on government.

THE only way to have prevented such mischiefs as these from arising in the city of God would have been this, that Christians should have adhered closely to the gospel, as it was taught by CHRIST himself; that they should have thought it, as he thought it, sufficient for them; have received implicitly what is plainly revealed in it, and have avoided all dogmatical decisions

fions on things obscure or doubtful. Explanations in all these cases serve only to multiply disputes, and to establish religion, on human, instead of divine, authority. This affords a rule invariable as God himself. The other fluctuates as the opinions, and even the interests of men vary. Under one, Christians might have continued united in the same communion, and even members of the same family, friends and brethren. Under the other it is impossible that this, which is the great object of christianity, should be obtained, and therefore I am willing to believe, that they who had been the immediate disciples of the saviour preached his gospel in a spirit of union, in so simple a style, and in so strict and scrupulous a conformity to the revelations he had made, in what form soever the writings of these men have come down to us, thro very interpolating hands, that there neither was nor could be any division among them, nor any seeds of division sowed by them. He who compares the epistles of JAMES, of PETER and JOHN, such as we have them, with those of PAUL, and all these with the doctrines of the gospel, will be perhaps of this opinion; at least he will have no ground to say of the three first, that they were authors of new gospels, as he will have grounds to say of the last, and as the last does in effect say of himself. He will be of this opinion too the more easily, on account of a very sensible difference in the manner as well as the matter of their writings. There is a most remarkable and amiable anecdote to this purpose mentioned by some writers, and for which the authority of JEROM is cited. St. JOHN had been long confined in the island of Pathmos, to which DOMITIAN had banished him, and where it is pretended that he writ the apocalypse, that strange rhapsody of unintelligible revelations, as they are called most absurdly. It is much more probable, and more for the honor of the evangelist, as well as of christianity, to believe that they were composed by CERINTHUS, by a visionary of the same
name

name as that of the apostle, or by some other enthusiast. They were not admitted into the canon at Laodicea, nor would have been ever admitted to disgrace it, if JUSTIN, IRENAEUS, ORIGEN, and TERTULLIAN, in whom the love of mystery was a kind of delirium, and after their example several of the other fathers, had not crowded them into the canon by receiving them as canonical. The anecdote I am about to produce will shew how far St. JOHN was, tho his gospel gave him the title of the theologian, from multiplying and propagating mysteries, and how he retained that character of plainness and simplicity, which he had acquired in the school of his divine master. DOMITIAN dead, and NERVA emperor, the holy evangelist returned to his church at Ephesus, threescore years after the death of JESUS. Not only the gospels, his own among the rest, which it is said that he writ at the desire of his people as soon as he returned to them; but even the epistles were then writ, and the system of christianity had taken, in most of the churches at least, the form which PAUL had given it. If the good old man, feeble and decrepit, was unable to make long sermons, it appeared that he did not think them very necessary neither; for when he spoke in the public assemblies, the sum of what he said was, children love one another. The people of Ephesus, where PAUL had been, where he boasted that he had fought with beasts after the manner of men, where he had certainly made long and mystical discourses, were disappointed and dissatisfied with the succinct and plain doctrine of their bishop; but when they expostulated with him upon it, they had a very short and decisive answer, this the Lord commands: and if you do this, it is sufficient. He spoke to men who believed already in JESUS the Messiah, and in all that he had just before recorded in the gospel he published at their request, after his return from Pathmos. Whatever others might think, he thought that the gospel wanted no further explanations, nor

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extensions, and contented himself therefore to recal to their memory, on every occasion, that fundamental article of the law of nature, and the law of the gospel, universal benevolence.

THE character of St. JOHN was not that of St. PAUL. One had been formed in the bosom of JESUS; called to be a disciple, and commissioned to be an apostle, instructed by the doctrine and example of his master. He had, like PETER and the rest, no other science, and what that was the four evangelists tell us. PAUL, on the contrary, had been educated in the schools of the law, such as the law was become in those days, when oral tradition, cabalistical mysteries, and scraps of pythagorician, platonic, and even stoician doctrines, had been blended with it, and composed the most extravagant systems of philosophy and religion. The masters of all this learning were the pharisees, whose sect began probably two hundred years before CHRIST, and was in the highest reputation when he came into the world. Of this sect was PAUL; and he continued in it till he was about forty years old, profiting in the religion of the Jews above many of his equals----exceedingly zealous of the traditions of his fathers----and persecuting the church of God *. After this, he, who had resisted so many miracles, was converted by a miracle, which he and his amanuensis LUKE have related. He was called by God himself in a great light, which was always understood to denote some divine presence, to be an apostle, a chosen vessel, replenished with gifts of the holy ghost, and overflowing with grace. His peculiar destination was to preach CHRIST, whom God had revealed in him, among the heathen: and this he began to do immediately, for being made an apostle by a distinct commission from the rest, he conferred not with flesh

* Epist. to the Gal. chap. i.

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and blood, nor went up to Jerufalem to them which were apostles before him, but preached as foon as his eyes were opened, as he had received the imposition of hands, and as he had been baptised, by virtue of a particular inspiration, that gospel of which he speaks to the Galatians with so much confidence, that he pronounces every one who should preach any thing different from it, himself, an angel from heaven, and therefore most certainly even the other apostles, accursed. It was not till three years after his journey into Arabia, and his return to Damascus, that he went to Jerufalem, where he communicated privately to them, which were of reputation, the gospel he preached to the Gentiles; for he might want their approbation, tho he did not want their information nor advice: and this he obtained so far, that they gave him and BARNABAS the right hand of fellowship, that these two should preach the gospel to the Gentiles, and they, that is, the other apostles, to the children of Israel.

THIS short deduction of facts, taken from St. PAUL's own account of himself, and in which he assured the Galatians before God that he lied not, may serve to introduce an observation touched upon already, and more easily made than explained. In the last chapter of his epistle to the Romans, he calls the gospel he preached, my gospel; which expression he cannot be supposed to have used, says Mr. LOCKE in his note on the passage very justly, unless he knew that what he preached had something in it, that distinguished it from what was preached by others. But what that was we are left by this able commentator to seek. It was not plainly, what he says it was plainly, the mystery of God's purpose of taking in the Gentiles to be his people—and without subjecting them to circumcision, or the law of MOSES. If this mystery, so inconsistent with the declarations and practice of JESUS, was revealed to PAUL,

it was revealed to the apostles too, since they preached and published the glad tidings of salvation indifferently to Jews and Gentiles; in doing which had this mystery been revealed to him exclusively of them, they would have been apostles of PAUL in this instance, rather than of CHRIST. If the exemption of the gentile converts from circumcision, and other observances of the mosaical law, was the mystery, the mystery was explained by the decree of the council of Jerusalem; by which nothing more was required of the Gentiles, than to abstain from idolatry, or meats offered to idols, from fornication, and from blood. St. PAUL assumed, indeed, that not only the vocation of the Gentiles, but this exemption in favor of them and of the Jews too, were mysteries revealed particularly to him. It is evident, however, that the other apostles and the elders looked on it as no mystery at all, and that they treated it as a matter of discipline: so that a question may arise, whether St. PAUL was, what the pope pretends to be, above the council, or the council above him. The apostles had given no directions to insist, that the Gentiles should, or should not, submit to circumcision, and to the yokes of the law, which St. PETER scruples not to say, in his speech on that occasion, were so heavy, that "neither they nor their fathers were able to bear them*." In a word, by the opinion St. JAMES delivered, and by the whole tenor of the decree, it is manifest, that the mistaken zeal for the law, which some of the Jews retained after their conversion, and perhaps the immoderate zeal of St. PAUL for an immediate and total abolition of it, had given rise to this dispute, and that it was determined not as a point on which the divine purpose had been revealed to PAUL, or any one else, but according to what has been just now said, as a point of discipline left to the discretion of the apostles and elders, whose sole regard was to prevent any schism in a church hardly yet

* Acts chap. xv.

formed,

formed, and who for that reason, whilst they indulged the Jews in circumcision and other ritual observances of their law, exempted the Gentiles from the far greatest and heaviest part of them.

BUT there is something more to be observed. If the purpose of God was to take the Gentiles to be his people under the Messiah in this manner, if their abstaining from Jewish rites and ceremonies was a positive law of God under the new covenant, as the abstaining from idolatry was both under the new and under the old, how came it to pass, that the Messiah himself gave no instruction about it to his apostles, when he sent them to preach his gospel to all nations, and, as we may say, to people his kingdom, which they did chiefly out of the Gentile world? Why was the revelation of this important mystery, so necessary to be published at the very first publication of the gospel, if it was the eternal purpose of God, or else not necessary at all, reserved for St. PAUL, who was then a persecutor, not a preacher of the gospel, and whose apostleship did not begin before the conversions? Shall we say that this eternal purpose of the father was unknown to the son? We shall blaspheme if we do. Shall we say that it was known to him, but that he neglected to communicate it to the first preachers of his gospel, and gave them imperfect instructions? The profanation will be little less. These questions, and some others of the same kind, will not be easily answered, unless it be by men who are never at a loss to account for the absurdities that they impute to the divine conduct, by supposing it directed according to such partialities as are proportioned to the lowness of their minds: but the pertness, not to say the impudence, of these men deserving no regard, we must seek another solution of the difficulty, and endeavor to find what it was that distinguished St. PAUL in this respect from the other apostles,
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and gave him a reason for calling the gospel he preached his own gospel.

SOME solution of this sort may occur to us, perhaps, if we reflect on what was mentioned above concerning the difference between the manner in which St. PAUL preached the gospel, and that of the other apostles; which difference marks very strongly the different schools wherein they had been instructed, and had formed the habits that characterised them, the school of CHRIST and the school of GAMALIEL. From one of these the apostles had brought great modesty and gentleness of temper, a short, familiar, and simple style, like that of their Lord and master. From the other St. PAUL carried into the apostleship, with a great stock of jewish learning, a great deal of that assuming air which is apt to accompany much learning, or the opinion of it: and accordingly we find him obliged more than once in his epistles to excuse his boasting, and the value he set on himself, by such humble expressions as a man who had not been full of the holy ghost might, in his case, have taken a pride in using. He carried with him likewise, from the pharisaical schools, a great profusion of words, and of involved unconnected discourse, even on those subjects which required to be the most clearly and distinctly developed, if they were to be insisted upon at all, and not to be passed over in silence rather, or touched very transiently, as they had been by the other apostles. The other apostles were all evangelists, that is, they were publishers of the glad tidings of salvation: they declared to the world that the kingdom of the Messiah, that is, the spiritual kingdom, was begun, and they taught men the indispensable conditions of belief and practice, in order to be admitted into it. Farther than was necessary to this purpose, they did not affect to carry their doctrines. They meant to convince, not to perplex the minds of men. They knew

knew that by doing the last, they should obstruct the first; or should give great advantage to the false doctors that were arisen, and were to arise to corrupt christianity. St. PAUL was a loose paraphraiser, a cabalistical commentator, as much at least as any antient or modern rabbin; and tho his gospel was, in the fundamental principles of it, the same as theirs, yet he mingled it up with so much of his own theology, that he might not improperly, and in one sense, call it his own, and that we may call him the father of artificial theology. Not content to reveal mysterious truths in propositions whose terms were intelligible, tho the manner of being of these truths was still a mystery, which is no objection to the belief of any thing contained in a revelation once proved to be divine, he amplified them, descanted upon them, opened the whole oeconomy of divine wisdom from ADAM to CHRIST, and accounted for the several dispensations of God to man. The original gospel, such as the other apostles preached it, was a plain system of belief and practice, fitted for all times, and proportioned to all understandings. St. PAUL's gospel, if it may be said to be fitted as much as the others for all times, of which I doubt, cannot be said to be proportioned to all understandings. It is evidently not so to the understandings of the deepest divines, and the most subtle metaphysicians; since they have been wrangling about it from that time to this, and have established the most opposite doctrines on the same texts, to the breach of all charity, and the disturbance of the christian world*.

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* I will mention a little more fully, in this note, what I omitted in the text. All that is said there, is said relatively to received interpretations and opinions, such as Mr. LOCKE would have admitted, and were therefore proper to be followed in reasoning against him. But if I am to speak my own opinion; the matter in question may be decided more shortly, and on the whole more consistently. St. PAUL then might very well talk of his gospel, even in contradistinction to that of CHRIST; since he taught several doctrines which had no foundation in that of CHRIST, and others,

IT may be said that some passages in the four gospels, and even some expressions of CHRIST recorded in them, have been liable to various interpretations, and have produced such disputes and contests as these which I ascribe to the writings of St. PAUL. But altho this be undoubtedly true, the difference between the original gospel, and that of St. PAUL, is very real, and very manifest. One is a plain and clear system of religion, with here and there a doubtful phrase that casts no obscurity on the rest. The other is an intricate and dark system, with here and there an intelligible phrase that casts no light on the rest, but is rather lost in the gloom of the whole. By faith I may believe, but by faith I cannot understand. A proposition, the terms of which are unintelligible, is an absolute mystery: to say that we are bound to believe mysteries in this sense is itself nonsense; to say we do believe them is a lie. But a proposition, the terms of which are intelligible, may be an object of faith, tho we understand by it nothing more than the terms; when it is supported, as was said above, by divine authority,

others, as I have said, that were directly repugnant both to the word and example of the Messiah. CHRIST professed judaism, and declared himself sent to the Jews alone, and not even to the Samaritans, so positively, that when he commissioned his apostles, he may be, and, to make him consistent, ought to be understood to have meant no more, than to send them to the Jews dispersed in all nations. St. PAUL, on the contrary, instead of grafting christianity on judaism, insisted on an entire abolition of the latter; to which, however, he had conformed most hypocritically on more occasions than one; and his doctrine became, not at once, but in time, the doctrine of the christian church. This may appear strange to those who read, without a free consideration of what they read: and it will appear still more strange to them to find a pagan emperor, and a great enemy both of Jews and Christians, introduced as an instrument appointed by God to accomplish his secret designs in confirming the doctrine of St. PAUL's gospel; and yet ADRIAN is so introduced by SULPICIUS SEVERUS; for he says, that the christian church at Jerusalem having had till that time none but Jews in the episcopal chair, and the greatest part of the faithful there believing in JESUS CHRIST without departing from the legal ceremonies, that edict of ADRIAN, which hindered Jews from going to Jerusalem was of great use to christianity; by which we must understand the christianity of St. PAUL's gospel, and not that of CHRIST's.

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may often when it is supported only by human. A man, upon whose knowledge and sincerity I ought to depend, reveals to me a few mathematical truths, which, in certain circumstances, it is necessary I should know, and troubles me neither with the demonstrations which I might not be able to comprehend, nor with many corollaries to be drawn from them which I do not want. Another, the scholar of the first, and of less authority than his master, brings me a paper filled with diagrams, and letters and figures, which he assures me contains demonstrations of the former truths, and explanations of several corollaries deducible from them. I understand neither. Those whom I consult appear to understand them as little as myself, by their disputes about the meaning of them. The truths which were clear and sufficient for me in simple propositions, as I received them first, are involved in mystery; and then incoherent, figurative discourse thickens the cloud.

LET any man read the epistles we have of this apostle's writing, after he has read the gospels; let him read the former, as he would read any other books of philosophy or theology; let him call in Mr. LOCKE to his assistance, who has succeeded better, perhaps, than any other expofitor, by happier conjectures, and no greater licence of paraphrase, in giving an air of coherence, consistency, and rationality to these epistles, and in making them intelligible: such a man will not be able, after all his pains, to shew any one mystery that is left unfolded in the concise language of the gospel taught by CHRIST and his apostles, that has been rendered less mysterious by the proximity of St. PAUL. St. PAUL rather doubles mystery than simplifies it, if I may say so, and adds every where a mystery of words to a mystery of things. That they who have, since his time, and after his example, grafted theology on revelation,

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extended

extended the doctrines of it, explained and applied the prophecies, types and figures, invented new ones of every sort, and raised a variety of discord and systems on the same simple and uniform plan, should be for the most part very little intelligible is not wonderful. He, who has clear and distinct ideas in his mind, will write clearly and distinctly: and the author who puzzles an attentive reader is first puzzled himself, how common soever it be, in the science we speak of here particularly, to see those admired the most who are the least understood. That has been the case of these men. They have pretended to instruct others on subjects, on which it was impossible they should have clear and distinct ideas, or indeed any ideas at all. But that St. PAUL should write confusedly and unintelligibly, he who was illuminated by the holy ghost, that he might enlighten the Gentiles, and he who received all he taught by immediate revelation, must be always a problem not easy to resolve. "He was, it is said, a man of quick thought" and warm temper — versed in the writings of the old testament, full of the doctrines of the new — so that "one may consider him, when he was writing, as beset with a crowd of thoughts, all striving for utterance*." But are we not to consider him too, when he was writing, as a man under the influence of actual inspiration? And was not divine inspiration sufficient to keep him from falling into those faults, want of order and perspicuity, into which none but the meanest of uninspired writers are apt to fall? Mr. LOCKE should have thought so, since St. PAUL says, that the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets†: and he in his paraphrase, that Christians, however filled with the holy ghost — are not hurried away by any compulsion. A neglect of eloquence, and the ornaments of speech, became an apostle. But it is hard to discern how a neglect of order and perspicuity

* Locke's preface to his paraphrase &c.

† 1 Cor. c. iv.
should

should be apostolical, since the design of such a mission is to instruct and to convince.

SECTION X.

AFTER saying so much of the unintelligibility of PAUL's gospel, truth authorises me to add, that where it is intelligible it is often absurd, or profane, or trifling. Is not the doctrine of passive obedience, which he teaches, most intelligibly absurd? Is not that of absolute predestination most intelligibly profane? Is not one of them repugnant to common sense? Is not the other as repugnant to all the ideas of God's moral perfections? Would not either of them be sufficient to shake the credit even of CHRIST's gospel, if they were contained in it?

BUT it remains that I give an instance of the most intelligible trifling that we find in this gospel, and this instance will lead us to observe in what manner christianity was taught and propagated by the first converts to it in their public assemblies, and how easily extensions of it, or engraftments on it might be made. We hear much of the extraordinary gifts of the spirit that were bestowed on these converts, such as prophesying, working miracles, and speaking in unknown tongues, which are enumerated, with several others, by St. PAUL in the twelfth chapter of his first epistle to the corinthian profelytes. The last of these gifts belonged more properly to those who were designed to be missionaries of the gospel, that they might be able to convert unbelievers more effectually in their dispersion over different countries. But where churches were established, St. PAUL * prefers the use of the language of the place, dislikes

* 1 Cor. c. iv.

the affectation of using any other, and indulges it only when there is an interpreter at hand. The gift of prophecy, by which he intends not only prediction, but singing of psalms and teaching the doctrines of religion in their public assemblies, is that to which he assigns the first place. Now this gift every one might exercise, even the women. They are ordered, indeed, by some passages, to keep silence in the churches *, and if they will know any thing, to ask their husbands at home †: and yet it is plain, by other passages of the same epistle, that they were allowed to prophesy, as it is called, and that they did so before the congregations. This apparent contradiction is reconciled by assuming, that tho they were not on every ordinary occasion to act the part of teachers and instructors, yet they were not debarred from it, when by any extraordinary motion and impulse of the spirit they were determined to exercise this function. The only dispute was, whether they should exercise it covered or uncovered: and this material point was decided by St. PAUL. He let the Corinthians, among whom this dispute had arisen, know, “that the head of every man is CHRIST, and the head of the woman is the man, and the head of CHRIST is God” — from whence he concludes that a man, “who is the image and glory of God — having his head covered, dishonoreth his head;” but that a woman, “who is the glory of the man, with her head uncovered dishonoreth her head; for that is all one as if she were shaven §.” This argumentation may not appear very conclusive, nor indeed very intelligible, to us; but it was both, I doubt not, to the Corinthians, and in all cases it serves to shew that both sexes had their revelations, and a right to publish them.

* 1 Cor. c. xiv.

† Ib. c. xi.

§ Ib.

THE apostle * proceeds afterwards to give directions for keeping better order in the public assemblies, which were held with great confusion, whilst every one was impatient to shew his gifts, and they could not stay to do it one by one. Even these directions left room for some confusion still. Two or three might prophesy at the same meeting, one after another, and the rest of the congregation were to judge; which not only begat debate, but caused interruptions, that usually beget altercation. That this must have happened we may assure ourselves, since by one of the rules St. PAUL prescribes, if any thing was revealed to a fitter-by, the speaker was to hold his peace. SIMON the magician would have bought the power of bestowing the gifts of the holy ghost by the imposition of his hands, as he saw them bestowed by PETER and JOHN; and SIMON had embraced christianity, and had been baptised. In an age, therefore, when a communication of these gifts was esteemed so common and so easily given, it could not but be, that multitudes thought they had some or more of these gifts, and especially that of prophesying, and that, as some imagined piously, they had inspirations when they had them not; so others, even this magician, tho the apostles had rejected his offer, affected impiously to have them. It could not be hard to pass false revelations on a world, on whom it was so easy to pass false miracles; which this very SIMON, and other supposed magicians, and real impostors, did very frequently.

THIS opinion of divine illuminations and revelations being once established, an abstruse theology being once grafted on the plain doctrines which the gospel taught, and an example being set of extending the system beyond its native simplicity by collecting passages here and there, and by comparing and

* 1 Cor. chap. xiv.

applying

applying them in a cabalistical manner, even according to the sound very often, rather than the import of the words, the natural consequences did not fail to follow among the illiterate and superstitious Jews and Gentiles, who were the first converts to christianity. I need not stay to point out these consequences. History antient and modern does that sufficiently, and even our own experience in some degree. Every man, who has heard of the language and behaviour of men possessed with fanaticism, may point them out to himself. But enthusiasm, superstition, and the abuse of religion were not confined to the most illiterate. A multitude of new doctors arose, all of whom pretended to have divine knowledge, and some to be divine persons. A multitude of doctors formed a multitude of sects: the followers of SIMON the magician, as he was thought by those who were no conjurers themselves, the disciples of CARPOCRAS and of CERINTHUS, of CERDON, MARCION, and soon after these of MANES, the Nicholaites, the Valentinians, and many others; for they grew up apace.

THESE men had the old testament and several gospels and several apostolical epistles before them, for no canon of scripture was yet settled, nor till more than three centuries afterwards; tho it may seem not a little extraordinary that this should have been neglected, whilst the tradition, that could alone establish the authenticity of these writings, was fresh enough to be itself authentic. The writings, however, that passed all for authentic, in some or other of the christian churches, these men had. Nay some of them had been hearers of the apostles, and had begun to dogmatise at the same time. Neither they nor their successors had the same spirit. But they assumed the same liberty, and by adding allegory to allegory, type to type, mystery to mystery, and one arbitrary interpretation to another, christianity became a confused chaos of theology. Such it continued

nued long, and such it is, in some degree, even now; for tho many of the systems that were formed out of it, and that were coeval with it, wore out in the space of three or four centuries, many others sprung up from the same seeds, and were nursed into maturity and strength by the same culture. Nay some of the same seeds produce now and then, even at this day, and in our own country, a feeble weed or two in the vineyard of the Lord. Some of the churches, which were established by the apostles or their immediate successors, and which maintained a charitable correspondence together, might maintain likewise, for ought we know, with greater purity of manners, a greater purity of doctrine. But we must not believe, on the first head, that they who dissented from them, and were therefore called heretics by them, fell into such abominations as have been represented by IRENAEUS, TERTULLIAN, EPIPHANUS, and other fathers, who were very choleric, very foul-mouthed, and often guilty of scandalous exaggeration. A charge that may be brought with the more confidence, since it is supported by their own writings that are extant, and by men of the greatest authority in ecclesiastical literature; and since it can be neither denied, evaded, nor excused by those who are the least willing to own it. As we must not believe all that the fathers advance on this head, so must we not believe on the other, as many good people seem to do, that the primitive Christians had an uniform plan of theology, explained as we explain it, and understood as we understand it. The system swelled insensibly faster among some, more slowly among others: and they seemed to agree much better than they did in reality, as it appeared when criticism came in fashion, and they were obliged to express themselves with more precision concerning the principal articles of their faith.

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SECTION XI.

ALL these sects may be comprehended under the general name of gnostics, or learned and illuminated. At first they affected to have it thought, that they alone were both one and the other, and to despise such as could not discover all they pretended to discover of the hidden sense of the scriptures, and of the mysteries of christianity. But the orthodox grew, in time, as much gnostics as others: and we see that CLEMENT of Alexandria * thought it necessary to be so, in order to be truly religious. Illumination, and the gifts of the spirit, served to establish this christianity: but philosophy, and the sciences, were of use to confirm and improve it. No ages nor countries could be more prepared to adopt every theological and metaphysical notion, even the most extravagant and least intelligible, than those wherein the christian religion was first published and propagated. Egypt, and the eastern kingdoms, had been famous schools of a reputed divine philosophy. PYTHAGORAS had gone to them all. PLATO had gone to the former only. But what he had not acquired at the first hand, from the gymnosophists, the followers of ZOROASTER, the magi and other oriental masters, he acquired at the second, by conversing with the italic philosophers, and by a study of their writings. He says somewhere, that the Greeks improved and mended all they borrowed from the barbarians, which I am far from believing to be true. But if PYTHAGORAS and he carried any science farther than their masters, I incline to think it was the most fantastic.

SINCE the works of PLATO are in our hands, we may speak of him and his theology with more assurance, than of those

* Strom. lib. 7.

who

who went before him, or of their doctrines. Those of ORPHEUS, or those that passed under such a name in antient Greece, were chiefly mythological; those of PYTHAGORAS, symbolical; and those of PLATO metaphysical, with a mixture of the other two. Nothing could be more proper, nor effectual, to promote fantastical knowledge, than a method of philosophising by fables, symbols, and almost a perpetual allegory. But the founder of the academy did more. He poisoned the very source of all real knowledge, by inducing men to believe, that their minds are capable of abstracting, as no human mind can abstract, and of acquiring ideas, that it is impossible any human mind should perceive. He pretended to raise a mystic ladder, on which we might not only clamber up by dint of meditation to a region of pure intellect, wherein alone is knowledge, and leave sensible objects behind us, concerning which nothing better than opinion is to be had, but find at the head of it incorporeal essences, immaterial forms, spiritual beings, and perhaps the logos or second god, as the supreme God is supposed to have been at the head of the ladder JACOB saw in his dream. Angels went up and down one: philosophers were to go up and down the other.

THIS philosopher dealt little in physics: and he was in the right to neglect them. Metaphysics served his purpose better. Hypotheses of the former kind must be founded in some real knowledge, how high soever the top of the ladder reaches, the foot must stand firm on the earth. But hypotheses of the other kind are more easy to be framed, and less easy to be controuled. Thus, for instance, an intellectual world being once assumed, wherein the ideas, the forms, the patterns of all that exist in the sensible world reside, it was easy to people it with numberless intellectual, that is, spiritual, that is, immaterial, that is, simple beings without extension or solidity, that is, beings of

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which

which these refiners had negative, but no positive ideas. They were at liberty afterwards to suppose whatever relations they pleased between these beings, and between them and men. Metaphysical hypotheses, in short, are not content to account for what may be by what is, nor to improve science according to the conditions of our nature, by raising probability on the foundations of certainty; but the makers of them affect to range in the immense void of possibility, with little or no regard to actuality, and begin very often, as well as end, in supposition. Not only their systems are hypothetical, but the first principles of them, and the very ideas and notions, which compose them, are hypothetical too.

SUCH a philosopher, such a teacher of imaginary and fantastic knowledge, PLATO was. Notwithstanding which, or for which reason rather, he grew soon into great vogue in Greece, and in those countries where grecian literature was propagated after the expedition of ALEXANDER. This philosophy could not fail to be well received in those countries, from the schools of which it had been derived originally; and it flourished accordingly, and triumphed, as it were, over all others in some parts of Asia, and in Egypt, whilst it made its way into Italy, and was propagated westward thro the roman empire. The Jews of Palestine, and they who lived under the protection of the PTOLEMIES, had taken a strong tincture of heathen philosophy, and of this in particular. The doctrines of the immortality of the soul, of a future state of rewards and punishments, and even that of a metempsychosis, were adopted by the learned amongst them; tho they were rejected by those who adhered to the letter of the law; for MOSES had taught nothing of this kind. If any such hints are contained in other books of their scriptures, it is impossible to say when, or by whom those books were written, with the least assurance, notwithstanding

standing all the dogmatical impertinence of scholars: whereas we know, that all their sacred writings were compiled after their captivity, and that the canon of them was long in settling. It is possible, therefore, and even evident, that if they knew any thing of these doctrines, which had not been transmitted to them by MOSES, before their acquaintance with the greek philosophy, they must have learned it from the nations among whom they had been mixed, and from whom the Greeks had learned the same, from the Chaldaeans, and even from the Egyptians, with whom they had commerce, and in whose country many of them found a refuge in the desolation of their own by the Babylonians. But if they had so learned it, they had learned it very darkly; for there is no instance that shews they understood, received, or taught these doctrines, till long after their first acquaintance with the Greeks.

BUT be all this as it will, it is certain, that platonism was an established philosophy among the Jews before the coming of CHRIST, and that it was much more so among the Christians afterwards. It is astonishing to consider how fond the Christians were, in the first ages of this church, to believe, and to make others believe, that all the mysteries of their religion had been revealed by the writings of pagan philosophers, many centuries before they were so by the preaching of CHRIST and his apostles: as if the latter could want, or the former give any additional authority. It was to promote this opinion, that so many books were forged under the names of MERCURIUS TRISMEGISTUS, of HYSTASPES, of the Sybils, and perhaps of others. These forgeries, indeed, were so gross, that they might be well suspected even at the time they were published. Their credit, however, was maintained, till they had had in some degree the effect they were designed to have. When they could have this effect in any degree no longer, they were rejected, and

even condemned. There was the less need of them for the absurd purposes to which they were applied, because the writings of PLATO *, writings indisputably his, were public; and because his works alone, wherein was mingled much of the pythagorean and other antient theology, formed an ample and sufficient repertory of theological fables and symbols, and of metaphysical mysteries. They who have employed themselves from those days to ours in raising systems of divinity on the gospel, and imposing their own inventions by pretending the authority of it, have contented themselves accordingly with the assistance of PLATO and ARISTOTLE; of the master for sublimity of matter; of the scholar for subtilty of form.

If the absurdity of those, who have gone about to explain, to confirm, and even to improve christianity by the doctrines and authority of paganism, be, as it is surely, very astonishing; we must confess, that it is still more astonishing to observe the strange conformity between platonism and genuine christianity itself, such as it is taught in the original gospel. We need not stand to compare them here. Particular instances of conformity will occur often enough. In general, the platonic and christian systems have a very near resemblance, "*quælis decet esse fororum:*" and several of the fathers, as well as modern divines, have endeavoured with all their might, by forced constructions, and sometimes by no very faithful extracts, to make this resemblance appear still greater. Ridiculous endeavours, no doubt, since they give unbelievers occasion to say, that if the doctrines are the same, they must have been deduced from the same principle, and to ask what that principle was, whether reason or revelation? If we say it was reason; they will reply, that reason could not discover what reason

* "*Res enim et verba scholam PLATONIS sapiunt, iis exceptis, quæ miscet è libris divinis.*" CASAUB. speaking of one of these books, in his exercit.

cannot

cannot comprehend when it is discovered. A mystery may be an object of faith to him, to whom it is communicated in an intelligible proposition. But it must be an object of knowledge in him who communicates it, and requires an assent to it, on his own authority, that is, on a confidence that he knows it to be true, and that it is no mystery to him. If we say it was revelation; they will reply, that PLATO then must have been illuminated by the holy ghost; that he must have been the precursor of the saviour, as some platonic bigots have ventured, with a very little softening to the term, to call him; and that he must have been a precursor too of more importance than St. JOHN. St. JOHN instituted a baptism of repentance; and much has been said by antient and modern doctors in theology to state the difference between this baptism and that of CHRIST, baptism with water *, and baptism with the holy ghost and with fire †. These terms, as dark as they are, shew however a manifest difference; and there can be no doubt that the baptism of JESUS was much more effectual than the baptism of JOHN, as that of JOHN was effectual to higher purposes than that of the Jews. But PLATO, instead of calling on men in general to repent, and of instituting one mystical ceremony, anticipated the gospel on so many principal articles of belief and practice, that, as some divines say the gospel was a republication of the law of nature, the unbelievers will say it was a republication of the theology of PLATO. They will argue "à fortiori," that since the republication of these mysteries was made by divine revelation, the publication of them must have been of necessity made by the same means, and they will conclude, perhaps, by asking with a sneer, whether a man, whose passion for courtesans, and handsome boys, inspired him to write so many lewd verses, was likely to be inspired by the holy ghost?

* In aquâ in poenitentiam.

† In spiritu sancto, et igni. MAT. cap. iii.
SUCH

SUCH considerations as these are more than sufficient to explode the impertinent and profane notion, that PLATO was inspired immediately, or that he had, in any lower degree metaphysicians can imagine, such a share of divine illumination as enabled him to discover, in part at least, those mysterious truths that were not to be fully revealed till the Messiah came. But the question returns, how came he to discover them, even in part, near four centuries before the Messiah did come? or how came they to make a part of that pagan theology from which he took them? A plain answer may be made to these questions: and I think there is no other that can be reconciled to common sense. I have hinted at it already: but it requires to be more explained. All we can know of the divine nature, of the attributes, providence, and will of God, must be communicated to us by his word, or collected by us from his works. The heathen philosophers had not his word, and they corrupted all the knowledge they acquired from his works by their manner of philosophising. They not only hastened too rashly from particular to general knowledge, and from a few imperfect observations of the phaenomena, to the most extensive hypotheses, but they raised hypotheses independently of the observations they made, or might have made, and then reasoned on these hypotheses as from certain principles of knowledge: so that the little real knowledge they acquired "*à posteriori*" was controuled by that which they fancied that they acquired "*à priori*," and thus the whole mass of the first philosophy was corrupted. They discovered, in his works, a first intelligent cause of all things, a Being of infinite power and wisdom, whose providence is over all his creatures, and whose will, relatively to man, is manifested in the whole human system. Here was abundant matter of real knowledge. Thus far the Supreme Being lets himself down, if I may use such an expression,

pression, within the verge of human comprehension, and of human alone, as far as we can judge of the animal world about us. Beyond this fixed point we can have no real ideas, and therefore no real knowledge. All that we may imagine we have, is, and must be, fantastical. We are no more able to acquire knowledge beyond, than other animals up to this point: and the divine nature, the manner of being, the moral attributes of God, the general system of his providence, are as inscrutable to man as to them. His will too, according to which they are determined by natural instinct, is as inscrutable to us, as to them, beyond the bounds of natural revelation, unless a supernatural revelation communicate farther knowledge, which it did not to these philosophers.

WHAT now was their proceeding? Did they stop where the means of knowledge stop? Not at all. Where the system ended, the hypothesis began; and with this difference between these and all other hypotheses, that those which are made in physics are made on subjects on which we have much knowledge, and means in our power of acquiring more; whereas hypotheses in theology are made on a subject we know little of, and have not the means of knowing more. Error in the former may be corrected by improvement of knowledge: error in the latter cannot, because there can be no improvement beyond the point where such hypotheses begin. It has been observed in these essays, and more than once, perhaps, that there are philosophers who boast much of the power which the human mind has of ranging far and wide in the regions of possibility, and of perceiving what may be, as well as what is, from whence they draw very foolish conclusions in favor of human understanding. Now that the mind of man has such a power, we know most consciously. But we know, or may know too as consciously, that the exercise of this power is dangerous,

dangerous, and that he who does not use it under a strict controul of judgment on imagination, will be sure to render his conduct and his science both fantastical. PLATO, like all the divines of paganism, was far from preserving such a controul. No man had more imagination; no man controuled it less.

It would be easy to conceive, if we had not his works before us, that such extravagant methods of philosophising must have produced the most extravagant opinions: and he who reads these works, like a man in his senses, will be tempted to think, on many occasions, that the author was not so. I say on many occasions; for on some it is certain, that he writes like a very pious and rational theist and moralist. But on the whole, his writings are pieces of patch-work, and there are few of them that do not abound in false sublime and low images, in things above comprehension, in things below notice, in the brightest truths, and the foulest errors: and, to come to the present purpose, some of them abound in notions that are agreeable to the christian system, and in others that are repugnant to it; or that bearing an appearance of likeness, nay of sameness, are much more proper to promote superstition and enthusiasm, as in fact they did, than true religion. These considerations, every one of which may be justified by the most famous of his dialogues, gave occasion, perhaps, to some difference that arose in the reception of platonism by the christian fathers. St. CHRYSOSTOM, it is said, declaimed against it: and I remember a passage in TERTULLIAN*, wherein he complains, that the seeds of heresies were scattered in PLATO's books of the republic, and in his doctrine of ideas, which he calls "haeretica idearum sacramenta†." The greatest fathers of the church, however, tho they differed in other things, agreed

* De anima. † — In ideis platonis gnosticonum haeretica semina relucere.
in

in admiring PLATO, and borrowed much of their theology from him. Such were JUSTIN, ORIGEN, JEROM, AUSTIN, to quote no others, and the first the most remarkably. But how venerable soever their names may be, their conduct was in this respect extremely absurd, injurious to the gospel, and derogatory to the authority of it, as will appear undeniably by the reflections I had in view when I said, that a plain answer might be made to those who should ask how the mysterious truths of the gospel could be known, without divine illumination, to PLATO.

SECTION XII.

THE reflections, I meant, are these. What the Christians borrowed from PLATO's works was not contained in the gospel, or it was contained in it. If no such thing was contained in it, the presumption of those was inexcusable, who added a single doctrine to the christian system, or even an explanation of a doctrine, on the faith of an heathen philosopher, whose theism, tho purer than that of others, had still a tang of superstition, and even of polytheism. With respect to God, this presumption was a profanation: with respect to man, it was a fraud. The Christians who were guilty of it imposed on themselves, or if not on themselves, on others as far as their authority extended, the word of PLATO for the word of God. If the things they borrowed were contained in the gospel, they had no reason whatever for borrowing; or this must have been their reason, they must have thought the authority of PLATO necessary to confirm that of CHRIST, or reason necessary to render complete what revelation taught imperfectly. The first is a blasphemous, and the second a silly thought. Reason is necessary and sufficient to establish revelation, as it has been shewed above.

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But when the truth of a revelation is established, we are to believe implicitly; the use of reason ceases, her interposition grows impertinent, and nothing can be more so than the affectation of antient and modern divines, to banish her out of her province, or to appeal to her very weakly in it; whilst they introduce her into another, and would be thought to rest upon her, where she has nothing to do. Whenever they do this, they go out of their strength: and reason, improperly used, becomes a much better weapon of offence, in the hands of their enemies, than of defence, in theirs; as the writings of many eminent divines may demonstrate.

If reason now be so ill employed about mysteries that are proposed, she is still less fit, and less likely, to propose them. MONTAGNE would say, they are not her game. The object of reason is truth, intelligible, attainable truth: and if she goes at any time in pursuit of it into that well where it lies concealed, as EMPEDOCLES, DEMOCRITUS, and the rest of the antient philosophers complained so loudly, she never plunges so far into the dark as to be unable to distinguish it from error. Divine mysteries she receives implicitly, but she advances none of her own under that title: and a reasonable man, and a mystic man, seem two distinct species. All mysteries, that are not communicated expressly by revelation, are produced by metaphysical delirium and religious enthusiasm; to both of which men of the brightest genius have been often transported. SENECA declares a man, who does not rise above humanity, contemptible*. Many have thought they did so, and, sober on all other subjects, have been stark mad on these; for there is a madness "quoad hoc," if I may say so: and neither you nor I could be at a loss to cite several, and some living examples of it. But there is too a degree of affectation

* O quàm contempta res est homo, nisi supra humana se erexerit!

some-

sometimes in this apparent madness, employed for different purposes. The metaphysical delirium may be kept up by a reputation, which singularity alone is often sufficient to acquire, and much more by an opinion of making new discoveries in the intellectual world. This affectation, sustained by his own warm imagination, and by those of his egyptian and pythagorean masters, possessed PLATO very strongly, and answered very effectually his purpose in the acquisition of fame. He knew the people with whom he had to do; he knew that no mythology was too gross, no pretended abstractions too whimsical for them: and nothing can shew so much either how he had turned their heads, or how easily heads were turned by the marvellous in those days, as the general opinion that prevailed of his divine birth. APOLLO appeared to ARISTO his father, and forbid him to enjoy his wife during the space of ten months; which was a very unnecessary precaution, if the poor man had often tried and never could: and if PERICTIONE was a virgin, when the same god appeared to her in a vision, and she conceived. Thus PLATO was begot to be a physician of souls, as AESCULAPIUS had been to be a physician of bodies.

PLATO might safely give a loose to all the extravagance of his imagination in such an age, and be assured that the wildest hypotheses would pass for systems of sublime knowledge, and that the doctrines the least understood would be the most admired. He improved this advantage to the utmost, and it happened, as it might, without inspiration or miracle, that in his rambling speculations about the divine and spiritual nature, about the immortality of the soul, about God's dispensations in this life and another, and various matters relative to these, he blundered on some divine truths that were not quite beyond human apprehension, according to human ideas; tho they had not

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been

been yet revealed to mankind, nor stripped of types and figures, those sacred hieroglyphics, wherein they lay involved. This answer to the question, above mentioned, is plain and full; for if events, that were to come to pass in the order of providence, were foretold sometimes by men who neither knew any thing of this order; nor even that they prophesied when they did prophesy, as divines have sometimes said, why should not some truths, that were to be manifested in after ages by divine revelation, be anticipated by human imagination? Human reason would have never discovered them, because they are no more objects of intuitive, nor of demonstrative, than they are of sensitive knowledge; but imagination, conceiving them possible, might impose them for true on minds wherein she exercised the plenitude of her power. Christians, therefore, might have given this answer, and have evaded by it the absurdity of supposing PLATO inspired, and the difficulty of accounting for the christianity of his doctrines without this supposition.

S E C T I O N X I I I .

I HAVE insisted, and must insist again a little largely, on the theology of PLATO; tho I have said a great deal in a former essay concerning his philosophy in general, in order to shew the more fully and clearly on what original authority we rest in matters of religion, and because his works have been made, after the writings of St. PAUL, a principal foundation of all that theology which has occasioned so many disputes in the world, and has rendered the christian religion obnoxious to the cavils of infidels: one of which I undertake to refute by shewing that it is not religion, but theology, which has done all the mischief complained of so loudly and so justly. Genuine christianity

was

was taught by God. Theological christianity is a religion that men have invented, and that has defeated the design by pretending the authority of the former. Human passions, human interests, human fallibility, not those of particular doctors alone, but those of the church oecumenically assembled, from the nicæan council down to that of Trent, have had their share in composing the present intricate, inconsistent, and voluminous system: I can easily believe, that some of these divines meant to preserve the purity of it, and to promote revealed religion. I can believe too, that such philosophers as SOCRATES and PLATO, who contributed to destroy, whilst they pretended rather to reform polytheism and idolatry, meant to restore the purity of theism, and to promote natural religion. But here a difference between them, which is very well founded, and worthy of observation, begins to arise. The latter could support their doctrines by no authority except their own. The former had always the pretence of spiritual gifts to authorize them.

FAITH in CHRIST, the Messiah, is the first principle of christianity, an article as plain as it is essential. But there are other articles in the gospel, darkly revealed, because doubtfully expressed; besides several in the other parts of the new testament the sense of which never has been fixed. Christian divines have supposed all these alike essential. They have supposed that, as obedience is better than sacrifice, faith is as essential or more essential than works: and every sect has supposed the understanding and believing these ambiguous passages, in the sense in which their teachers expound them, necessary to the salvation promised in the gospel. Thus it happened formerly, and thus it happens still, that the objects of faith vary in every christian sect: and as neutrality, in the civil contests of the athenian commonwealth, was branded with a

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note of infamy; so in these religious contests, as they are falsely called, he who takes no side is stigmatised for an infidel by all, and he who takes any side is given over for an heretic to the hangman here, and to the devil hereafter, by every side except his own. In short, it is not enough to believe like a Christian, it is made necessary that men, women, and children should decide like metaphysicians, or believe without knowing what they believe.

IF we may be allowed to think, and they who prefer the example and doctrine of CHRIST to those of PAUL will find reason to think, that the Messiah intended rather to reform, and to graft upon judaism, than to abolish it; we may think too that SOCRATES and PLATO intended rather to reform paganism, and to graft something less carnal, and more spiritual upon it, than by a more direct opposition to the rooted prejudices of their age and country to abolish them quite. This pious attempt cost the master his life, and made the scholar, perhaps, not only involve his doctrines in greater obscurity, but seem, at least in several instances, favorable to the absurdities of paganism. SOCRATES was a zealous missionary of morality: and the obligations of natural religion in public and private life were taught and pressed upon men both by him and PLATO, not only from motives that reason suggests, but by inculcating the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, a doctrine the most usefully believed, and the most weakly proved, says CHARRON*; and of a future state of rewards and punishments, which they had learned from the Egyptians, among whom these doctrines had prevailed from an unknown antiquity, and not from the Jews who could not derive these doctrines from MOSES, and who do not appear to have entertained them till they began to tag their law with the scraps of philosophy.

* De la sagesse l. i. c. 15.

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ADORATION of the Supreme Being, gratitude and resignation to the order of his providence, were the great internal duties of religion, that these philosophers taught: and it is easy to discern what they thought of external worship, by several passages in PLATO. In his book of laws he directs indeed, that men should resort to the public temples, deliver their victims and offerings to the priests, and sacrifice and pray there only. But even in that place, where he seems to have so much regard to the uniformity of public worship, he hints sufficiently in what esteem he held it, by his invective against the superstition of private devotions; which, after all he says against them, were founded on the same principles, and performed on the same model as those of established and public worship. He speaks most reasonably, in the second ALCIBIADES, of the regard God has to a pious disposition of mind, and humorously enough of this external worship, as of an account, that men pretend to keep with God, as with a banker or usurer; whereby acts of devotion performed, and benefits received, may be balanced. But the passage, I choose to cite, precedes these in the same dialogue. After shewing that men asked things contrary, and even hurtful to them, SOCRATES commends the prayer of the poet who asked JUPITER to grant his friends such things as were good for them, whether they prayed that they might have them or not, and to refuse such as were hurtful, even when they desired them. From hence he takes occasion to commend likewise the custom of the Lacedaemonians, who asked for good in general, and for nothing in particular, "*pulchra cum bonis*," in all their prayers public and private. They were not, however, he says, less happy than other people; and upon that occasion he tells ALCIBIADES a story, which he had heard from certain old men. The Athenians, being always beaten at land and at sea by the Lacedaemonians, consulted JUPITER

HAM-

HAMMON to know why the gods were more favorable to their enemies, who did not worship them with the same pomp and expence as the Athenians did? HAMMON answered, that the acclamations, that is, the prayers of the Lacedaemonians pleased him better than all the religious rites and ceremonies of the other Greeks.

NOT only the notions of these philosophers concerning divine worship, but their notions concerning the first principle of all religion, the existence of a Supreme Being, were much more conformable to right reason than any of those which prevailed at that time. There are many such scattered about in the writings of PLATO, which the most orthodox theist might adopt. He acknowledged one Supreme Being, eternal, ineffable, incomprehensible, all-perfect, the self-existent fountain of all existence, divine and human, himself above all essence. God is truth, but above all truth, intelligent as well as intelligible, but above all intelligence; good, but above all goodness. He is none of these, but the principle of them all, as the sun is the principle of light, and as he makes all things to be seen without being light or sight himself. In a word, PLATO acknowledged the omniscience, the omnipresence, the infinite power and wisdom of God. These are very elevated sentiments, which may be collected from his writings. They are strained as high as the utmost pitch to which we can carry our ideas, and they point still higher. So they should; for after all the efforts that the mind of man is capable of making, our conceptions will fall infinitely short of their object, when this object is the majesty of the all-perfect Being. Neither PLATO, nor they who received his philosophy four or five hundred years after his time, and who were even more extravagant and less intelligible than he, could push their general and abstract notions of this sort too far. The intellectual prospect is immense, and the intellectual

lectual sight must be strained, from objects clearly and distinctly perceived, to such as are less so, and from these, still farther; till it can be strained no more, and the mind is lost in the sublimity of its own conceptions.

If these speculations cannot discover, by infinite degrees, the whole truth, they cannot lead us into any error, and they serve to maintain in our minds that awful sense, and that profound veneration of the Supreme Being, of the true God in the unity of his nature, which are due to him from every intelligent creature. Thus far, therefore, and in this manner, PLATO was an excellent master of natural theology. His errors, and those of all other pretenders to metaphysical theology, are owing to speculations of another kind, relative indeed to these, but pursued in a different spirit, the spirit of vain curiosity, and are hypothetical from the first for want of real ideas whereon to set out. In a word, they are engraftments on the religion of nature and of reason, which neither nature nor reason can admit. Our world seems to be, in many respects, the bedlam of every other system of intelligent creatures, and with this unlucky circumstance, that they who are most mad govern, in things of the greatest importance, those who are least so: and CHARRON * might very well say, that minds thought capable of prophecy, illumination, revelation, and admission into the secret councils of the gods, were such as extasy and enthusiasm transported, or sleep set on dreaming. The observation may be carried down from antient to modern days, and may be verified by examples of christian as well as heathen fanatics. There are, indeed, madmen little less ridiculous among those who pretend to be metaphysicians and theologians, great masters of reason, lovers of wisdom, instructors of mankind, and spiritual guides. It has been the pride and folly of these men in

* Lib. 1. cap. 6.

all ages to impose complete systems of knowledge on the world; whereas all human knowledge in its utmost extent is deficient, and a system of this kind, that affects to be, and that appears to be complete, is therefore false. This folly prevailed most in the nonage of philosophy; for as men have risen in science, they have seen their ignorance better. It continues however still, in some degree, and appears, on some occasions, but is so predominant on none as on subjects that the first philosophy furnishes, on which every dabler in theology, nay every old woman, "*quaedam anicula christiana*," to speak like TERTULLIAN, is ready to explain very particularly the divine nature and attributes, the constitution of the spiritual, and the creation and government of the corporeal world, and to speak like another great doctor as well as heretic, the whole scheme, order, and state of things *.

PLATO gave encouragement, and furnished matter, to this presumption, by his engraftments on natural religion, by the extravagant notions which he propagated, and by his whole manner of philosophising. His works have stood in the place of his imaginary system of eternal ideas, and divines and metaphysicians, who have thought like MALEBRANCHE, that they consulted the Logos, and that they derived their knowledge from those abstract beings that reside in the divine intelligence, have consulted only PLATO, and have derived from his writings all the whimsies that compose their fantastical science. They may have thought themselves wrapped into a third heaven, as St. PAUL says that he, or somebody that he knew, was, or that they rose in extasy, like PLOTINUS and PORPHYRY, up to a divine union; but we may assure ourselves, that they never were wrapped in any heaven but that of their own imagination, nor rose to any divine union but that with the divine PLATO.

* CLARKE in his Eviden.

To collect all the absurdities, and manifest inconsistencies and contradictions, that are to be found in his works, would be to write a treatise bigger, and as strong at least to the purpose as that of PLUTARCH on the repugnancies of the stoics. To separate, from what is reasonable and true in this philosophy, all the logical puerilities, all the false sublime, all the tedious and flimsy argumentations that prove nothing, in a word, all that is unintelligible, or that informs us not when it is understood, would be a work something like to that which our VERULAM * wished to see performed in one view, and MONTAIGNE † in another; and if I mistake not, the vogue of PLATO, the particular importance of some subjects, and the general hurt he has done to science by laying false foundations of it considered, this work would be more useful in a third view: it would shew us to what miserable shifts the greatest men are reduced, since PLATO is to be numbered among these, when they pretend to give complete systems of knowledge divine and human under the name of philosophy §; when they assume unattainable knowledge to be attained, and that which is fantastical to be real. But this is a work we shall never see performed. Men, as dull or as mad as all the commentators and translators of PLATO have been, are incapable of it, and men who are neither will find themselves more agreeable employment.

THO this philosopher was not a friend to the polytheism and idolatry of the heathen world, he was not an enemy to superstition. Far from going about to destroy it, he refined, he spiritualised it, and intrenched it more in mystery. He made it more plausible, and more secure from the attacks to which it stood exposed before. He made use indeed, on some occasi-

* Advancem. of Lear. lib. 3.

† Essays chap. 12.

§ Philosophia est divinarum et humanarum rerum scientia.

ons, for ornament or illustration, of fables taken from the current mythology, like that of love begot by PORUS on PENIA, when he was drunk in JUPITER's orchard, and the gods were met to celebrate the birth of VENUS : but the divine mythology he taught purposely was not so gross. The gods of the heathen had been men. The sepulchers of these immortals were shewn, and they retained in heaven the passions, the manners, and the habits of the earth. The celestial kingdom was peopled, like other countries, by colonies from abroad, by naturalisations of foreigners, and by the generations of those who had been there so long, that they seemed the aborigines of the country. The gods of PLATO were of another sort. They were generated indeed, for he supposed too a production and propagation of divinities; but the image of this generation was changed, and gods were said to be produced by emanation or procession; emanations from the first divine essence, like beams from the sun, processions, or rather extensions of the supreme and simple substance *, for thus they have been explained by the platonics. In some such incomprehensible, if not ineffable manner, (for what is ineffable to one of these philosophers?) souls, angels, and daemons were produced; by the supposed existence of the two last of which, visions and dreams, and every art of divination, and every superstition of magic, was upheld.

THIS little that I have said, may stand as a general specimen of the platonic theology in this place; for in another, I shall give some that will be more particular. No man ever dreamed so wildly as this author writ—"velut aegri somnia, vanae finguntur species." But as he had no divine mission nor authority to claim, all this rested on his own authority: he was to prove it as he could, and every man was at liberty to receive

* Profusio quaedam et extensio summae et simplicis substantiae.

or reject all or any of these doctrines as he found the proof. Thus they remained purely hypothetical, nor could be made dogmatical, till christian divines made them so, by adopting them as parts of divine revelation. Then, indeed, they became dogmas to Christians: and before that time, they were not such to many of the heathens. They could not be such to PLATO himself, whatever they were to some of his disciples. He, who published them, knew that he invented them, or that he borrowed them from those that did invent them, and that neither he nor they were led to them by any chain of knowledge. Neither he nor they could be the bubbles of these doctrines; tho they, who received them for true theology, were so. It is not he who makes, but he who swallows, the wine that gets drunk. But as soon as Christians found some, and thought they found others of these doctrines in the gospel, the difference I mentioned between the authority of these divines, and that of the divines of paganism was complete. The authority of revelation confirming that of PLATO, propositions that were dubious to the one became certain to the others, and philosophical conjectures became articles of faith: just as it happened afterwards, when the authority of ARISTOTLE was added to both, and new doctrines were devised, by metaphysical explanations and extensions, under pretence of defending the former.

Nothing less than this could have established and continued the theology of PLATO. In his days, and long after them, philosophy was for the most part very hypothetical. Physics were so. What wonder if metaphysics were more, nay wholly so? When PLATO had brought these, and ARISTOTLE logic, into repute, one of them made the material world metaphysically, the other logically, and both very absurdly. But when they set themselves, and PLATO especially,
to

to raise an immaterial intellectual world, metaphysical and logical architecture were most properly employed. They could employ no other: they knew little, imagined much, built beyond nature; and terms and phrases, which supported their schemes, covered equally the deficiency and the futility of their matter, not unlike to those columns and entablatures of painted pastboard that imitate the solidity of marble and deceive the eye. This was the least laborious, the shortest and surest way to fame: and whilst men neglected the analyse of ideas, and attended to the forms of argumentation, it was no hard matter to throw words into such forms as were sufficient to keep up dispute in the defence of any doctrines. An hypothesis, plausible to the reason, or to the prejudices, or to the predominant affections and passions of men, formed a sect; and as soon as a sect was formed, the hypothesis became a demonstrated system, which the honor of the sect was concerned to maintain. There were many such among the Greeks, and they were all defended and attacked with equal obstinacy, till time and contests wore them out. If platonism was not better founded in reason and knowledge than others, it was kept up long with greater art, and had greater good fortune afterwards. PLATO gave occasion to both. To the first directly, and by choice. To the last indirectly, and by chance. His immediate successors, SPEUSIPPUS, XENOCRATES, POLEMO, CRATES, CRANTOR, had acquired no great fame, nor had any great success. The portic and the gardens of EPICURUS rivalled the academy, in opposing dogma to dogma. ARCESILAUS, therefore, and CARNEADES changed the conduct of this philosophical war. By affirming nothing, they left their adversaries nothing to attack; and by assuming, in consequence, the right of disputing against every thing, they were at liberty to take their advantage wherever they found it. The example of their founder, and of his master, suggested this expedient to them, and
counte-

countenanced them in the use of it. They became terrible to the stoicians, and to the epicureans, and to all the dogmatists.

As these men pretended to revive the first academy by reverting to scepticism, tho they were called authors of a second and a third, and therefore academic philosophers, so there were others who, under pretence of adhering to the first academy, professed themselves dogmatists, and affected to be named platonicians. Some of these men indeed became peripatetics, or slid from platonism into stoicism, like the philosopher ANTIOCHUS whom TULLY mentions*; whilst the suspension of assent was still maintained, as the true principle of the academy old and new, by CLITOMACHUS, PHILO, and TULLY. VARRO says, in the academics, there was no difference between the peripatetics, certain dogmatists no doubt, and the old academy†. TULLY says, that the academy they called the new, appeared to him to be the same as the old§. Thus the matter stood in Greece and at Rome. But the platonism that prevailed in Asia and Egypt, and was taught in the famous school of Alexandria, was unquestionably dogmatical in every point. If the philosophers in those countries did not find it, they made it such. It could not otherwise have suited the characters, nor have answered the purposes of Jews, of Christians, and of those who opposed christianity: by all of whom it was, in some degree, and in a different manner, adopted, according to the method of the eclectic sect that POTAMO of Alexandria founded. The object of this sect was very specious. These philosophers were to select the best and truest placits from all others. But we may conclude that they selected, conformably to the human character, such as agreed best with their own

* In academ.

† Nihil enim inter peripateticos, et illam veterem academiam, differebat.

§ Hanc academiam novam appellabant, quae mihi vetus videtur.

opinions,

opinions, according to the account DIOGENES LAERTIUS * gives of POTAMO, that he chose those things that pleased him most. Thus the Jews took some dogmas, the Christians more, and the Pagans most of all, from PLATO's philosophy; which became accidentally of greater extent, duration, and importance than the author had any reason to expect.

THERE are many things unintelligible in the antient philosophers, many inconsistent and contradictory, even among those who wrote with the greatest clearness and precision; for I except neither CICERO nor SENECA. It would be time well saved to neglect the first, and nothing can be more ridiculous than the pains that learned men take to disguise or reconcile the others, instead of owning them to be, what after all their pains they are forced to leave them, inconsistencies and contradictions. But PLATO has this peculiar advantage over all the philosophers of any name. He has puzzled mankind, not only by particular passages in his writings, but about his own general character as an author. The dogmatists, and the sceptics, for such in truth the academicians were, have claimed him: and it is at this hour a problematical point at least, whether this great philosopher and divine gave a full assent to the truth of his own doctrines. To all of them, to some of the principal, he could not. They were the fruits of his own and of other men's invention; and he must have been conscious that they were so, as I observed above.

S E C T I O N X I V .

IT is in itself of little moment in what spirit, and on what motive, PLATO writ, who or what he was. The weight of

|| In praefat.

reason,

reason, and not the authority of an author, should decide our opinions*: and this philosopher himself speaks very strongly to this purpose, in many places, in the *Gorgias* particularly. If a doctrine, which *PLATO* taught, be supported by reason or revelation, we ought to receive it with that assent which is due to truth†; tho he were a sceptic under the mask of a dogmatist. If any of his doctrines are supported neither by reason nor revelation, we ought to reject them; tho he were a dogmatist under the mask of a sceptic. This is evident: and yet christian divines have been in all ages as zealous to make him pass for a dogmatist, as if nothing more was necessary to establish the truth of a doctrine than to be assured that he thought it true, and taught it as such. In the mean time, they did not enough consider that they made a fool or a knave of their favorite philosopher. Wrong methods of inquiring after truth and knowledge, and frequent contentions about them, ended in a dispute at last, not whether there was any such thing as truth, but whether there was any such thing as knowledge. From hence arose dogmatists, acataleptics, and sceptics§. If *PLATO* was one of the former, who boasted that they had found the truth, and if there can be on every subject one opinion alone true, how came he to have different opinions on the same subject, not transiently nor inadvertently mentioned, but formally delivered and maintained? In the other two characters, if he believed all things to be absolutely incomprehensible, or if he restrained his assent because, tho he did not deny that truth might be found, he did not deter-

* Non tam auctores — quam rationis momenta quaerenda sunt. *Cic. de Nat. Deor.* l. 1.

† — Alii alios se convincere arbitrantur, cum — multos et celebres testes produxerint — verum haec probationis ratio nullius est momenti ad veritatem, &c.

§ Ex philosophis alii se verum adinvenisse jactant, et dogmatici appellantur. Alii pronunciant, verum nec inveniri nec percipi posse, et cataleptici dicuntur. — Alii, assensum sustinentes, neque statuunt verum inventum esse, neque inveniri posse negant, et dicuntur sceptici, consideratores, et ephectici, cohibitores assensus.

mine neither that it had been found; in these two characters, I say, he might very fairly, tho not very usefully, deliver contrary opinions, and defend or oppose any of them hypothetically. But neither the supposition of two doctrines, nor of two senses, nor of two characters, in PLATO, that stale artifice by which critics make authors say or not say whatever they please, will excuse him as a dogmatist, if he was one, and a dogmatist too who treated the most important points of knowledge, since the being of a God, the worship of him, the first principles of things, and the conduct of providence, were some of the objects of it.

My way of thinking, which I have found no where the least reason to alter, would hinder me from any farther consideration of PLATO in this respect, if it was not worth our while to consider how feebly the authorities we value the most are often founded. The fathers of the christian church have maintained that PLATO was a dogmatist, and well they might; since NUMENIUS, a pythagorean philosopher, asserted the fame of PYRRHO, and since SEXTUS EMPIRICUS says *, that ARCESILAUS was suspected to be another. With the paradox concerning PYRRHO I have nothing to do; but surely it is as little possible to imagine what grounds SEXTUS, who lived four hundred years after ARCESILAUS, or St. AUSTIN, who lived above a century later, or indeed any man of his own age, country or school, could have to make a dogmatist of one who disclaimed all knowledge like him, even that which SOCRATES excepted, the knowledge of his ignorance, as it is to imagine what NUMENIUS meant when he imputed dogmatism to PYRRHO. A man, who made it the business of his life, and the principle of his profession, to dispute against every proposition that could be advanced, was not surely a sceptic in ap-

* Lib. i. cap. 31.

pearance

pearance alone, " *primâ fronte*," as *SEXTUS* says, but inwardly and in very good earnest. Notwithstanding this, *St. AUSTIN* * took the fact for granted, and wrought up in his warm imagination a very subtle and pious scheme of policy, which is almost too fanciful for the saint, and which no man, less visionary than he, can believe that the philosopher ever entertained. Some such there have been, however, and a reverend father † of the oratory in France has treated this whimsy very seriously.

THE stoicians then, according to *St. AUSTIN*, placing the chief happiness of man in virtue, that is, in the mind, the epicureans placing it in volupty, that is, in the body, and the platonists placing it in the enjoyment of God, the latter judged very wisely, that it was proper to prepare the way to truth by destroying, in the first place, the errors of those sects. They saw that their own sublime doctrine would fall into contempt, if they published it among men immersed in sense, like the epicureans, or even among the stoicians, who gave the preference indeed to virtue, but who could not raise their conceptions up to something divine and immaterial, to something above mind as above body, to something knowable by pure intellect, and yet far superior to it, that is, up to God. They knew that they should not be heard, if they went about to teach men who believed atoms, or the four elements, to be the first principles of all things, that all things proceeded from an immaterial wisdom §. They considered farther, that the epicureans being persuaded their senses never deceived them, and the stoicians believing, like the aristotelians, that altho their

* *Ep. ad Diosc. ep. 118. ed. bened.*

† *THOMASSIN de la maniere d'étudier la philos.*

§ N. B. This is said purely to do honor to *PLATO*, for he was absurd enough to make matter and ideas first principles jointly with God.

senses might sometimes deceive them, yet they could not acquire, without the assistance of their senses, any knowledge of the truth of things, it would be to little purpose to tell either the one or the other that the only Being, which has a real existence, cannot be represented to the mind by any of the images of sense, and that this immutable Being is that alone which we conceive truly; because pure intellect, which alone perceives the truth of things, alone perceives the existence of this Being.

Now since ARCESILAUS could not flatter himself that these sublime doctrines would be received, against the philosophical prejudices that prevailed in his time, it behoved him to look forward, and to convey the pure streams that flowed from the springs PLATO had opened, as St. AUSTIN* expresses himself in one of his letters, thro a channel shaded and covered by brambles and thorns, lest they should be exposed to beasts that would render them foul and muddy. Nothing less than a submissive faith, such a faith as he mentions in his letter to CONSENTIUS †, a faith that must precede reason in order to purify the heart, and to prepare the mind to comprehend what it ought to admit implicitly at first, could impose such doctrines, and nothing less than the authority of one who was God and man could impose such a faith. Now the platonicians could produce no authority of this kind, nor shew a God abased and humbled before the coming of CHRIST. They were in the right, therefore, to conceal their doctrines, till this great event happened. But as soon as it happened, they opened the whole secret of their theology and metaphysics. Some of them, indeed, were corrupted by the damnable curiosity of magic. But many of them acknowledged JESUS to be that God and man, in whom immutable wisdom and truth were incarnated, and by whose mouth the eternal essence had spoken to mankind.

* To HERMOG. ep. 2. ed. benedic.

† Ep. 120. ed. benedic.

SUCH are the notions that St. AUSTIN endeavours to give in some of his epistles, and in his books against the academics, to establish the opinion that PLATO was a dogmatist, and to account for the conduct of his sceptical followers. But this ingenious scheme hangs ill together. What has been said above, concerning the motives that ARCESILAUS had to make a public profession of scepticism, seems much more probable than what our african bishop advances. PLATO had rivals and enemies among the philosophers, ARISTIPPUS and DIOGENES the cynic, for instance, who embarrassed him more than once. But in his time, and for some time after him, no school grew up that could vie with his. ARISTOTLE, who founded one that became famous, heard PLATO twenty years, that is, till PLATO died. EPICURUS did not come to Athens till XENOCRATES was at the head of the academy, nor begin to teach so soon; and ZENO and ARCESILAUS were scholars of POLEMO at the same time. Thus far the course of the academy glided smoothly on. But here the contests began; and the subtilties of the portic were the more to be feared by ARCESILAUS, because ZENO, who set up this rival school, had been received in the academy, and had learned, like a spy, where and how it might be attacked with most advantage. Other dogmatic sects grew up and strengthened at the same time: and the surest way to divert their attacks, was to attack them all on this one principle established by SOCRATES, "nihil sciri, nihil percipi posse." If ARCESILAUS had gone about to defend his master's doctrines, which were not easy to be defended, surrounded as he was by enemies, he must have been beat on every side; whereas by renouncing all pretensions to knowledge, he had nothing to defend, had no recrimination to fear, and might attack with his whole force. We may add, perhaps, a motive of pique to this of policy; for besides that ARCESILAUS was piqued personally

sonally by ZENO, who employed the arms he had acquired in the academy against that school, nothing could be more provoking than the arrogance wherewith the stoics exacted the same assent to their most extravagant paradoxes, as the mind gives to truths that are objects even of intuitive knowledge. Thus we may easily conceive, that it happened in philosophy on this occasion, as it has happened in religion on many. Excess on one side produced excess on the other. So sabellianism gave occasion to arianism, and the foppery of Rome to the rusticity of Geneva. So the dogmatical presumption of ZENO, who affirmed the world to be a rational animal, as confidently as he affirmed it to be light at noon *, pushed ARCESILAUS to deny every kind and degree of knowledge.

BUT it is not enough to have shewn that this account is probable, unless a short and obvious reflection be added to shew, that it is impossible the motives St. AUSTIN assigns to the conduct of ARCESILAUS and the academics should be true. Now, I ask, whether these philosophers could mean to conceal the doctrines of PLATO, which had been publicly taught by more of his successors than St. AUSTIN mentions, and which were contained in his writings? They might abandon the defence of these doctrines, and shew little regard to them, but they could not mean to conceal them, and reserve them for a more proper conjuncture, as St. AUSTIN asserts. They might do so the rather, and with a due regard to the honor of their founder, since by abandoning these they did not abandon him. He had jumbled two opposite characters most preposterously together. He was sometimes apparently a dogmatist, and made even SOCRATES talk in that style. But still the known sceptical character of the master was the real character of the scho-

* —Nec magis apparebit nunc lucere, quoniam stoicus, quam hunc mundum esse sapientem. Acad.

lar.

lar. This character therefore ARCESILAUS and CARNEADES assumed, as soon as it was for the honor and interest of their school to abandon the other, and deemed themselves, no doubt, more truly, platonicians, than any of those who had been at the head of the academy before them. I confound ARCESILAUS and CARNEADES together, as TULLY does: for tho there might be some difference, which I will not have the trouble of considering, between the notions CARNEADES had, and those of ARCESILAUS, concerning the causes of incomprehensibility; yet they both maintained, with equal zeal, and CARNEADES, it is said, with greater force of argument, that we are unable to arrive at the truth of things by sense or by reason.

IF SOCRATES was not so great a genius, even with the help of his daemon, as he has been represented, he was certainly something better than a genius. He was a very good man: and I find in myself an unwillingness to believe him absolutely a sceptic, both on this account, and on account of that predilection, which you know that another good man, our friend, the bishop of Cloyne, has for him. That he might be such, as to physics and all the sciences which the Greeks called mathematics, or disciplines *, I can easily believe. XENOPHON gave the lie to PLATO, and all those who pretended that he taught them; and SOCRATES himself complained bitterly, when he heard the Lyfis read †, of PLATO's misrepresentations. No philosopher could be so easily, nor so safely, misrepresented. He preached, but he did not write: and we know nothing more of his philosophy than the scraps his auditors retained, some of which XENOPHON has given us more truly, and PLATO more copiously. He picked up scholars occasionally in the streets and public places of Athens, and was a missionary of virtue to them all, from ALCIBIADES down to the meanest citizen. He

* AUL. GELLIUS.

† DIOG. LAERTIUS.

rather

rather refuted the sophists, than labored to instruct directly: and this he did by a perpetual diffimulation of his own opinions, and an ironical deference to theirs; which manner might give an air of scepticism to all he said, even on moral subjects. In short, if I cannot believe him a dogmatist, I will not believe him an absolute sceptic.

SOCRATES may be compared to the Cimmerians, who were deprived of the light of the sun, but were not in utter darkness. He founded his ethics on probability, if you please; but it was on such a probability, as TULLY explains in his reply to LUCULLUS; such a probability, as a wise man must rest upon, or all the rules of life will be subverted. If this was so, the difference between SOCRATES, and ARCESILAUS, and CARNEADES was very great. They did not admit, at least the former did not, the faint light of probability, and could be scarce distinguished from those who professed pyrrhonism: tho St. AUSTIN thought fit to employ even the former, very piously, in preparing the way for the reception of the gospel; for which he had no authority whatever, except that of his own wild imagination. For the dogmatism of SOCRATES and of PLATO, and for a distinction between the old and new academy, he had some indeed. CICERO introduces LUCULLUS, in the academical questions, comparing ARCESILAUS to TIBERIUS GRACCHUS, and complaining, that as one of these disturbed the peace of an excellent commonwealth, so the other overturned philosophy, when it was brought to perfection. But TULLY decides the controversy, without regard to probable arguments, by an appeal to fact. He had a bigot veneration for PLATO. He had studied his works so long, and had familiarised himself with them so much, that he seemed to have lived with this philosopher, "ut penè cum his vixisse videar;" as he says of himself. He knew PLATO better than St. AUSTIN, and he asserted,

ferred, that the new academy was the same as the old *, if PLATO, who founded it, was to be reckoned of the old, in whose works nothing was affirmed, who disputed for and against many things, inquired about all, and advanced none as certain †.

IF PLATO must be reckoned, notwithstanding this, a dogmatist, it will be equally impossible to justify the regard, that the christian fathers, most of them at least, paid to him themselves, and that they encouraged others to pay, nor the use that they made of his writings. They who called him the homerical philosopher thought more justly of him, than they who called him the attic MOSES, or than they who still more profanely put him and PLOTINUS, and even JESUS CHRIST, in matters of doctrine, on a level §. By doing this they defiled christianity with many superstitious notions, and mixed their theology up with much of that imaginary science about divine, angelical, and human natures, which was derived from Egypt and the East, thro PYTHAGORAS and PLATO chiefly, to the Greeks and the Romans, and from these two philosophers, thro the school of Alexandria more than any other way; for dogmatical platonism, which included both, flourished in that school more than it had ever done in the academy, to the whole christian world.

BUT farther, and to set this proceeding off in all the colors it deserves, are we sure that PLATO, tho a dogmatist, was much in earnest on every point of theology which the fathers of the church took from him, and incorporated into the chri-

* Academiam novam, quae mihi vetus videtur.

† Nihil affirmatur—in utramque partem multa differuntur, de omnibus quaeritur, nihil certi dicitur.

§ Vid. Ep. NEBRIDII ad AUGUS.

stian system, as explanatory of it, or additional to it? He might not be so most certainly. DES CARTES was dogmatist enough in all conscience; and yet, without derogating from this part of his character, we may believe that he was not very serious when he revived the whimsical notion of GOMEZ PEREYRA, that beasts are automates, or pieces of clock work, nor, perhaps, when he maintained the plenum. He had his particular reasons of prudence, to shelter himself from some attacks, that he might apprehend, and of consistency to make the hypothetical parts of his philosophy hang the better together, as well as of conformity to certain received opinions. PLATO might have reasons of the same, or of other kinds. It would not be hard to point out some such: and if he had no other, philosophical observation alone, and the desire of acquiring fame by the publication of a new and more sublime system, for so all things that are unintelligible in metaphysical theology are called, would have determined him to ransack antient legends, as well as his own imagination, for every thing that might serve to this purpose. We may believe this the more easily, since there runs thro all his works a tinselled embroidery of this kind, on a ground of low conceits and tedious irony:

“Purpureus, latè qui splendeat, unus, et alter

“Adfuitur pannus.”

Now if PLATO may be justly suspected of such a proceeding, how ridiculous, as well as absurd and profane, ought we to esteem that of the fathers of the church? If the doctrines of PLATO are conformable to the gospel, which I think they are not exactly in any one instance, except in some of the moral doctrines, it is absurd: if they are different, or more extensive in any respect, it is profane to make them a supplemental code to the evangelical system of faith. But if he published things that were neither dictated to him by his reason, nor even believed

lieved by him, whatever these things were, and how true soever they might appear on some other authority, it was sovereignly ridiculous to accept them in any degree for such on his. Of all this absurdity, profaneness, and ridicule, they who built up christian theology were guilty. Instead of commenting platonism by christianity, they commented christianity by platonism. Instead of applying revelation to explain, and the authority of the revealer to confirm, what they thought to be true in his writings, they applied platonic philosophy to introduce and explain christian, and the authority of PLATO to confirm what they received for true on the authority of CHRIST. They added the epistles to the gospels, the doctrines of PAUL to those of CHRIST; and to all these, the reveries of heathen philosophy, rabbinical extravagance, and christian enthusiasm, till the apocalypse became a part of our holy scriptures, and the athanasian creed a summary of our faith.

SECTION XV.

I do not expect, on this occasion, from you the answer I should be sure to have from persons more orthodox, than I know you to be, in the faith of the pretended catholic church. Such persons would insist on the authority of the church, by which all this heathen lore has been sanctified, and ground this authority on passages of the scriptures, as they ground the authority of the scriptures on that of the church. This circular proof would deserve no other answer than that of silent contempt. CLEMENT of Alexandria opens another way, to justify himself, and other fathers, for adopting so much heathen theology into christianity. He supposes every system of grecian and barbarian philosophy to have been a branch of the eternal truth *, and

* — Aeternae veritatis avulsam quandam particulam. Strom. lib. 1.

all these branches to have been united in the christian system, like the trunk of the tree of all divine truth. Thus the doctrines of heathen theology, that were taught by PLATO and PYTHAGORAS, and derived from Egypt and the East, are not sanctified by a sort of retro-active power, but are made divine by their original. If now by these terms we do not understand, that the human mind rises up to the supreme mind, is united with it, and contemplates the ideas that are in it; if we do not understand, that the intellect of man is a part of the intellect of God, as the soul of man was thought to be a part of the deity, or of the soul of the universe; in short, if we do not understand them according to any of those mystical, metaphysical notions, that platonism propagated, and that CLEMENT was very likely to intend, they are capable of receiving a very true sense. There are, no doubt, in theology some truths that human reason, the gift of God, and in this sense alone divine, is sufficient to demonstrate, according to those criterions of human knowledge, the things that are, and that we know to be as the author of all nature ordained that they should appear to creatures in our rank of being. Several such truths the pagan philosophers discovered. But then they blended them with monstrous errors, derived from various extremes, by planning the divine order and oeconomy on the human, or by neglecting the phaenomena of nature, or by making extravagant hypotheses to account for them. They discovered the unity of the godhead, and they saw that worship is due from the creature to the creator. But then they ran into ditheism, and gave up the unity, that they might save the goodness of the Supreme Being, which they imagined very falsely to be, as atheists objected that it was, inconsistent with the phaenomena. They ran farther into polytheism, that they might provide a multitude of agents or ministers to execute the will of God, and to govern under him, or to be mediators and intercessors with him in behalf of mankind.

kind. As they took notions of mediation and intercession, so they took others of attonement and expiation, from the characters of men and of governments. Hence the offerings and sacrifices, sanguinary sacrifices, human sacrifices, such as the Carthaginians, our Druids, the Mexicans, and other barbarous people have instituted; from which examples, of the utmost depravation of human reason, that ignorance, superstition, and habits of cruelty can beget, divines would sometimes prove that such sacrifices, and the appeasing of God by blood*, are agreeable to the natural reason of mankind.

It must be confessed, however, that even in these days, men, whose natural reason was not thus depraved, saw by the light of reason alone how abominable such rites as these were, and little by little, as their reason improved, how absurd all their other rites, and almost all their theological opinions were†. Polytheism was mitigated; idolatry was in good measure distinguished away, among the philosophers at least. Oracles and the arts of divination grew into contempt: and if hea-

* Vid. THOMASSIN. maniere d'étudier la philosoph. &c.

† It may be worth while to observe here what is said by a very great and worthy man, in a book writ on the principles of HUTCHINSON, to shew that christianity is indeed very near as old as the creation. He admits, that this belief is of all others the most unreasonable, except as it is explained in the original. What now is the original, by the explanation of which this belief becomes reasonable? It was the decree of God, that a saviour should die to atone by his blood for the sins of men. It was therefore his command, that to keep this revelation in mind, the future sacrifice of the saviour should be emblematically and prophetically represented by shedding the blood of beasts in sacrifices, accompanied with many typical and emblematical circumstances. No other invention could be so likely to preserve, and perpetuate, the knowledge and belief of a revelation so necessary to mankind. Strange absurdities! the bloody sacrifice to be made so many thousand years afterwards was that of the son of God, of the very God, and the emblematical institution continued among men, who soon forgot that it was typical and emblematical only. Thus it served to no other purpose, than to lead men into an opinion, that the deity was implacable, and sins unforgiveable, unless he was appeased, and they were atoned for by the shedding of blood.

thenism

thenism was kept up by men above the vulgar, it seemed to be so only by the priests for lucre, and by others for fear of having no religion at all. Thus the way was prepared by reason for revelation, in the countries where christianity first appeared, and which were enlightened by philosophy. Philosophy had begun to spiritualise religion, by exploding many of the gross, the carnal conceptions of heathen theology, and by substituting an inward devotion, purity of heart, and a pious disposition of mind, to the outward pomp and ceremony of worship. That this representation is true, the works of PLATO alone would be sufficient to prove; altho EUSEBIUS * was desirous to make it believed, that no reformation had been made even in the opinions of philosophers, before christianity: but that, being then grown ashamed of their polytheism and idolatry, they endeavoured to conceal them under the pretence and disguise of allegory. In all cases, when christianity was once established, the means of carrying this reformation of opinions to perfection were in the hands of christian philosophers and divines. It might have been expected too that revelation would unite, in one uniform system of theology, all the converted Pagans, whom reason had not been able to reconcile; since they had now, in the word of God, a sure criterion, by which to try the truth of their opinions.

THE very contrary happened. They differed as much as ever, and with uncharitableness and hatred that had been unknown to them before their conversion. Whilst they were Pagans, they disputed without quarrelling, and even embraced opposite sects without becoming enemies. We see the stoic, the epicurean, and the academic meeting amicably together in TULLY's works, which represent the manners of the age. They endeavour to refute one another; but they live in the ut-

* Praep. Evangel.

most

most intimacy of friendship: and if CARNEADES was exasperated against the stoics, on account of their dogmatical, and, as we may venture to pronounce, their trifling but assuming airs, neither TULLY nor even COTTA were so*. Nay the former inclined, as much as an academic could incline, to stoicism: and SENECA, who was professedly of this sect, and he, speak often with the greatest regard of EPICURUS, and with the greatest tenderness of their epicurean friends.

How it came to pass that men, who had embraced opposite opinions without acrimony, whilst they were heathens, became inveterate enemies for this very reason, when they were Christians, or how they came to be more divided than ever, even when they had one common rule of faith and doctrine which they all acknowledged alike, is not very hard to conceive. Whilst they were merely philosophers, they were attached to some sect or other, not only by the illusions of their own imaginations, by their affections and passions, by ambition and private interest, but by prejudices and habits contracted early, and sometimes before they were able to judge for themselves. To this sect, whichever it was, they adhered: and that which we may observe frequently in the political struggles of our miserable parties, happened, no doubt, in those theological contentions †. A false point of honor prevailed sometimes over the love of truth; it determined the will even against the judgment: and men chose rather to err with those with whom they had long erred, than go right in new company, or alone.

* — Contra quorum disciplinam ingenium ejus, CARNEADIS, exarserat. Tusc. disp. l. 5.

† — Caeteri primum ante tenentur adstricti, quam, quid esset optimum, judicare potuerunt. — infirmissimo tempore aetatis, aut obsecuti amico cuidam, aut una alicujus, quem primum audierunt, oratione capti, de rebus incognitis judicant, et ad quaecunque sunt disciplinam quasi tempestate delati, ad eam tanquam ad saxum adhaerescunt. Acad. quaest.

But

But still, as they were mere philosophers, and had nothing but reason, their own or that of their party, to oppose to reason in every instance in which they differed, and as the particular opinions of no one sect interested the whole body of philosophers, the state or the church in any country, these men might differ, before their conversion to christianity, without those incentives to uncharitableness and hatred, which acted so powerfully on the malignity of their hearts afterwards. As soon as this malignity could exert itself, under the specious pretence of zeal for the honor of God and for the purity of the faith, it broke out with violence. Every side assumed that the word of God spoke in favor of them, that the salvation of souls depended on believing as they believed, and that all those who dissented from them were guilty of heresy; for this word grew soon into fashion, and from having, as I believe, a very innocent signification at first, it came, like the word tyrant, and some others, to convey a very odious idea at last. Heretics then were enemies to God, and rebels to his law. They were to be treated as such by the orthodox: and heresy and orthodoxy being determined by the strength and weakness of parties, alternate, and therefore constant, persecution was established in the church of CHRIST.

S E C T I O N X V I .

IF we inquire after the causes of that strange multiplication of sects, which have grown up from the apostolical age to this, among Christians, it seems to me that they are to be found in the metaphysical madness of philosophers mixing with the enthusiasm of the first Christians, in the cabalistical practice of giving different senses to the same passages of holy writ, in the uncertainty of tradition, and in the use that a distinct order of men
has

has made, in every christian state, of these and other circumstances to acquire dominion over private consciences.

MEN run naturally from extreme to extreme. The farther they have gone into one, the more likely it is, that when they recover from it they will hurry as far into another: so that reformation is often nothing more than a change of error. Thus it happened in the pagan theology. The professors of it, and the people in general, had acknowledged a divine nature; which was human nature under a different name, and placed in a different habitation. Their divinities, from MOMUS the son of night, up to JUPITER the father of gods and men, were in truth celestial and immortal men, endued with more knowledge, and with more and greater powers; but with all these after the manner of men, and divested neither of human passions nor of human vices. These objects of adoration were monstrous. So was the worship paid to them. But then, as fast as philosophers exploded these corporeal notions, for such they may be properly called, of the divine nature, and endeavoured to spiritualise it in their thoughts by abstraction from the human, they refined theology, with much confusion and obscurity of ideas, from a system of physical into a system of metaphysical fables; and a sort of intellectual mythology took the place of the former. Mythology, properly so called, served in the infancy of science to conceal the ignorance of philosophers. Of the cosmogonia they made a theogonia. Such the poets taught, and multiplied polytheism by their supposed science, and very real flattery. Allegory succeeded and served to conceal the absurdity of theology. They who taught it grew as mad as their predecessors had been absurd, and very little less profane. The few remains of pythagorean doctrines, the metaphysical and theological parts of PLATO's writings, and above all those of the latter pythagoreans and platonicians which are

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in our hands, will justify what is here advanced; for, surely, no men who were thought to be in their senses, and were suffered to go about without their keepers, did ever talk such nonsense as is to be found in PORPHYRY, PLOTINUS, JAMBLICUS, and those who have been infected with the same phrensy. Such of these philosophers as opposed christianity, opposed to the marvellous of this theology the marvellous of their own, and none of our angelical or seraphic doctors, none of our ravished mystics, ever rose higher in illuminations, visions, and rapturous unions with the divinity, than some of them. On the other hand, many of these philosophers became converts in different manners. Platonism mixed easily with christianity; but they who retained most of the former, infected the latter with innumerable errors, and planted or watered all the heresies that started up daily in the first ages of the church. Such were the gnostics or the learned, who, under pretence of improving, corrupted the simplicity of the religion they had embraced. They who became afterwards the greatest lights of the church, apologists, confessors, saints, and martyrs, were determined to christianity by their philosophy, as well as the others, and came full fraught with platonism into the holy pale. But they used it more modestly. They made it the hand-maid, not the rival, of christianity: and tho this hand-maid governed the family, and took a principal share in ordering the whole scheme and oeconomy of it, yet the authority of the mistress was always pretended. JUSTIN owns that platonism prepared him to be a Christian: and ORIGEN, a man far superior to the good martyr, ran as platonically mad, in the second century, as PICUS of Mirandola, TICINUS, PATRICIUS, or any of the renowned platonicians, in the fifteenth. I know not whether the despair of attaining any other way a full knowledge of divine truths, which SOCRATES and PLATO had so often inculcated, might not dispose these men to receive

ceive a revelation, to prefer faith to uncertainty, and, since they could not fix their minds on these subjects by reason, to fix them by authority, as the disciples of PYTHAGORAS did.

THO I ascribe so much to the mere influence of philosophy, and believe it to have been the frantic mother of a frantic offspring, I do not mean to exclude absolutely that of grace on this occasion, tho I confess that I have no conception of it, nor to deny that this directed in some measure the other: and, to prove that I do not, I will quote the example and authority of St. AUSTIN, to shew how these two co-operated in him, and how the first prepared him, by God's immediate appointment, for the last, in one of the most sublime articles of christian faith. The saint laments in the seventh book of his confessions, the grievous errors in which he had been engaged concerning the divine nature, and the original of evil, on both of which he had followed the opinions of the manichaeans. He relates the steps by which he was delivered from these errors, as well as from the superstition of astrology and divination, and the approaches he made to truth by the helps that God procured him. After this, he breaks out into ejaculations of thanks to God, who had taken pity on him, and had procured him some books of platonic philosophy, wherein he found the divinity of the Word established by many arguments. Of the incarnation of the Word, indeed, he found nothing. But he found it afterwards in the scriptures, and he remained persuaded that God had prepared him, by this accidental information, for what he was to learn when he should study the scriptures concerning the humiliation of the Word made flesh*; the reasons of which persuasion he gives, in the
twentieth

* Miseratus es terram et cinerem — procurasti mihi per quendam hominem, immanissimò typho turgidum, quosdam platoniorum libros ex graeca lingua in latinam

twentieth chapter. Thus you see how PLATO, in the wanderings of a wild imagination, had discovered, in part at least, one of the greatest mysteries of christianity, and how God made use of this truth, which he who published it did not know to be such, for the conversion of one of the greatest doctors and saints of the church. What wonder is it that metaphysics, the very dotage of philosophy, should bear witness to some of those truths, which may come out of the mouths of babes and sucklings?

S E C T I O N X V I I .

ANOTHER cause of the multiplication of extravagant opinions and sects, in christianity, has been the arbitrary practice of giving different senses to the same passages of the bible. A practice derived from the jewish masters, the worst certainly that can be followed if we seek truth, and are desirous to preserve any precision either in fact or argument. Among the lowest artifices, that have been employed by those who seek to impose their own inventions under some other and better authority than their own, this has been one of the lowest and grossest, tho' not the least successful. It is in truth a kind of forgery, since it serves to make an author say what he had no intention to say, or renders at the best uncertain what he did intend to say when he writ with the greatest clearness. The jewish rabbins have done by the old, and our christian rabbins by the new and old testament both, what PETER did by his father's will in our friend SWIFT's tale of a tub. The text was against

nam verfos, et ibi legi &c. — non quidem his verbis, sed hoc idem omnino multis et multiplicibus suaderi rationibus, quod in principio erat verbum, et verbum erat apud Deum, et Deus erat verbum. — in quos me propterea priusquam scripturas tuas considerarem, credo voluisti incurrere, ut imprimeretur &c.

him,

him, but by a new combination of the same words, or syllables, or letters, he made it speak for him and support his claim. It had been well if MARTIN and JOHN, and the rest of PETER's brethren, for he had many more which the historian thought it not worth his while to mention, had stood their ground like good caraites, and had adhered to the text in the plain and obvious meaning of it, instead of imitating the very men whom they have opposed, and whom they laugh at. But they have done otherwise. They have supported their decisions by the same unjustifiable means, by which the rabbinist PETER supported his. Nay they have done more, they have admitted divers codicils, and have, like him, supposed them to be of equal authority with the will, tho it is plain that the father speaks in the will, and his stewards or other domestics in the codicils. Allow me another comparison. It may illustrate the folly, as the former explains the fraud, of this practice. The Chinese reverence much the table of FOHI, which must be nine or ten centuries older than ADAM, according to their chronology. This table consists of several lines, some shorter, some longer, and placed in a certain order like that of a diagram or scheme, serving, as they imagine, to the design or demonstration of the most sublime knowledge. The learned men among them have been employed several thousand years in attempts to draw some of this sublime knowledge out of the table. The way they have taken, and what other could they take, if they had leisure enough to take any? has been to make all the possible transpositions, and different combinations, of these lines, in hopes of affixing some sense to this mystical table. The consequence has been, that they have affixed several, and that they agree in none. Now tho I am persuaded, that the accounts the jesuits * give us of this table are imperfect, and that something more than barely these unequal lines, some-

* Scien. Sinica.

thing

thing hieroglyphical at least, belongs to it; yet whether it be so or no, the anecdote is equally apposite to my purpose: for in either case, the chinese and the christian critics have been employed alike. If the table consists of unintelligible lines, and it would be the same if it consisted of unintelligible words, whereof FOHI has given no clue to explain and determine the sense, the chinese critics have been employed just as reasonably as the christian expositors of mysteries, neither fully nor plainly revealed by revelation itself. If it be said, that the table, which none but he who made it could explain, explains itself, as our scriptures do in all the essential parts of them, the comparison holds still; for the learned Chinese must have done, as the learned Christians have done, and have made mysteries for some purpose or other where they found none. It is impossible by any means that art can find to see in the dark; but it is easy to contrive glasses that shall shew the plainest and most uniform object in a mist, and under various forms in the clearest day. The first is a silly, and the last a knavish attempt. I said just now that it was a kind of forgery. I do not recal my words, but add, that in the case here supposed, the Chinese are much more excusable than the Christians; for if the Chinese have forged different words of FOHI, Christians have forged different words of God.

How can we lay less than this to their charge, when we consider in how many different, remote, and inconsistent senses, such as destroy one another, and such as are advanced on no authority but that of their own imaginations, they interpret the same passages of holy writ? There is, according to these doctors, a grammatical, a literal or historical, an allegorical or figurative, an anagogical or divine, and a tropological or moral, sense. Some, or all of these, may be applied to the same sentence, nay to the same word. Light, in that noble passage of the

the book of Genesis, where it is said, "let there be light and "there was light," signifies very plainly, in the grammatical, literal, and only proper sense, the corporeal light which God created, and concerning which alone it was at all to the purpose to speak in that place. But divines, by their arbitrary power over the scriptures, make it to signify the Messiah allegorically, and tropologically or anagogically the inward light of grace, or the outward splendor of celestial glory. Thus again, by virtue of the same power, Jerusalem, which is the name of a town, has been made to signify the vision of peace, the church militant, the church triumphant, and the soul of a believer *. The sense of no writings, neither sacred nor profane, can be ever fixed, if they remain subject to such licentious interpretations. These interpretations have served, and they could be intended to serve, by the Jews who set, and by the Christians who followed the example, no other purpose, than that of furnishing the rabbins of both religions with means of giving a color of divine authority to all their own inventions. The absurdities which the former have advanced on such interpretations, seconded by those of their oral law and cabbala, and which you may find in our modern writers, that were skilled in rabbinical learning, are innumerable, and pass all measure of probability; so that one cannot help being astonished, when some of our christian divines lament most piously the loss of those rules, according to which the Jews interpreted their scriptures, as they suppose; for that there were any such stated rules observed is but supposition.

It is more probable, that the Jews did, as the Christians have done; that they followed their several imaginations, or their several theological and even secular interests. This was the case among Jews and Christians both, and if it may be said,

* Vid. CALMET.

which

which is not very clear however, that the latter have not fallen generally into so many puerilities and palpable errors as the others, the most unreasoning, the most ignorant, and the most absurd of men, yet they have rendered theology more voluminous, and, with respect to the divine nature and oeconomy, more contentious than it was before. St. AUSTIN seems to aim at a sort of composition about the interpretation of the scriptures, in a letter to MARCELLINUS *. He says, that “ how good
 “ soever any reason may appear, it is false and deceitful if it
 “ contradicts them; and that how clearly soever we may think
 “ any thing deduced from them, if the thing be manifestly
 “ against reason, we are deceived; it is not the true sense of
 “ the passages alledged; truth and they cannot stand in opposi-
 “ tion.” We may observe in this place, what is to be observ-
 ed often in the writings of this saint, a gingle of words, that
 pretends to strength and precision, and has neither really.

THE first proposition supposes a case that can never happen among reasonable men, who have received the christian revelation for genuine, after a sufficient examination of the external and internal proofs. Such men, having found nothing that makes it inconsistent with itself, nor that is repugnant to any of those divine truths which reason and the works of God demonstrate to them, will never set up reason in contradiction to it, on account of things plainly taught, but incomprehensible as to their manner of being. If they did, their reason would be false and deceitful; they would cease to be reasonable men: and St. AUSTIN says nothing to the purpose, if he confounds these things with such as imply contradiction, and means an opposition of reason to the former only. But if we could suppose, or if St. AUSTIN could mean to suppose, that they who followed the rule he lays down in another place, the rule of

* Ep. 143.

believing

believing first, in hopes of understanding afterwards, should discover things, when they came to examine in order to understand; that implied contradiction, his conclusion would be false. They would be obliged in this case to reject the revelation, not their reason; or to fall at once into a general and particular absurdity. The general absurdity of renouncing the faculties God had given them of distinguishing truth from falsehood, good from evil; and the particular absurdity of renouncing, in favor of the internal, that very rule by which they had judged in favor of the external proofs of this revelation.

THE second proposition admits and encourages the very practice we censure so justly, for which the saint was so famous, and by which he contributed so much to promote contentions in his own days, and to perpetuate them to ours. The practice of deducing doctrines from the scriptures, that are not evidently contained in them, for if they were evidently contained in them, they could not be said to be deduced from them, is admitted. It is admitted, that these deductions may be manifestly against reason. Several such there were, and among them some of his own. Reason is made the judge of doctrines thus deduced; but when reason condemns any, divines, the inventors or fautors of them, are at liberty to evade the objections they cannot answer by interpretations of the same passages in some other and new sense. Who does not see, that the direct tendency of this practice is exactly the same as the event has proved it to be? It composes and propagates a religion, seemingly under the authority of God, but really under that of man. The principles of revelation are lost in theology, or disfigured by it: and whilst some men are impudent enough to pretend, others are silly enough to believe, that they adhere to the gospel, and maintain the cause of God against infidels and heretics, when they do nothing better, nor more than

espouse the conceits of men, whom enthusiasm, or the ambition of forming sects, or of making a great figure in them, has inspired. If you ask now what the practice of the christian fathers, and of other divines, should have been, in order to preserve the purity of faith, and to promote peace and charity, the answer is obvious, and so evidently agreeable to right reason, that the modestest man alive might make it before an oecumenical council without blushing. They should have adhered to the word of God; they should have paid no regard to heathen philosophy, jewish cabbala, the fallies of enthusiasm, or the refinements of human ingenuity. They should have embraced, and held fast the articles of faith and doctrine, that were delivered in plain terms, or in unequivocal figures; they should not have been dogmatical, where the sense was doubtful, nor have presumed even to guess, where the holy ghost left the veil of mystery undrawn. If the council should decree, that this answer was erroneous, and that the system of christianity would have been incomplete and insufficient without these adventitious helps, let us make no scruple of saying, that the council would decree blasphemously, as more councils than one have done, since they would decree, that infinite wisdom had not proportioned means to ends, or that the ends of infinite wisdom were more or other than the gospel of CHRIST assigns.

S E C T I O N X V I I I .

THE uncertainty of that precarious tradition, whose authority has been so magnified, may be set down as a third cause of the multiplication of doctrines and sects in the christian church. The truth of facts, however notorious, and even of those that men have the least interest or temptation to falsify, is trusted

trusted very unsafely to tradition. How much more unsafe must this conveyance be, when it is that of opinions and doctrines, intricate, and therefore easily mistaken, disputed or disputable, and therefore industriously misrepresented? BARROW, in his exposition on the creed, takes away this great foundation of theology; for tho he asserts, that there are proper and sufficient means to discern the genuine doctrines and dictates of christianity, yet he leaves us in effect none but the writings of the evangelists, and the epistles of two or three apostles who had been disciples. According to him and to right reason, the first and best way of preserving doctrines is to preserve them in the writings of the authors of them; tho even this cannot be deemed absolutely secure. It is far from being certain, that genuine peripatetism is every where plainly read in the writings of ARISTOTLE, as they are come down to us: and if PYTHAGORAS and SOCRATES had writ, or if the works of ZENO were extant, we should be best assured, better than any other way, what their philosophies were, but still not without some possibility of error. Another way of preserving doctrines, is to preserve them in the writings of disciples, that immediately received them from the authors. Thus the writings of PLATO and XENOPHON tell us, with a good degree of certainty, what SOCRATES taught: and yet these writings give very different and contradictory accounts of the socratic philosophy. The next way that BARROW mentions is the preservation of doctrines in the writings of those who writ at larger distances of time, as those of the stoics were preserved in the writings of CICERO, SENECA, and EPICTETUS. This way he allows to be more imperfect than the former, because every writer is apt to misapprehend and misrepresent---to do somewhat more than transcribe--- to comment and descant--- to adorn and set out, to confirm or confute the doctrine they relate, in order thereto representing it with advantage to their purpose. The last way

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is that of oral tradition, the most liable to defect and corruption of any according to this judicious expositor. Men do as before, and in this case with greater advantage, "accommodate doctrines to their own prejudices, inclinations, and designs. The farther such tradition departs from the original spring, the more subject it is to contract such alterations and impurities. Every doctrine, thus propagated, is like a stream at the head, small and narrow, but clear and pure. Proceeding on, it grows larger and fouler. So tradition swells, by taking in what oblique channels of private fancy and pragmatical invention discharge into it, and by receiving tincture from particular inclination or politic design it grows muddy and feculent."

THE genuine doctrines, and dictates of christianity, have not been conveyed to us by the first of these four ways; for the saviour published his gospel by preaching, and by occasional discourses, and not by writing. But they have been preserved by the second; for two of the four evangelists had been disciples from the first, and witnesses, not only of all that had passed during his mission, but of his resurrection. They had, therefore, received immediately from the author the doctrines they published in his name. Who the other two were, it is impossible to say with sufficient assurance, amidst the fabulous or little authentic reports of ecclesiastical writers. But if MARK was the convert, the scholar, and the amanuensis of PETER, his testimony comes nearer to that required under this head, since PETER was a disciple, one of the twelve, than the testimony of LUKE, who belonged in all these relations to PAUL; since PAUL was no disciple, neither one of the twelve, nor one of the seventy, if, in truth, there was any such seventy, had received nothing immediately from CHRIST, nor had any apostolical commission, except that which he assumes in the Acts of the apostles written
by

by LUKE, and dictated, probably, by himself. I say probably, because it is possible LUKE might have been an eye and ear-witness of part of all he relates in the Acts, as St. JEROM observes; tho he could be no more than an hearsay witness of what he relates in the gospel, since he owns, in the beginning of it, that he writ, like many others, what he had been told.

WHEN divines urge, on this occasion, that the differences between MATTHEW and MARK, as well as others, are accounted for, and an intire harmony of the gospels is established, by critics, so that they all confirm one another, infidels, I know, will cavil, and sometimes plausibly, against many things that must be assumed to make this harmony appear, and to reconcile these differences. When it is urged again, that the gifts of the holy ghost, and an immediate inspiration being bestowed on all the disciples in an eminent manner and alike, they are all to be esteemed witnesses alike, and they all received the doctrines of christianity immediately from God, the author of it, tho not by the mouth of the saviour whilst he was in the flesh. I know too, that the same men will not remain without a reply. For instance, they will insist that all this, if allowed, will prove nothing in favor of MARK nor LUKE, nor even PAUL himself, who were neither of the twelve nor of the seventy; after which they will add, perhaps, "ex abundantia," that none of these three, having been designed by God to stand in the place of that disciple who had betrayed JESUS, and to fill up the number of the apostles, MATTHIAS alone, with the eleven, could pass in any sense for one of those disciples who had received the doctrines of christianity immediately from the author of them; tho the seventy might be, as it is said they were, appointed to be witnesses of the resurrection. ERASMUS, in the first chapter of his paraphrase on the Acts, makes CHRIST say to all the disciples,

disciples, that the holy spirit, which he had breathed upon them, and which he promised should descend upon them from above, would not only recal to their minds all he had taught them, but suggest likewise to them whatever else it might become necessary for them to know. But the cavillers, of whom we speak, will urge, that these words were added by ERASMUS for reasons very obvious, and are not contained in the text; nor is even the sense of them implied so far as to authorise the disciples, and much less any that were not of their number, to add any thing to the conditions of salvation that CHRIST himself had imposed. Such cavils will be raised, I say, but they will deserve to have little weight, as long as it is out of dispute that we have in our hands the gospels of * MATTHEW and JOHN, who give themselves to us for eye-witnesses of all that CHRIST did, and of all that happened to him, and ear-witnesses at the same time of all the doctrines he taught. Two channels were as sufficient as four to convey these doctrines to the world, and to preserve them in their original purity. The manner too, in which these evangelists recorded them, was much better adapted to this purpose than that of PLATO, or even of XENOPHON, to preserve the doctrines of SOCRATES. The evangelists did not content themselves to give a general account of the doctrines of CHRIST in their own words, nor presume, in feigned dialogues, to make him deliver their opinions in his own name, and as his own doctrines. They recorded his doctrines particularly, they recorded them in the very words in which he taught them, and they were careful to mention the several occasions on which he delivered them to his disciples or others. If therefore PLATO and XENOPHON tell us, with a good degree of certainty, what SOCRATES taught, the two evangelists seem to tell us, with much more, what the saviour taught, and com-

* N. B. I speak of both alike, tho I am not ignorant of what has been said that might weaken the authority of MATTHEW's gospel.

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manded them to teach. In a word, we may say, on these grounds, that the genuine doctrines of christianity have been preserved much better than those of heathen philosophy, in the second way of preserving doctrines, tho they have not been preserved in the first and best, as some of the others have been.

THE third and fourth ways of preserving doctrines, which BARROW mentions, have so near a relation, that they may be thrown into one. They who decide about doctrines, or who write about them, at great distances of time from the first disciples, are more easily imposed upon by traditions, and can more easily impose them on others. Both these things fell out, and no case can be well supposed wherein the truth of fact, or the purity of doctrine, was so liable to be corrupted, or was in fact so much, or so soon corrupted, as in the propagation of christianity. The mixed crowd of Jews and heathens that embraced it, and the very manner of propagating it, rendered this corruption unavoidable.

THE Jews had begun long before this time to corrupt their own religion. They had borrowed many superstitious opinions from Egypt, and the eastern nations; and pythagorean and platonic metaphysics, which they had entertained after they became acquainted with the Greeks, and lived under the domination of the SELEUCIDES and the PTOLEMIES, were imported both by them and the heathen converts into christianity; by the hellenist Jews more than by those of Palestine, and by the heathen more than by either. Christianity began in Judaea; it derived it's authority and it's proofs from the jewish scriptures, the authenticity and divinity of which it every where supposes. The author of it was a Jew; and, as the religion he instituted tended not directly to destroy judaism, so the christian

stian church at Jerusaleſem conformed long, as CHRIST himſelf had done conſtantly, to the antient religion. On all theſe accounts, the jewiſh converts might regard chriſtianity as a branch of judaiſm, and take the ſame liberties of retrenching, of adding, of altering, with one, as had been taken with the other. They had acknowledged JESUS to be the Meſſiah foretold by their prophets. In this, they had gone beyond the phariſees, who rejected him, as the phariſees had gone, in receiving all the books of the old Teſtament, beyond the ſaducees, who received the pentateuch, and rejected all the others. The phariſees had added an oral to the written law. They believed the reſurrection of the dead, the immortality of the ſoul, future rewards and puniſhments, the metempsychosis, and other doctrines utterly unknown to MOSES, which they accommodated ſome how or other to his law. They made up a new ſyſtem of theology, by ſuch accommodations of the law to their traditions and their philoſophy. Why ſhould not the chriſtian Jews we ſpeak of make up a new ſyſtem likewise, by blending all theſe and chriſtianity together, as they could beſt reconcile them? The example of PHILO, who did not profeſs chriſtianity indeed, but who found means to make the platonick opinions of the deity, and thoſe of MOSES agree, might encourage them in the attempt.

MUCH in the ſame manner the pagan converts might, and certainly did proceed. They found a great analogy between the moſt ſublime and important doctrines of chriſtianity, and thoſe which ſome of their philoſophers had taught, and they might eaſily be led from hence to think, that a ſimilitude of doctrine denoted a ſimilitude of authority. This will appear the more probable, if we conſider, that not only ſome heretics, but ſeveral of the moſt orthodox fathers, believed all thoſe to be illuminated from above, who purified their minds, ſeparated
their

their souls as much as possible from their bodies, and died this philosophical death in order to arrive at a philosophical regeneration, according to the notions that metaphysical enthusiasm had established *. Thus, JUSTIN the martyr makes CHRIST to have been known, in some sort, to SOCRATES †. It could not be otherwise. The soul of SOCRATES was a purified soul, and CHRIST the illuminating word. St. AUSTIN was much of the same mind, and says little less than JUSTIN of this philosopher.

THE eclectic sect, which POTAMO founded about this time at Alexandria, might give farther occasion to the heathen converts to corrupt christianity. This sect professed a detachment from all sects, in the search of truth: they were

“ Nullius addicti jurare in verba magistri.”

They delivered themselves from the chains of philosophical bigotry. They might hold some to one and some to another system of philosophy in the main, as their different judgments or prejudices inclined them; but they asserted the reasonable liberty of embracing truth wherever they found it, and without any regard to the tenets even of that sect towards which they leaned the oftenest and the most. SOTION passed for a stoic, and his scholar SENECA professed himself such §. Yet SOTION was fond of pythagorean doctrines, and SENECA || made no scruple of borrowing from EPICURUS. PLOTINUS was a platonician, and yet he adopted doctrines, such, we may presume especially, as were subtle and mysterious, both from the stoics and the peripatetics. CLEMENT ** was a Christian, who taught christianity by his public lessons at Alexandria, and who de-

* PLATO, PLUT. JAMB. et alibi. — liberatio à corpore celebratissima mors est philosophica.

† Apol. i.

§ SENEC. ep. 58.

|| SENEC. passim.

** Strom. l. i.

fended it by his writings, and yet he approved this manner of philosophising ; we may conclude too, that it was the method of that school. AMMONIUS was the preceptor of PLOTINUS and of ORIGEN. PLOTINUS deserted christianity, and bred up an inveterate enemy to it in PORPHYRY ; or if he continued a Christian to the last, as EUSEBIUS says somewhere that he did, for no better reason, perhaps, than to keep a name of so great renown in the christian catalogue, he dressed up his Christian, with so much pagan theology, that he might pass for a professor of either. ORIGEN, on the other hand, who had heard CLEMENT, as well as AMMONIUS, was such a zealous Christian, that he aspired to suffer martyrdom, like his father, and did actually execute one sort, that of castration on himself ; by which however he avoided another, that of temptation. ORIGEN signalised himself in the eclectic method. His warm imagination carried him into allegorical and cabalistical interpretations of the scriptures, and his immense reading furnished him with a multitude of notions borrowed from pagan theology. Many of these he introduced into christianity : and his book of principles was a repertory of the most extravagant opinions. Heretical too they were declared by men less learned, less zealous, perhaps, but certainly more politic, and more circumspect in observing the course that orthodoxy took, than himself.

FROM what has been said it is evident, that such a motley crowd of Jews and heathens, as the first converts to christianity were, could not fail to mix a leaven of judaic and heathen theology into the christian system, and thereby to swell, to perplex, and ferment it. Had they kept closely to what the saviour taught, all this had been avoided : and supposing christianity to have been purely an human invention, it had been the most amiable and the most useful invention that was ever imposed

imposed on mankind for their good. But the extensions of it, and the engraftments that were made on this divine stock, by mere human philosophy, and by religious prejudices already entertained, produced a system, or rather caused divers systems to grow up, of fantastical theology. Christianity, as it came out of the hands of God, if I may use the expression, was a most simple and intelligible rule of belief, worship, and manners; which is the true notion of a religion. As soon as men presumed to add any thing of their own to it, the human alloy corrupted the divine mass, and it became an object of vain, intricate, and contentious science. Such it continued to be: and the very manner in which truth was propagated, served to establish error.

THE doctrines of christianity, and the facts that proved the divinity of it, were published by discourse not by writing. CHRIST preached; he was the greatest of preachers, and he sent his disciples out to preach *. They pursued their mission thro different countries; and as fast as they formed a church in one, they hastened to another. At least this was the practice of St. PAUL, who scattered about more spiritual seed than all the rest, and more widely. PETER was a very itinerant missionary too, if we give credit to EUSEBIUS, which I do very seldom. This writer makes him travel over a great part of Asia minor, and even to the people of Pontus; because he speaks of these nations, tho not of his preaching to them, in his first epistle. It is much more likely that he continued in Palestine and the neighbourhood, and that, perhaps, he never went even to Rome, whither you pretended catholics send him, that you may impose, as you have done without proof and against common sense, the ecclesiastical tyranny of the bishops of that see, his supposed successors, on the christian world. PAUL indeed

* Summus ille ecclesiastes. — verbum et sermo Dei. ERAS. de rat. concion.

was a great traveller, as I have said, moving about from place to place almost continually during the greatest part of the time that passed between his baptism and his death; that is, according to the calculation of ERASMUS, thirty five years. He went over the countries, where PETER taught, more than once. He had been in Arabia before. He visited Greece and most of the islands. He penetrated beyond Thracia and Macedonia into Illyria. He returned into Palestine, and was sent in chains from thence to Rome.

How these two apostles preached, for of the rest we have no need to speak, and should have little to say, may be seen by their public discourses recorded in the Acts, and might be guessed by the style and matter of their epistles. To shew how they succeeded in their missions, one example will be sufficient. PAUL had preached eighteen months or two years at Corinth, and had settled a church there. The Corinthians did not renounce christianity as soon as he had left them; but they corrupted it both in opinion and practice, and fell back into all their former habits of vice and debauchery. It was, on this occasion, that the apostle writ his two epistles to the Corinthians, and in them we see the particular errors and abuses that were grown in a short time to a great head in that city. Among these, it is to our present purpose to mention some. The taint of heathen philosophy remained upon them; and they had contracted a gnostical contempt for the simplicity of the gospel, and of evangelical teachers. False apostles from Judaea had introduced superstitious opinions and practices, and had persuaded them to regard the law of MOSES as necessary to be observed with that of CHRIST. They were divided into sects, and affected pre-eminence according to the dignity they ascribed to those by whom they had been baptised, to APOLLOS, to CEPHAS, to PAUL. For these, and for many other things, they

they are severely reprov'd in the first of the two epistles I have mentioned: and tho St. PAUL seems satisfi'd in the second with their submission and amendment, yet is it certain, that the same errors and abuses continued or reviv'd in the church of Corinth, and in others. JEROM * says in general, that even in his time the remains of them appeared in Achaia, and St. AUSTIN †, taking notice in particular of the superstitious washings of the feet, laments, that the church of CHRIST was subjected to more than judaical servitude under the load of external observances.

It was easy to intermix, in this manner of promulgating the gospel, as many philosophical and pharisaical conceits as the prejudices or purposes of the several preachers of it required: and when they were once well mingled together, as tradition varied those of one sort, or multiplied those of another, public writings and ecclesiastical authority were added to increase and perpetuate the confusion in which christianity was deliver'd down to posterity, and in which it continues even at this day. A state not to be quite parallell'd by that of any other religion, as I believe; neither by the mahometan, however divided, nor by that of FOE, into how many sects soever it has been broken among the eastern nations. But we must not imagine, that the diversity of sects, and the opposition and confusion of doctrines, which were principal, were sole causes of the uncertainty of the traditions of the primitive church, or were caus'd solely by the manner of promulgating christianity. Other causes of this division and confusion exist'd and concurr'd, either mediately thro them, or by their own immediate effects, to corrupt tradition, and hinder the christian system from acquiring any appearance of consistency.

* Praefat. 2di lib. com. in ep. ad Galatas.

† Ep. ad JANUARIUM.

SECTION XIX.

To collect instances of all the extravagancies which were broached at that time, which almost choaked the tender shoots of christianity, and which grew up with them, like weeds among the corn, would be endless and needless both. I will recal one alone of the enthusiasm that prevailed, and of the impudence with which some men imposed on the simplicity of others. We find it in PAUL's second epistle to the Corinthians. The effect of his first, whatever that was, encouraged him to write in this more plainly and more bitterly against the false teachers, and more highly in praise of himself, his authority, and his merit, which he scruples not to prefer to that of all the other apostles. On this occasion it appears, that the false teachers had the front to assure, and to make the first christian converts believe, that they had an immediate communication with celestial beings. This gave them an air of superiority to which St. PAUL thought it not proper to submit, as indeed it was not, since that would have been to submit his authority to theirs, and the gospel he taught to the gospels they taught. The least he could do, and it is observable, that his modesty would allow him to do no more, was to oppose his own raptures and visions to those which these men pretended to have, and to declare, that he too had been wrapped up into the third heaven, either in body, or spirit, where he had learned things incomprehensible and ineffable.

WHAT has been said very summarily may serve, however, to shew, that it was not possible, traditions derived from the first, and thro the most early ages of christianity, should convey either facts or doctrines down with a due authenticity and precision, unless a continued miracle had subsisted to alter the

the nature of things, and to produce effects repugnant to their causes. But there remain some circumstances still, which deserve to be mentioned. It has been observed already, that the fondness of the first Christians for pagan theology carried them, not only to borrow from it, but to forge books under the names of such as had been famous divines in the East, in Egypt, and elsewhere. Even this did not content them. They not only introduced, with equal absurdity and falshood, these authorities to confirm the most sublime mysteries of christianity, and to teach men the way to salvation*, but they composed a multitude of different gospels, not less, I believe, than forty, to give the authority of a divine original to all the fabulous traditions, superstitious practices, and extravagant doctrines, which were adopted, or invented by the different sects. Thus the gnostics had their gospel; the marcionites had theirs; the valentinians had theirs, and even JUDAS ISCARIOT had his †. Apocalypses, or books of revelations, were not so numerous; but of these too there were several. One of these particularly, the apocalypse of St. PAUL, I could almost wish that we had, since it pretended to relate the ineffable things he saw in the third heaven. But it is lost as well as others: and if that which we have under the name of St. JOHN had been lost likewise, there might have been some madmen the fewer, and christianity would not have suffered so much.

THERE was another practice in the primitive church, which may find its place properly enough here, because it served to corrupt the traditions of the church, and to fill the ecclesiastical annals with lying legends; tho it did not corrupt the doctrines of christianity so directly as the others. The practice I mean is, that of writing pious romances, under the pretence of writing the lives of saints, and the deaths of martyrs. This

* Via ad salutem——indicata.

† Cod. apoc. nov. testam. of FABRICIUS.
practice

practice grew so frequent, and these romances were held in such esteem, that a certain ecclesiastic of the greek church, one METAPHRASTUS *, I think, published a treatise of criticism on the subject, and laid down rules for the composition of them. Christian historians, like those of Greece who wrote after the expedition of ALEXANDER, imagined they could never add too much of the marvellous to so many marvellous events. Their readers seemed to be of the same mind: and history became romance in order to please. These histories too of saints and martyrs were panegyrics as well as romances, and had the same effect that TULLY ascribes somewhere to the funeral orations of the Romans, which corrupted tradition first, and history afterwards. Well might they have this effect, when they were authorised by the greatest and most admired fathers of the church; when such a man as St. AUSTIN, for instance, read such legends in the pulpit to his congregation, and kept and published accounts of miracles wrought by the relics of saints and martyrs. Since the preachers propagated these idle tales, it is not wonderful, that the hearers believed them, and that pious lying became the voice of tradition, in ages when any thing might be imposed on christian auditories, and that which was least understood was most admired in them, according to the character given of these flocks by St. GREGORY of Nazianze in a very remarkable anecdote related by St. JEROM †. But these romances had an effect still worse; for they introduced into christianity a sort of polytheism and idolatry, too nearly akin to heathenism. Let not your zeal for the honor of saints, martyrs, and confessors make you think the expression too hard. I can quote you one much more hard from ERASMUS, for whom you profess the same veneration that I have. In the preface to DE MARCA, before his paraphrase on St. PAUL's epistles to the Corinthians, after saying, that "this apostle did not suffer any mortal to

* Vid. BAILETT's pref. to the lives of the saints.

† Ep. ad NEPOTIAN.

" be

“ be cried or preached up, nor the praise of the gospel to be transferred to men,” he adds, “ nunc quidem, velut antiquato CHRISTO, novum idolatriæ genus invehunt, ex hominibus, ut ita loquar, deos facientes.” The church, your church I mean, has ascribed divinity, little if at all better than the heathen did. Some of your saints, tho they were not public debauchees, were very ill men: and if you consult CYPRIAN, whose authority is so much respected, and for the same reason, by the christian clergy of every sect, you will find, that they who suffered as confessors were very often men of the most profligate morals. If they were such after their sufferings, there is room to believe, that some of the martyrs were such before they suffered, and when they suffered.

No monuments can be more uncertain, none more precarious, than those of christian tradition. Other traditions grow more and more so by time. These were never more so than at first. Ask your acquaintance doctor WATERLAND, whether he has found the tradition of the three first ages of the church direct, clear, and uniform in support of the consubstantiality of the son to the father, which is a doctrine that he defends most strenuously. He will assure you, that he has found it to be so. He will not be able, however, to prove it any more than bishop BULL has done, after all his boasts of the unanimity of the fathers, and even with the help of forced constructions, and indirect proofs. As little will he or any other divine be able to defend, on this authority, several doctrines, that they hold, or to justify themselves for not holding several that they reject. Even your divines, who lay so much stress on tradition, are pleased to abandon it, as well as ours, in cases wherein it seems to carry the greatest authority, because it is immediately derived from the apostles. Thus, I believe, that abstinence from blood, which was enjoined as much as abstinence from fornication

tion by the apostles in a solemn council, is at this time required by no doctor, except doctor DELANY. Thus again, there are, I suppose, very few millenarians left, if even Mr. WHISTON be still of the same opinion, tho the year one thousand seven hundred and twenty is past, and the millennium not begun. In short, by partial traditions they can prove or disprove any thing. By universal traditions almost nothing. This very doctrine of a millennium was opposed at the close of the second century*: and a certain priest, one CAIUS, who believed, that the apocalypse ascribed to St. JOHN was writ by CERINTHUS, ascribed this opinion not to the evangelist, but to the heretic. JEROM, AUSTIN, GREGORY the great, or the saint as he is called with less reason, and divines much more modern than these, have interpreted the passages of the apocalypse, that establish the millennium, in another sense: and a man, who should profess to expect it at this day, or to believe the doctrine, would be treated as a visionary. But yet we must, I think, receive this tradition, so generally rejected; or reject all traditions, even those as generally received.

LET me say something more, which occurs to me on the subject of the millennium. IRENAEUS is a father much quoted and much respected. IRENAEUS had seen PAPIAS and POLYCARP, and was himself a disciple of the disciples of St. JOHN. All these were millenarians: and thus the first authors of apostolical traditions taught this doctrine as apostolical. JUSTIN the martyr, and TERTULLIAN, were millenarians likewise. JUSTIN was the first father, I believe, who took notice of the apocalypse, ascribed it to St. JOHN, and founded his belief of the millennium upon it, in the dialogue with TRYPHON. TERTULLIAN goes farther. He maintains the apocalypse against the marcionites, and affirms, that the new Jerusalem, to be

* EUSEB. hist. eccles. lib. 3.

built

built by the hand of God, and to descend from heaven, was known to EZEKIEL, and had been seen by the apostle St. JOHN; nay, that the plan, or model of it, had been seen in his time suspended in the air forty days together, that it might be known again, when it should actually exist on the earth. Let it not be said, that I insist on the authorities of a weak man, and of a madman. I might do so, in this case, with as good reason as divines have for insisting on them in so many others. But the point I insist upon is this. The doctrine of the millennium was an apostolical doctrine, and taught as such by the immediate successors of the apostles. It was opposed, indeed, near two centuries afterwards by an obscure priest, who denied it to be the doctrine of St. JOHN, because he denied St. JOHN to be the author of the apocalypse. But the doctrine was founded on original tradition as well as on the apocalypse: and therefore whatever interpretations were made of these revelations in after times, the tradition was too fresh to be shaken. What shall we say now? Were the traditions concerning the millennium of doubtful authority in the first ages of the church? In that case, tradition is no rule at all. Were they uniform? How comes this doctrine to be exploded?

THE third and fourth ways, that is the two worst, of preserving doctrines, which BARROW mentions, have so near a relation to one another, that one is the necessary consequence of the other. They, who decide about disputable and disputed facts or doctrines, at great distances of time, may be easily imposed upon by tradition, and may easily impose by authority. Tradition is all that time growing corrupt. If it become false, they decide and they write falsely; if uncertain, uncertainly. The nicaean council decided against ARIUS: and yet, if we give credit to PETAVIUS, whom it was more easy to silence by authority, than to refute by fact and by rea-

F f f 2 son,

son, the fathers of the three first centuries were little better than arians. How came the fathers of the fourth to decree so positively and so precisely in favor of a consubstantiality, about which the tradition had been neither positive, precise, nor unanimous; tho bishop BULL has ventured to assert, that the antenicaean fathers had agreed on this subject, "ad unum." Could any man, who had not the front of a controversial writer, affirm in this manner, when he knew, as BULL knew, that eighty fathers who condemned PAUL of Samosata, denied the homöusion or consubstantiality of the son with the father?

Will it be urged, that the four gospels are as old, and even older than tradition; that the orthodox doctrine concerning the trinity is established in them, and in the other scriptures of the new Testament, by all which tradition is to be controuled and corrected? I apprehend, that the answer will not be sufficient. Some will assert, that the scriptures, far from establishing the nicaean doctrine, vindicate, by their whole tenor, the supremacy of the father, and declare the subordination of the son. But let it be, that the gospels received into the canon are favorable to the orthodox belief; how do we know, that the other gospels were exactly conformable to these, on a matter of so much nice definition? Might not our learned and subtle theology find the task infinitely harder, if we had those gospels, to create an harmony between three or four dozen, than between four? The council of Laödicea admitted four, and rejected all the rest. But it is very possible, that this council might proceed, as councils have generally done, under the influence of an ecclesiastical faction, and decree accordingly; or else on some such reasons as IRENAEUS called a demonstration*. There are four parts of the world. There are four cardinal winds. There have been four covenants under ADAM, NOAH,

* Lib. 3.

MOSES,

MOSES, and CHRIST. There can be but four gospels therefore. I omit some other proofs, just as demonstrative as those, upon all of which he did, and the council might, determine that there could be neither more nor less than four gospels; tho several traditions authoris'd several others.

THE truth is, that as every man, in the most early days of christianity, judg'd of his own inspiration, and of the gifts of the spirit he received, so every church judg'd of the inspiration of authors, and of the divine authority of books. The first led to the last, and those authors were deem'd inspired, and those books were canonis'd, in which every particular church found the greatest conformity with her own sentiments. It is astonishing to consider how far this extravagance was carried. To consider, for instance, that CLEMENT of Alexandria should look on an apocalypse of PETER as genuine, and it should be reject'd afterwards. That St. PAUL should insert in his epistles several passages of the apocalypse of ELIAS, as ORIGEN assures that he did, and it should be refus'd admittance into the canon. But it is still more astonishing to observe how much respect ORIGEN himself had for the visions of HERMAS, and the oracles of the SYBIL, as well as others of the fathers. IRENAEUS, having cited the former, uses this expression, "scriptura pronunciavit*:" and honest JUSTIN, in his admonition to the Greeks, exhorts them in a most solemn manner to believe the antient and venerable SIBYL, who was extraordinarily inspired by almighty God.

I CONCLUDE from the little that has been said on a most voluminous subject, that as tradition furnishes very precarious anecdotes to those who write at great distances of time, so it may become difficult, nay impossible, to ascertain the autho-

* Lib. 4.

rity even of books that were written, perhaps, at the time they suppose themselves to have been written, if the attempt to fix their authenticity, and to reduce them into a canon, is made at a great distance of time. They may be neither received nor rejected on grounds absolutely sure. They may be rejected at one time, and received at another: a remarkable example of which we find in the adventures of the apocalypse. Whether this book was writ by JOHN the evangelist, JOHN the priest, CERINTHUS, or some other visionary, it passed for a composition of the evangelist's, and maintained great credit as such in the church for some centuries before the council of Laödicea. This council left it out of the canon in the year three hundred and sixty: and altho asiatic bishops might pass, in this case, for judges more competent than those of the west, the council of Carthage put it into the canon in the year three hundred and ninety seven. Some spanish councils, and others, I believe, in the west did the same. Anathema, that convincing argument, was employed against all gainfayers: and as the mist thickened, it was universally admitted into the canon of the new Testament.

To sum up the whole in one short proposition. Ecclesiastical tradition has been, from the first and purest ages, founded, for the most part, in ignorance, superstition, enthusiasm, and fraud. He who pretends to clear the reverend fathers, by whom tradition was principally conveyed down from age to age, and to deny this charge, must be very ignorant himself, or very impudent. Sometimes they shew their learning, like JUSTIN, who took the inscription "SEMONI deo fan-
"eto," on the statue of a god of the Sabines, for an inscription on the statue of SIMON the magician. Sometimes their logic, and the strength of their reasoning talents are extremely like to those of IRENAEUS, in his famous demonstration of the necessity of four gospels. Sometimes they are as sober as CYPRIAN,

PRIAN, who rehearsed to his church in the morning the visions and dreams he had in the night, and who consulted little children in their extasies, when he had none of these himself *. Some-
times

* As extraordinary as this may seem, it will not surprise those who have read the confession, ascribed to him, and published among his works in the benedictine edition of them. The great St. CYPRIAN, for so our divines, as well as yours, affect to call him, had been a rhetorician before his conversion, and was after it an admirer of his countryman, TERTULLIAN, whom he called his master, and some portion of whose works he used to read every day, according to an anecdote mentioned by St. JEROM *. Now since he formed his style on this model, and on the taste of his age, we may well expect to find what is found in his writings, much hyperbole, much spiritual bombast, and all the flowers of false eloquence. We find them very eminently in that extraordinary piece, his confession. There he gives an account of his education, of his initiation into all the mysteries of paganism, and of his admission into all the secrets of the blackest and most diabolical magic. Believe me, says the saint, I saw the devil himself; believe me, I embraced him, I conversed with him, and was esteemed one of those who held a principal rank about him. He adds, that the devil made him many compliments and promises, gave him a band of infernal spirits to command, and at the end of this first visit arose from his throne, and accompanied the young JAMBRES with a politeness that surprised all those who saw it. He describes his person, his dress, and the spirits that attended his court, in material forms, with which they were supplied by the steams of sacrifices. He describes afterwards the wonderful feats he performed, whilst he was a magician, and all the abominations of which he was guilty. But finding at last that the devil, and all the powers of hell had not been able to debauch JUSTINA, a christian virgin, for whom his friend AGLAIDAS had a strong inclination, and whom CYPRIAN himself seems to have liked very much, he renounced the devil and all his works. He set him even at defiance. You tremble, said the saint, at the name of CHRIST: the sign of his cross deprives you of all power: how would you stand his presence? Thus the devil was put to confusion. But CYPRIAN fell into despair, till his friend, EUSEBIUS, comforted him, carried him to the bishop, and made him not only a Christian, but one of the greatest lights of the church.

SOME divines would find, in all this, no reason to object to CYPRIAN's authority. On the contrary, they would exalt this confession, and the public shame which the penitent took to himself, as an illustrious proof of the sincerity of his conversion. Such divines might, perhaps, go farther, and shew, by way of corollary, not only against the novatians, that christians who had apostatized might be received to repentance, but also that the most wicked of pagans might become a saint. They would not, however, be able to solve this dilemma. "Either CYPRIAN believed what he reported to be true, or he knew it to be false. If he believed it true, he was a madman. If he knew it to be false, he was a liar; and neither in one character, nor in the other, a fit pastor for the flock of CHRIST."

* Lib. de scrip. ecclesiast.

times they are as sagacious as AMBROSE, who had visions and dreams too, and who had besides them the faculty of distinguishing

OTHER divines, both of your church, and of mine, are very unwilling to own that this confession is CYPRIAN'S. They would gladly father it on some other person, no matter on whom. His writings do not only give, like those of the other fathers, a seeming authority to many of the doctrines that they teach; but he was in particular a zealous assertor of the dignity and power of bishops, and of the whole ecclesiastical order. The papists, indeed, have most use for this father: and his book "*de unitate ecclesiae*" alone, nay, one single passage of it would suffice to make him a favorite in the church of Rome. The passage I mean is that wherein, after he has quoted the words of CHRIST to PETER ^a, tho he acknowledges that all the apostles received the same powers, he adds ^b, "*tamen ut unitatem manifestaret, unitatis ejusdem originem ab uno incipientem suâ autoritate disposuit — sed exordium ab unitate proficiscitur, et primatus PETRO datur, ut una CHRISTI ecclesia, et cathedra una monstretur.*" The reputation of such a witness in favor of papal primacy, and episcopal authority, in the middle of the third century, is to be supported at any rate; and by consequence this piece is not to be ascribed to him, if the priesthood can hinder it, by opposing the most improbable, to the most probable reasons.

WE know nothing of the man till he became a Christian. St. Austin ^c indeed speaks of him, as if he had read his confession. "*Mutatus est CYPRIANUS,*" says this saint of his countryman, "*cujus hodie memoriam frequentamus — ipse scribit, ipse testatur cujus vitae fuerit aliquando, quam nefariae, quam impiae, quam improbandae, ac detestandae.*" The author of the confession could almost alone deserve such epithets: and it is extremely probable that PONTIUS, a prudent deacon, and the ancient biographer of CYPRIAN, passed over in silence all that preceded his conversion, as if it had been unworthy to be mentioned, but in truth that he might not be obliged to say any thing of this important confession. His modern biographer, a benedictine monk, who published the edition of CYPRIAN'S works, which BALUZIUS had begun, is not so easily embarrassed. He pretends that there were two CYPRIANS, the great St. CYPRIAN of Carthage, and a little St. CYPRIAN of Antioch, whose name is likewise preserved in ecclesiastical monuments. He insists on a poem, which PHOTIUS reports that the empress EUDOCIA wrote about a CYPRIAN and a JUSTINA who suffered martyrdom at Nicomedia, and which contained many things that are imputed to the CYPRIAN we speak of, by St. GREGORY of Nazianze in his eighteenth sermon, tho they could not belong to him. On this foundation the monk assumes that St. GREGORY confounded the antiochian with the carthaginian CYPRIAN, and did not know on whose festival he preached. Our learned FELL had objected that no one of this name is to be found among the bishops of Antioch: no wonder, says the learned benedictine, for as there were two CYPRIANS, there were two Antiochs, the great Antioch so famous in history, and a little private Antioch concealed in Phoenicia, and scarce heard of in any public records. It

^a MAT. c. xvi.^b JOH. c. xx.^c Serm. 311.

seemed

guishing the relics of saints and martyrs by certain emotions that they caused in him. Sometimes they are as cautious and exact, in their reports of miracles, as AUSTIN was, who says on that important question, whether St. JOHN died or not, "that the people of Ephesus, men of sense, and not light of belief, had assured him, that the saint was buried in their town; but that he lay in his grave like one who sleeps in his bed, and that the earth which covered him rose and sunk, as the bed-clothes do over one who sleeps and breathes." To conclude, they were sometimes as sincere and honest as JEROM. The sincerity of this great doctor may be seen in this instance. He pretended that angels had scourged him severely for his attachment to profane authors; and to shew that he had not dreamed it, he appealed to the marks that remained on his back*. His honesty may be seen in this. The fathers were apt to employ, like rhetors, false reasons and false authorities. JEROM commends the practice, avows it, and gives rules for it. Nay he makes PETER and PAUL guilty of it in their famous dispute, which gave occasion to another between him and the bishop of Hippo.

If we were obliged to search for the articles and grounds of faith, and for the measures of obedience, in this mystery of folly and iniquity; if we were to collect our christianity from dark passages of scripture, that admit often of no sense, and

seemed incredible to FELL that St. GREGORY, who had been so well instructed in ecclesiastical affairs by his pious father, and who had been at Nicomedia and in the neighbouring country, should know nothing of this antiochian CYPRIAN, but apply the whole of this confession to the carthaginian. It will avail little, I suppose, to affirm that GREGORY was come newly to Constantinople, and that he preached without sufficient preparation and information: so that I may continue to believe, as I do believe, it more probable that these critics go about to deceive us, than that St. GREGORY was deceived himself, and imposed on his auditory.

* Ep. ad EUSTOCHIUM.

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often of several, and that are rendered more uncertain and obscure by ecclesiastical traditions, and by such divines as have been mentioned, our case would be bad indeed. But such an absurdity cannot be in the order of an all-wise providence. God has dealt more graciously with his creatures. The kingdom of theology is the kingdom of darkness: and to enjoy the true light of the gospel, we must fly from it. To believe that JESUS was the Messiah is said by some to be the "unum necessarium" of faith; but to observe the laws of nature is certainly the "unum necessarium" of duty. About this summary of faith and duty there can be no very reasonable doubt. Scripture, tradition, and theology, all conspire to establish them; altho the two last endeavour to add to them, and to perplex them.

S E C T I O N X X .

BUT it is time we should proceed to the last cause I assigned of the multiplication of sects, and the confusion of doctrines, which have rendered theology the corruption of religion and the bane of society, by the abuse which a distinct order of men has made of religion to acquire dominion over private conscience, and by that spiritual, a great share of temporal, dominion in every christian state. With this I shall conclude all I have to say concerning authority in matters of religion, and shall plead the cause of it, successfully, I hope, against those infidels who charge it unjustly.

THAT religion is necessary to strengthen, and that it contributes to support government cannot be denied, I think, without contradicting reason and experience both. This some men have been extravagant enough to do directly: whilst others,
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with whom we shall meddle here, have contradicted reason and experience, just as much, in a manner more likely to impose, and therefore more likely to do hurt, by propagating false conceptions of the Supreme Being, by perplexing the notions of religion, and by associating to it such as are really distinct from it. From hence all the evil consequences, that are imputed to religion, have flowed immediately: and it is necessary, therefore, in defence of it, to distinguish clearly between what is really religion, and what has been industriously, and is now habitually, confounded with it, and made to pass for it.

Civil obligations are imposed by the laws of man; religious obligations by those of God; and as the authority of the legislator is far greater in one case than in the other, so is the sanction of the law, eternal punishments in another life, instead of temporal pains and penalties in this. If it be said, that besides this difference, we are to consider how much religion has a farther influence than civil government can have, because the former reaches to the inward dispositions of the heart and mind, whilst the other goes no farther than to regulate outward conduct; I shall neither deny the proposition, nor admit all the use that is made of it: but I shall conclude from thence, how necessary it is to the peace and welfare of mankind, that they be kept from jarring, which cannot be effectually prevented, unless the intire power of both remains in the same hands. As long as natural religion is alone concerned, this should not seem so difficult; but when revealed religions are established, the difficulty becomes almost insuperable. The principles and duties of natural religion arise from the nature of things, and are discovered by the reason of man, according to that order which the author of all nature, and the giver of all reason, has established in the human system. From hence too would arise the institutions of civil government, in a natural state; if the

minds of legislators were not corrupted previously by superstition. In these cases, religion and civil government, arising from the same spring, their waters would be intermixed, they would run in one stream, and they might be easily confined to the same channel; if revelation did not introduce mysterious doctrines and rites, which it becomes soon a trade to teach and to celebrate.

NEITHER nature, nor reason, could ever lead men to imagine two distinct and independent societies in the same society. This imagination was broached by ecclesiastical ambition; and when it was once broached, it was sure to be propagated by the self-interest of a whole order of men in every country, and by the superstition of all the rest. A respect for religion begat a respect for this order. The idea of religion came to be associated to that of church, or rather to be confounded with it, and church came to signify this order of men even exclusively. This church, this religious society, grew up in some countries to be the tyrant, in others to be the rival of the state on the authority of pretended revelations among the heathens: and it is a melancholy truth, that the same monstrous growth has been seen and felt, on the pretended authority of real revelations among Christians. Such is the knavery and such the folly of mankind, that no example, antient nor modern, pagan nor christian, can be produced of such an order of men once established that has not aimed at acquiring from their institution, and that has not acquired, sooner or later, immoderate wealth and exorbitant power.

FEW men are so little acquainted with the history of the christian world as not to know, that the wealth of this church is equal, at least in many countries, to that of the egyptian church; that the influence of the antient could not be greater than

than that of the modern magi over all ranks of men; and that the bishop of Rome has exercised, even over kings in many countries, a power which he claimed, in all, of the same nature with that of the ethiopian church over kings of one country.

A RELIGIOUS society, by which is meant, on this occasion, a clergy, is, or is not the creature of the state. If the first, it follows, that this order, no more than others, which the state has instituted for the maintenance of good government, can assume any rights, or exercise any powers, except such as the state has thought fit to attribute to it; and that the state may, and ought to keep a constant controul over it, not only to prevent usurpations and abuses, but to direct the public and private influence of the clergy in a strict conformity to the letter and spirit of that constitution, the servants of which, in a much truer sense they are, than what they affect sometimes to call themselves, the ambassadors of God to other men. If the last is said, if it is asserted, that the church is in any sort independent on the state, there arises from this pretension the greatest absurdity imaginable, that I mean of "imperium in imperio:" an empire of divine in an empire of human institution. It is in truth so expressly contained in the very terms of the assertion, that none of the tedious sophistical reasonings, which have been employed for the purpose, can evade or disguise it.

ONE of these I will mention, because it has a certain air of plausibility, that imposes on many, and because, if it cannot stand a short and fair examination, as I think it cannot, the whole edifice of ecclesiastical independency and grandeur falls to the ground. It has been said then, that religious and civil societies are widely distinguished by the distinct ends of their institutions, which imply necessarily distinct powers and

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a mutual independency; that the end of one is the salvation of souls, and that of the other the security of temporal interests; that the state punishes overt-acts, and can punish nothing else, because it can have cognisance of nothing that passes in the mind and does not break out into criminal actions; but that the church employing her influence to temper the passions, to regulate the inward dispositions, and to prevent sins, as well as crimes, is that tribunal at which even intentions are to be tried, and sins, that do not ripen into crimes, nor immediately affect civil society, are to be punished.

Now in answer to all this we may deny, with truth and reason on our side, that the avowed ends of religious, and the real ends of civil societies, are so distinct as to require distinct powers, and a mutual independency. The salvation of souls is not the immediate end of civil government: and I wish it was not rather the pretence than the end of ecclesiastical policy. But if to abstain from evil, and to do good works, be means of salvation, the means of salvation are objects of civil government. It is the duty of princes and magistrates to promote a strict observation of the law of nature, of private and public morality, and to make those who live in subjection to them good men, in order to make them good citizens. For this purpose, the balance and the sword are put into their hands, that they may measure out punishment to every one who injures the community, or does wrong to his neighbour; and a rigorous punishment of crimes, especially if it be accompanied with rewards and encouragements to virtue, for both are entrusted to the same men, is the surest way, not only to reform the outward behavior, but to create an habitual inward disposition to the practice of religion.

A CLERGY

A CLERGY might co-operate with the civil magistrates, very usefully no doubt, by exhortations and reproofs, whereof they are seldom sparing, and much more by example, which can alone give efficacy to the former, and which is not, however, very frequently employed. This they might do as assistants to the civil magistrate, in concert with him, and in subordination to him. To what purpose, therefore, do they claim and affect independency on him? Greater power never did, nor can enable them to do greater good. On the contrary, it always has, and always must divert them from the proper business of their profession, create scandalous strife with the civil power, and embarrass the whole order of government. Would they erect a tribunal to punish intentions? The very pretence is impertinent. Would they erect it to punish, where no injury is offered, nor wrong done? The design is unjust and arbitrary. The ideas of crimes are determinate and fixed. The magistrate cannot alter them. The ideas of sins are more confused and vague; and we know by long and general experience how they vary in the minds, or at least in the writings of casuists. Would they erect such a tribunal to try the orthodoxy of men's faith? Such an one is erected, in some countries, under the name of the inquisition, and is justly detested in all. A tribunal, with all the powers of the inquisition, may extirpate heresy, or rather propagate hypocrisy, by the most abominable species of tyranny. A tribunal of this sort, that has powers less coercive, may tease, and vex, and irritate mankind. It may multiply sects, render them more obstinate by persecution, and bring all those evils on the world which atheists object to religion: but the former can never procure a real, nor the latter even an apparent uniformity. To what end and purpose then can spiritual courts, and coercive powers attributed to the clergy, serve, unless it be to make them judges and parties

ties in their own cause, when matters of interest are concerned?

S E C T I O N X X I .

I INSIST on this point the more, not only because it leads directly to what I shall have occasion to say in the latter part of this essay, but because I would take off the mask of ecclesiastical ambition, which even some of our own divines put on. Those of your church have laid it aside long ago, and contend openly for ecclesiastical tyranny. The principal difference among them seems to be, whether this tyranny shall be that of a monarchy, or of an aristocracy. Honest LAUD went as far, at least, as the most moderate of yours, and was frank enough to own his principles and aims. The several revolutions that have happened in our church and state have rendered the first too unpopular, to be directly avowed, and the latter too visibly impracticable, to be entertained. The bait, however, is tempting, and therefore even they nibble at it, who fear the hook. What they are not suffered to attempt in practice, they maintain in speculation: they insinuate principles, which may serve to re-establish ecclesiastical power and independency on the state, in some more happy conjuncture; and they do all this safely, whilst seeming modifications, and ambiguous expressions, hinder most men from discerning the consequences of what they advance, and some even from knowing again in their writings the same doctrines that they had condemned in the writings of others.

AMONG all the fallacies which have been employed by churchmen, who have thought it necessary to soften the absurdity, and to anticipate objections, one of the most absurd has been,

been advanced, tho not invented, by a paradoxical acquaintance of yours; and it is to maintain the independency of the church, and to suppose, at the same time, a sort of original contract between the church and the state, the terms of which every whimsical writer, even this scribler, adjusts as he pleases. They who contend for absolute monarchy in the state endeavour to explode the notion of an original contract between the prince and the people, because the terms of it are easy to be ascertained. They know, those of them at least who are not as mad as FILMER know, that all the rights and powers which a prince can have must be derived originally from the people. They know, therefore, that the terms of such a contract, generally made, and always implied, may be sufficiently ascertained by reason, by law, and by custom, notwithstanding any previous and divine right, which it may be supposed, that princes have to govern. They know too, that the whole body of the people, and no particular order of men, are to judge of the observance of this contract. But they who contend for the independency of the church on the state are ready to assume such a contract, because the pretence may serve to delude the state, in some countries, and can never embarrass the church in any. By admitting it, the state acknowledges an original independency in the church, derived from a greater authority than her own: and the supposed terms of union may be construed to be rather concessions of the religious society to the civil, for the sake of order and peace, than grants of the civil to the religious society. Thus religion and the church are set on the same foot: no human authority can alter one, but must receive it in the terms in which it has been revealed; and so may a good casuist prove, on this hypothesis, that no human authority can measure out any conditions of establishment to the other. Thus the state becomes nothing better than a coordinate, but inferior power.

THE stupid fellow, who advanced this paradox in english, did not see how ill the parts of it hang together; nor that if ecclesiastical government was, by divine appointment, independent of civil, no such contract, as he supposes, could be made. The religious society, notwithstanding their known moderation, could not have parted from that independency and superiority over the civil power, which God had given them. But the truth is, they were glad to get an establishment in the empire at any rate: and when a fortunate conjuncture had made one emperor think, that they might be of use to him, it happened, as it often has happened, that the auxiliaries usurped on him, or his successors at least, on the prerogatives of the crown, and on the liberties of the people. In short, if there had been any alliance between the church and the state on this occasion, it must have been such an alliance as never was heard of before nor since. It must have been an alliance without any treaty, for there certainly was none: and all the advantages, which the religious society acquired afterwards over the civil were mere usurpations; for usurpations by fraud are as really such, as usurpations by force, and these were carried as far as legislative authority.

THE church advocates beyond the Alpes may be a little more impudent, but they are much more consistent than some on this side. That voluminous compilation of decrees of councils and of popes, of resolutions of fathers, of apostolical constitutions, and of other ecclesiastical authorities, composes a body of law, according to them, which the church had a right to enact without the concurrence of the state, and which is, however, obligatory on the state, and on every member of the state, as far as they are concerned in it. This, I say, is impudent; but it is consistent with the notion of a religious society
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of divine institution, and therefore independent, and may be easily defended on that principle. But where we shall look for the conditions of that original contract, which was made between the religious and the civil society, I know not; unless we suppose them written on the back of CONSTANTINE's grant to SYLVESTER, and preserved in that grand repertory of forgeries, the records of the roman church. We shall not find them in the canon law. The French, as good papists as they are, admit this in part only: and the quarrel between PHILIP LE BEL and BONIFACE the eighth may be said to subsist even now. We, who have shook off the roman yoke entirely, admit still less of this ecclesiastical code; for we reject every thing in it, that is not conformable to the law of the state, and to the doctrines of the church, which this law has established.

THIS imaginary contract, in short, whether well or ill made, never existed, at any time, nor in any country; tho to have been real, and really authorised, it should have been the same, at all times and in all countries, where christianity was propagated. Political societies make, and alter, and break their alliances, as the varying reason of state suggests. Different orders of civil government, in the same society, change, and with them the whole constitution of such governments, as reason or passion, the interests or dispositions of men determine them. But a religion given by God is in it's nature invariable: and therefore, if a religious society, with certain privileges, immunities and prerogatives, be necessary to preserve it so, the order and constitution of such a society must be invariable too. The church must be established by the same divine authority as the religion, and be by consequence independent on the state. But nothing of this kind has been. CHRIST's kingdom was not of this world. He sent out his apostles to teach and to baptise, and the utmost power he gave them, besides that of

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working

working miracles to convince and to convert, was to shake off the dust of their feet, and to protest against the infidelity of those, who refused to receive them and the gospel they published. The apostles ordained others to accompany and to succeed them in the same office, the office of teaching and baptizing. The apostles could give no more power than they received; and no argument of right can be drawn from any thing that passed, nor from any thing that these men did, for the maintenance of their sect, whilst christianity was a sect. As little argument of right, or of independency, can be drawn from the impolitic indulgence of civil governments, that embracing the religion admitted the teachers of it into a legal establishment, with all the extraordinary powers they had enjoyed, whilst they were leaders and heads of a sect. I call it indulgence, because the religious society had no original right to any such powers; because the sect could not prescribe in such cases to the state; and because they were not admitted by any treaty, but by the good will and sole authority of the civil government. I call this indulgence impolitic, because it encouraged ecclesiastical ambition, laid the foundation of all the usurpations of the church on the state, destroyed the effect of religion by theology, and made even christianity a grievance, as will be shewn immediately.

S E C T I O N XXII.

CHRISTIANITY had not been established many centuries in the west, before a claim to universal property was set on foot in favor of the faithful, that is of Christians; nor before the bishop of Rome claimed universal empire, not only over the religious, but over all civil societies. St. AUSTIN shall vouch for what I advance here on the first head, and what I say on the

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the second has public notoriety for its voucher. The faint in a letter to MACEDONIUS *, takes notice of a passage in the proverbs of SOLOMON †, which runs to this effect in the septuagint version. "To the faithful man belongs a whole world of riches; to the infidel or unfaithful, not even a farthing §." What sense the passage may receive, I inquire not: but this is the comment of St. AUSTIN upon it. "We have a property in that which we possess of right; we possess of right what we possess justly; we possess justly what we possess well; whatever is ill possessed therefore belongs to another; but he possesses a thing ill, who makes an ill use of it." On this admirable foundation, the good bishop establishes the right of such saints as himself, "*fideles et pii quorum jure sunt omnia*," to the property of the whole world. The right is in them, tho the iniquity of the unrighteous possessors be tolerated. "Toleratur iniquitas male habentium, et quaedam inter eos jura constituuntur quae appellantur civilia." This however he is willing to connive at for the sake of present expediency, instead of insisting on an immediate cession of all this wealth, or on an actual repeal of all the laws of civil government. His words are so gracious that they deserve to be quoted. "Sed tamen etiam hic non intercedimus, ut secundum mores legesque terrenas non restituantur aliena &c." I believe this great doctor of the church appears to you, as he does to me, a casuist fit for VENNERS and the tribe of the fifth monarchy: and I cannot persuade myself that he was so inconsistent as to refuse any estates, or other donations, that were offered to the church, or to restore any that had been given, tho it has been asserted, I remember not on what authority, that he did so.

* Ep. 54. ed. Basil.

† Prov. xvii. 6.

§ Fidelis hominis totus mundus divitiarum est, infidelis autem nec obolus.

THUS

Thus early, and thus violently, did a spirit of avarice possess the religious society : and we may easily conceive what a spirit of stupid bigotry and implicit resignation possessed the laity at the same time, when a little bishop of Hippo durst advance such doctrines as I have quoted to such a man as MACEDONIUS. He might be encouraged to make the claim by the practice of the first Christians ; for among them, all things were in common ; the rich sold their possessions, and laid the whole price at the feet of the apostles. - I say the whole price, and I add, that it was strictly exacted, as we may assure ourselves from the example of ANANIAS and his wife SAPHIRA *. They might have kept their estate, or the whole price they had sold it for. But when they brought it, in imitation of the zeal of other Christians, to the apostolical chamber or treasury, it became a fraud to keep back any part of it. Less than the whole would not satisfy the church : and St. PETER accuses them accordingly of fraud, and of lying to the holy ghost ; because they had given no more than they could spare, and had owned no more than they had given. The punishment followed instantly : they were both struck dead. It appears that great collections were made, and every church had a common purse. By these means they supported their poor : and every man who embraced christianity, being sure not to want bread, the gospel was more effectually propagated, and great numbers of the lowest rank of people were brought into the pale. Another pious use of ecclesiastical wealth was to maintain the fathers and ministers of the word. We see, by St. PAUL's epistles, that they were so maintained in their several missions ; and this apostle, in writing to the Corinthians, when he distinguishes himself from others, and values himself above them on many accounts, insists particularly on this, that he had preached gratis, and

* Acts c. v.

taken

taken nothing from them. He had a trade, and he maintained himself by it; for which reason ERASMUS calls him, as I remember, "coriarius pontifex," the leather dressing pontiff.

It was not zeal alone that brought an immense wealth to the church, even in the first centuries. An opinion that the end of the world was near, made the rich more indifferent to riches, that they were not to enjoy long, or that were not to remain long in their families. This opinion the clergy promoted: and the laity was so silly as not to see, that if it was not worth their while to keep their estates, it was not worth the while of churchmen to be so solicitous to acquire them. The end of the world seemed to be fixed at the distance of about two hundred years, in the beginning of the fourth century, according to LACTANTIUS *, who wrote at that time: and yet this motive had such effect, in conjunction with a multitude of other artifices employed by the religious society to the same purpose, that in this very century a law to restrain ecclesiastics from obtaining donations and wills in their favor was become necessary. Not only VALENTINIAN and GRATIAN, but even THEODOSIUS, made edicts for this purpose: and the practice of inveigling weak people, devout women particularly, to defraud their right heirs, and to give their estates to the church, was so public, so frequent, and so infamous, that the church, who had permission to hold these estates, thought it prudent to submit to some appearance of restraint in acquiring them. I say appearance of restraint, because we may conclude that means were found of evading this very restraint, from the experience of our own age; and because it is fair to conclude that none were neglected of heaping up wealth in those ages, when bishops themselves were the greatest usurers. This wealth was

* Omnis expectatio non amplius quam ducentorum videtur annorum. Instit. l. 7. c. 25.

such that it proved a principal cause of the persecutions of the church, as father PAUL observes *, from the reign of COMMODUS: and we know that DECIUS, who was a great and a good prince, as princes went in those days, and as they go in ours, attempted nothing more at first, than many christian princes have executed. He attempted to seize the treasure of the church at Rome. LAWRENCE, a deacon of that church, broke his measures. He put LAWRENCE to death, and the seventh persecution began on that occasion; for which his memory has been persecuted by christian writers; as that of CHARLES MARTEL has been by the monks, who sent him to hell for taking some of the wealth of the church, to defend both the church and the state against the Saracens.

ABUNDANCE of matter offers itself to us on this head. But the immense wealth of the clergy, their insatiable thirst after it, the usurpations and other scandalous methods by which they acquired it, and the no less scandalous use they made of it, are now so well known, that it would be loss of time to enter into any great detail on the subject. A general observation or two will be sufficient for our purpose. Bishops found pretences and means of taking to their own use the revenues that had been appropriated to the poor, the churches, and the inferior clergy, as well as to them; and left the charge of maintaining all these on the laity, who had provided for them once already. The laity were so simple as to take the charge upon them, instead of obliging these lords of the religious society to keep to the original appropriation. Hence arose the divine right of tithes, and a multitude of other exactions. But if the laity thought that their pockets were to be picked no more, they were soon undeceived. The secular clergy, living no longer in communities, gave more public scandal, and became less

* Hist. of Benef.

fit to excite the charity of the faithful. A new clergy, therefore, arose: and monks and monasteries began about the year five hundred. The former were not all priests, indeed, at first. But the latter were retreats of men who obliged themselves to live in these convents, that I may speak with exact propriety, a cenobitic life, under the conduct of the priests, and in all the supposed regularity and austerity of the first Christians. These professions and engagements struck the imaginations, and rowed the zeal of the faithful; and convents were endowed with as much profusion as if nothing had been yet done for the church. These orders degenerated apace; and as fast as they did so new orders were founded, and endowed, under the same pretence. Nothing was taken from those who had forfeited the conditions of the grants made to them, and much was given to those who took new engagements, and kept them as ill. Thus ecclesiastical policy contrived to enrich the church, even by the corruption of the clergy, and to carry these abuses forward, in an uniform gradation, and with an equal pace.

THE claim St. AUSTIN made to the riches of the whole world, as belonging of right to the elect, had not been made, I suppose, before his time; tho IRENAEUS had justified the robbery of the Egyptians by the Israelites, on principles much the same. This claim too was neither publicly asserted by himself, nor by his cotemporaries, nor by his successors, nor at any time by the church in form; the reason of which was, no doubt, that they saw how needless and imprudent it would be to give such an alarm to all mankind, when they might go on to plunder particular countries and families without resistance, tho sometimes against law, and always with very great effect. This the religious society did, before it had any pretence of alliance with the civil, or any establishment in the roman empire: and it is astonishing to consider, tho we meet with the exam-

ples and proofs almost in every page of history ecclesiastical and civil, how an order of men, instituted to teach a religion of so much purity, sanctity, and detachment from all worldly interests, could convert this very institution into a sordid trade, and make other men believe that the best of good works was to enrich this order, and the greatest of sins to take any thing from it. This continued to be the case, however, near fifteen centuries, without any considerable interruption. During so long a course of time, the principles of the gospel were so forgotten, and so perverted, that salvation was a merchandise bought and sold in every ecclesiastical shop, in that of Rome above all. This shop had so much custom, that a pope of the fourteenth century, JOHN the twenty second, the inventor of annates and many other exactions, left behind him, by VILLANI'S account, which father PAUL quotes in his history of benefices, eighteen millions in specie, and seven millions in plate and ingots. An immense sum in any age, especially in that when the West Indies had not been yet discovered.

THE abuse grew to be most exorbitant in the most devout ages of the church, that is, in the ages of greatest ignorance and superstition; for then the clergy had persuaded men, and the more corrupt they were, the more easily they were persuaded, that all sorts of crimes might be committed safely by those who submitted to the slight penances and pecuniary mulcts which the church imposed, either arbitrarily, or according to a book of rates. When, I say, that crimes might be committed safely on these terms, I mean safely from divine vengeance; for the man whom the church pretended to screen from this would have been condemned at any human tribunal, and was so, I doubt not, often to the gallows or the rack. Thus the great sanction of revealed religion was taken away by artificial theology and ecclesiastical fraud; and a great part of the objections

tions that infidels urge against it receive a color from the doctrine and practice of that religious society, whose independency and divine institution are pleaded for so strenuously.

The religious society was so far from being by any right independent on the civil, or from treating with it in form, and being incorporated with it on specific terms of alliance, when christianity became in a fortunate conjuncture the established religion of the empire, that this society grew into power, and into riches, as it has been said already, by degrees, by indulgence and concessions on one hand, by art and management on the other. Claims precede acquisitions in the natural and ordinary course of things. But in this case acquisitions preceded claims. The church, indeed, made a claim to power, when she was first established; but it was to spiritual power. Nothing else was avowed; nothing else was suspected. The civil society did not see that spiritual power was power over opinion, and that this was power over conscience, or seeing it did not enough consider how this power might extend and increase, how it might rival and subdue their own. But as soon as the church had drawn a great part of the affairs of civil government into her own tribunal, under the notion of spirituals, or of things appertaining to spirituals; as soon as she had acquired a prescriptive right of employing the civil power in spiritual quarrels, and the spiritual power in civil, she claimed a sovereign and universal authority, seized the two swords into her hands, and sharpened the edge of both.

SECTION XXIII.

THE good effects of maintaining, and the bad effects of neglecting, religion, had been extremely visible, in the whole course

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of the roman government. NUMA, the second founder of Rome, contributed more to the prosperity and grandeur of that empire, than the first founder of it, ROMULUS, and all the warrior kings who succeeded him; for NUMA established a religion, directed it, as others, both kings and consuls, did after his example, to the support of civil government, and made it the principle of all the glorious expectations that were raised in the minds of that people. This religion was very absurd, and yet by keeping up an awe of superior powers, and the belief of a providence that ordered the course of events, it produced all the marvellous effects, which MACHIAVEL, and writers more able to judge of them and of their causes than he was, POLYBIUS, CICERO, PLUTARCH, and others ascribe to it. The inward peace of that government was often broke by seditions: Rome was in distress at home whilst she triumphed abroad, and at last the dissolution of the commonwealth followed a long and bloody series of civil war. But the neglect of religion, not religion, was a principal cause of these evils. Religion decayed: and the state decayed with her. She might have preserved it; but even in her decay, she gave it no wounds, nor festered like a poison in any.

THIS example, many others, and the reason of things were sufficient to make such a man as CONSTANTINE see the necessity of reviving and reforming the antient religion of Rome, or of establishing a new one; in short, of taking in the assistance of some religion or other, to pursue more effectually the great designs of his ambition. His rivals in the empire were Pagans: and paganism did more than begin to be no longer a proper band of society. The superstitious opinions and practices of it were as much in vogue in his time, as they had been in the best ages of Rome, but they were not directed, as they had been in those ages, to the support of civil government.

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The virtue of old Rome, and the spirit of her religion, fainted, when her liberty expired: and they were wholly extinguished in the time of CONSTANTINE, by a long course of tyrannical dominion seldom interrupted, by the venality of the senate now and long before inured to slavery, by the ferocity of the armies, by the licentiousness of the provinces, and by that independency on the authority, as well as disregard to the majesty, of the empire which prevailed in both.

ON the other hand, christianity, born, if I may say so, in a desert, and educated in a little province of the empire, had spread thro the whole in the course of three centuries. The progress of it was not so immense, perhaps, as TERTULLIAN represents it in his hyperbolical style. But it was great, and Christians under one denomination or another were numerous in every part of the East and West. Paganism was worn out in one sense, in theory, if not in practice; the impostures of it were detected; the absurd doctrines and rites were exposed to ridicule. The priests could not defend it, and the philosophers explained it away. It lay exposed like an unfortified country, and, as the empire did soon afterwards, to every incursion. Christianity was fresh and vigorous. The apparent sanctity of those who professed this religion, the courage of those who died for it, and the zeal of those philosophers and rhetors who were converted to it and writ for it, were more than sufficient to defeat the calumny raised against it. They were more than sufficient, I mean, to defeat it among all such as finding it to be calumny in some instances, looked no farther, but deemed it to be the same in all. Among others, and in general, the very name of Christian continued to be odious long. A spirit of enthusiasm prompted many on one side to revile and disturb the rites of an established religion, to provoke the heathen, to rejoice in sufferings, and to court martyrdom. A spirit of
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party, inflamed by resentment, transported the other side to exercise the greatest cruelties, by sudden popular emotions, as well as by regular authorised persecutions. But as soon as the christian faith and worship, by being tolerated first, and legally established soon afterwards, became better known, the grossest calumnies, that had been propagated against them, began to die away even among the vulgar. These calumnies had been such as could not bear examination; more gross, if that be possible, than any of those which Christians have propagated against the heathens, the Jews, the Mahometans, or even against one another in their several sects. One may easily conceive, that the detection of these turned to the advantage of christianity, and that patience under this kind of persecution, as well as fortitude and perseverance under another, did honor to the professors of this religion, and prepared the way to the establishment of it.

THERE is another circumstance of the same tendency, which deserves to be mentioned. Whilst the Christians were confounded with the Jews, or passed for a sect of that religion, they shared the hatred and contempt which that nation had contracted. But they distinguished themselves soon, in a manner that took off all prejudice of this kind from them, and shewed the wisdom and policy of St. PAUL's conduct in declaring himself the apostle of the Gentiles, to whom the kingdom of CHRIST was opened, and who were heirs of the promises as well as the Jews. On this popular principle christianity was propagated: and one of the first edicts, that CONSTANTINE published, in favor of christianity, was a very severe one against Jews, who should insult Christians, and Christians who should turn to judaism. The Jews were no longer a chosen people: their nation was rejected; and all the nations of the earth were invited to partake of the same privileges, the same graces,
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and the same salvation. Thus the christian religion was made the religion of mankind, by the first principles of it, even whilst it was a sect: and therefore CONSTANTINE might think very reasonably, that to embrace and establish it would be an effectual means of uniting mankind under his government. He might think this establishment the more easy to be made by his authority, because the mysteries of christianity were more sublime and more refined, and therefore more proper objects of veneration, than those of paganism; tho many of them had been borrowed from it, and because the external worship of the new religion might be rendered, if that should be thought necessary, as pompous, and as fit to draw the attention of the people, as that of the old, by adopting some of the ceremonies and usages of the old; which adoption the christian church had already begun to put in practice.

ALL this was done: and no man, who considers what influence not princes only, but private men raised to the head of parties, have had in the change of religions, will think it was hard for CONSTANTINE to do it when he had persuaded his troops, that they beat MAXENTIUS under the ensign of the cross, and when he disputed the empire with LICINIUS, the declared enemy of the cross afterwards. Christianity became the established religion of the empire, and heathenism, in its turn, a persecuted sect, banished from the cities by CONSTANTINE and his successors, and forced to hide its head in villages and hamlets. Whilst gentilism, or the religion of nations, was the established religion, christianity maintained itself in most of the cities of the empire. But as soon as this religion had taken possession of the court and the cities, the other became so generally that of peasants only, that the appellation of paganism did, probably enough, take its rise from thence.

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THIS great revolution was effected in part by the circumstances I have mentioned, and by others that favored the growth of christianity. The imperial authority did the rest, but did it ill, so ill, that the chief of those political views, which CONSTANTINE had in making this establishment, were defeated by it; and the admission of a religious society into the state, in the manner in which he admitted it, was the cause of all the ecclesiastical and theological evils that have followed from his time to ours, and that are so falsely imputed to religion itself. We may be assured, that the society co-operated with the court to bring about a revolution so much to their advantage, and thought themselves happy enough to be dependent, not independent, on the emperor; his instruments, not his allies; whatever appearances he might give or suffer them to assume in those solemn ecclesiastical farces, wherein he condescended to act, in some respects, a second part. This supposition is easily reconciled to history: and if it was less so, history would be only the more inconsistent. We should never persuade ourselves that such a man, as it represents CONSTANTINE to have been, was a bigot, as much as HELENA, or revered priests as much as she did relics. He was not a bigot, tho the church has made him a saint; nor a bubble of ecclesiastical policy, tho it seems to me that he was so of his own. But whilst he recalled to his mind, as he did most probably, the great service religion was of to antient Rome, he seemed to forget that, when that religion flourished, and was of so much service to the state, it was under the immediate inspection of the state. There was no council, but the senate, to define doctrines, nor to regulate discipline: and men were at the head of religious, because they were at the head of civil administration, instead of being at the head of the latter, because they were at the head of the former.

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WE cannot doubt, that the political views of CONSTANTINE, in the establishment of christianity, were to attach the subjects of the empire more firmly to himself and his successors, and the several nations that composed it, to one another, by the bonds of a religion common to all of them; to soften the ferocity of the armies; to reform the licentiousness of the provinces, and by infusing a spirit of moderation and submission to government, to extinguish those principles of avarice and ambition, of injustice and violence, by which so many factions were formed, and the peace of the empire was so often and so fatally broken. Now no religion was ever so well proportioned, nor so well directed, as that of christianity seemed to be to all these purposes. It had, indeed, no tendency to inspire that love of the country, nor that zeal for the glory and grandeur of it, which glowed in the breast of every roman citizen almost, whilst the commonwealth was in splendor. But it recommended, what CONSTANTINE liked better, benevolence, patience, humility, and all the softer virtues, subjection to the civil powers as to the ordinances of God, and passive obedience and non-resistance. These it recommended: and these it is said the Christians had practised, not only whilst they lay under the ordinary hardships imposed upon them, but under the extraordinary severity of ten persecutions, wherein ecclesiastical writers boast, how truly may be doubted, that thirty bishops of the church of Rome alone were martyred *.

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* ECCLESIASTICAL, like all other party writers, deserve little credit when they relate facts, or draw characters, which may seem to reflect honor on those of their own side, and to render their adversaries odious. That Christians were sometimes persecuted, is a point out of dispute. But whether these persecutions were so frequent, so severe, and so unprovoked, as they stand represented, is a point very disputable. If some of the emperors, and those not of the worst, used the Christians ill; others, and those not of the best, shewed them favor. ORIGEN, who was the

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SUCH doctrines and such examples might well encourage CONSTANTINE to think, that nothing could contribute more, than the establishment of christianity in the empire, to the

son of a martyr, and who aspired to be such himself, asserts^a, I think, that they, who suffered for their religion, were few. The authority is good, and the matter of fact probable. Whoever considers the temper and character of sects, of religious sects especially, and of the primitive Christians among others, will think it probable, that whenever they were punished by the heathen magistrates, they were ready to impute their punishment to their christianity, and to complain of persecution. Their clergy were, under pretence of religion, a very lawless tribe, and paid little regard, on many occasions, to the government whose subjects they were. They usurped the part of civil judges, they assumed the power of making wills, they took possession by fraud, or violence, of the estates of others; and not content to break the laws in such instances as these, which may be called private, they broke them in the most public manner, and instigated others to break them by popular insurrections against the legal authority of magistrates, and by tumults, and riots, in which they insulted not only the established religion of the empire, but even their own religion, as it was practised by those who differed from them in any points of doctrine or discipline. Zeal, worked up to enthusiasm, pushed them to these excesses, and we may well believe, that they who were punished for them were decorated with the title of martyrs, and made the heroes of pious romances by the zeal of others. The list of martyrs consisted, I believe, of those who suffered for breaking the peace, and for insulting one religion, as much as of those who suffered for professing quietly another, nay more: and thus it might be immeasurably lengthened. Thus too the assertion of ORIGEN may be reconciled easily to the opinion, that there was an innumerable army of martyrs in the primitive church. We find passages in the letters of JULIAN, which confirm very much what is here supposed. In that which he writes to the Alexandrians, it appears, that he did not banish ATHANASIUS because he was a bishop, but on account of his intriguing spirit, and the disturbances he raised. JULIAN gives the Christians leave to choose any other bishop, who might instruct them as well as ATHANASIUS; and adds, that if they desired to have him at Alexandria for any other reason, that was the reason for which he was banished. This emperor, on whose testimony, tho he was an apostate, a reasonable man, who considered the characters of both, would rely much sooner, than he would rely on that of such a turbulent, intriguing, foul-mouthed priest as CYRIL: this emperor, I say, complains loudly of the christian flocks for persecuting one another, and for insulting the established church, at the instigation of their pastors. When he promises, therefore, to force none to worship at his altars, and commands the heathens not to injure nor affront any of them, he commands them likewise to live in peace with the heathens and with one another, and threatens to punish them, not for their religion, but for sedition, and the violation of the civil laws.

^a Lib. 3. contra Cels.

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establishment of hereditary imperial dignity in his family, and to universal peace and tranquillity. He was confirmed in this expectation, no doubt, by the professions and adulations of SYLVESTER, and of the whole tribe of ecclesiastics; whether the tale of his conversion by this pope has any more truth in it, than that of his famous grant to the church of Rome, or not. But in order to discern the better how these professions were kept, and what the effects have been of this ecclesiastical establishment, we must descend into some few particulars, at least, concerning it, from CONSTANTINE to CHARLES the great, and from CHARLES the great down to our own age. The usurpations of the religious on the civil society, the abuse of theology, and the abominable consequences of this abuse, were in part alike, and in part different, and differently carried on with regard to power especially, in these two periods, which for that reason it is good to distinguish.

SECTION XXIV.

THESE usurpations might have been wholly prevented: and altho the abuse of theology, which was grown up to a great height, could not be so, yet might the growth of it have been checked, and the tragical effects of it have been prevented, if CONSTANTINE had reduced, and his successors had kept the clergy within proper bounds, instead of giving such a loose to avarice and ambition, to enthusiasm and contentious subtilty, as made them the plagues and scourges of the world. The emperors were sovereign pontiffs. As such, either with this title, or without it, they should have kept the whole power over ecclesiastical as well as civil affairs in their own hands, and have applied the former to preserve order and discipline, to prevent abuse and corruption in the christian, as it had been

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their prerogative and their duty to apply it in the heathen church. This was natural; this was reasonable. But nothing could be more unnatural, nor more unreasonable, than to divest themselves of any part of the imperial power, in favor of this order.

It seems too, that there could be no need of doing so. That the bishops gave the emperors leave to retain the title of sovereign pontiffs, is one of those idle tales which BARONIUS invented. But that no objection appears to have been made to it by the Christians, is true; and if there was no objection made for holding a pagan pontificate, there would have been certainly none for assuming that office in the christian church. I will not say, that the emperors might have performed pontifical functions; tho I see no absurdity in the proposition, nor am able to conceive why they should not have exacted to be ordained priests and primates of the whole christian church from the first, if that form had been thought necessary, as they have submitted to be crowned emperors, since that time, by the bishops. But this I will say, and no divine of our church will dare to contradict me, that they might have made themselves heads of the church, defenders of the faith, and, next under God and his son CHRIST JESUS, supreme moderators and governors in all matters ecclesiastical and civil, without being priests. From whence should any opposition to CONSTANTINE or his successors have arisen, if he or they had thought fit to execute the functions of christian pontiffs, when the state of religion in the empire permitted them to do so; since they kept the title, wore the robe, and executed some of the powers, at least, of supreme pontiffs in the pagan church? Should it have come from the bishops? But the bishops were mean and generally ignorant men, exercised in the lowest and least honorable professions, elected by party and faction, by intrigue and violence, and ready to

to comply with any mode that was prevalent, according to the character given of them nearly about this time by St. GREGORY of Nazianze. We may assure ourselves the good men would have founded high the honor which CONSTANTINE did the church, and his zeal for our holy religion, before they had got the strength they got afterwards, for want of this very precaution. Then indeed, such an inequality of privileges and advantages was established between the clergy and the laity in many respects, and in this particularly, that the former were deemed capable of exercising all the powers, and of enjoying all the dignities and profits of civil magistracies, whilst the latter were excluded from all ecclesiastical power, dignity, and profit. In a word, we may believe that this step would have been popular among the whole body of Christians, when their religion was first established. Nothing would have appeared more just than that an emperor, by whose favor alone they became members of an established church, from being members of a sect, seldom tolerated, often persecuted, and always afflicted, should suffer no diminution of his imperial prerogative in this great change.

CONSTANTINE neglected to take this advantage, in the extent in which he might have asserted his right to it. He took, indeed, some airs of supremacy on certain occasions, and so did his successors. They presided in the synods they convened, they controuled the proceedings of these assemblies, and they confirmed their decrees in matters of doctrine as well as discipline; for without this confirmation these decrees would have had little effect. By these means the emperors secured their prerogative, on which ecclesiastical synods would not have failed to incroach more than they did, or at least faster, in cases of appeals, of exemptions from secular jurisdiction, or from the common burden of taxes, and in many other cases. But the successors of

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CONSTANTINE laying aside even the title of sovereign pontiff in little more than half a century, if GRATIAN did lay it aside, and neither CONSTANTINE nor they having preserved a steady exercise of the pontifical power over ecclesiastical affairs and ecclesiastical persons in the christian church, the exercise of it devolved of course on the bishops. A constant exercise gave the pretence, and settled the opinion of a sole right in them, who could have none independently on the emperors, even in ordinary cases, to many extraordinary powers, whilst an occasional exercise of powers that belonged of right to these princes came to be looked upon in them as usurpation and sacrilege. Their chaplains became their masters: and one of these pretends to be so even at this time. How CONSTANTINE was the bubble of his own policy, as I have presumed to say that he was, as many great men have been, and as CHARLEMAGNE was in much the same respect four hundred years after him, may be shewn, I think, on good grounds of probability, without supposing him to have been misled by a bigot respect for the church, which many of those who succeeded him were. It may be shewn, I think, even by ecclesiastical history, for this, like other histories, shews very often more than it owns, even what it denies; and the sagacity of the reader gives him often a right of saying to the historian "ex ore tuo condemnaberis."

Thus it seems to me, that the great and fundamental error from whence so many others proceeded, and which CONSTANTINE committed in the establishment of christianity, was this, which has been touched already. He admitted a clergy into the establishment, on the same foot on which this order had stood, whilst christianity was the religion, and these men were the heads, the directors, the governors, and magistrates of a sect by no authority but that of the sect it self, and therefore illegally such. He admitted them, vested with this authority, which

which might be necessary as long as Christians made a sect apart, distinct from the other subjects of the empire, and not only out of the protection of the laws, but obnoxious to them, and which became unnecessary and dangerous when christianity had a legal establishment, and when the professors of it were entirely incorporated into the empire, enjoyed the protection of the laws in common with other subjects, and more of the smiles and favors of the court. The conduct of CONSTANTINE, on this great occasion, must needs appear extremely absurd to every one who considers the consequences it had. But we may easily conceive that the state of christianity, of paganism, and of the empire in general, as well as a multitude of particular circumstances to us unknown, might determine him, on apparent reasons of good policy, to hold it. If we seek for these reasons in the historians of that age, or in more modern ecclesiastical writers, we shall be misled or disappointed. EUSEBIUS wrote a panegyric, ZOZIMUS a satyr, and no relations can be more confused, no authority more precarious than those of all the authors who have treated these subjects, and indeed every other ecclesiastical subject, from that age to this. They have been all intent to serve some particular turn: and tho all men are regardless of truth in such a disposition of mind, yet are there none so regardless of it as these writers, who have rendered church history more inconsistent, and more grossly fabulous, than any other history, perhaps, than some romances. But still, notwithstanding the little reliance that any of them deserve, some general truths result from the concurrent tenor of their writing; two of which I shall mention, in order to account for the conduct of CONSTANTINE.

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SECTION XXV.

THE first of these truths is, that this emperor neither designed to establish christianity, nor did in fact establish it with any other view, than that of making it subservient to his ambition and policy. He worked up this establishment of religion, which he preferred to paganism, for reasons already given, by slow degrees, as he found it answer his purposes, and he trimmed long between the two. The second of these truths is, that in the design of attaching the whole body of Christians to himself, he chose to do it by the medium of the clergy. The Christians were dispersed over the empire, and even beyond the bounds of it. They were of all nations and all languages. But among them all, this order of men, which we call the religious society, was established. This order was often divided; and their divisions formed different sects. But however divided they were, nay the more they were divided, the more need they had of imperial favor. The pastors were brought by one common interest under the influence of the court; and the flocks were every where under the influence of their pastors. These two principles run thro the whole conduct of CONSTANTINE, in every relation of it that is come down to us.

THERE is little room to doubt, that he had taken the resolution of establishing christianity when he marched, in the seventh year of his reign, from Gaul into Italy against MAXENTIUS. It is much more probable too, that this resolution produced the miracle of an illuminated cross in the air, with an inscription promising him victory, and which he affirmed upon oath that he had seen, as EUSEBIUS relates, than that any such miracle produced his conversion. A story like this was sufficient to make the impression he designed. Nay that which ZOZI-

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MUS relates of a monstrous flight of owls, that settled on the walls of Rome when MAXENTIUS marched out of the city to give CONSTANTINE battle, and which this emperor seeing, drew out his troops, might have it's effect likewise. His army did not consist of Romans, attached to their antient religion, tho even by such the omen would have been well received, but of Britons, whom we believe to have been, already Christians, and of the celtic nations, to whom we may believe that all religions were indifferent enough.

BUT however this might be, whether CONSTANTINE came into Italy with a resolution of establishing christianity, and of leaning on that party in the empire, or whether he took the resolution when he had beat MAXENTIUS, it is evident that this resolution was no other than I have represented it. LICINIUS was not certainly a convert to christianity, and yet the first edict in favor of this religion was published in his name and by his authority, as well as in the name and by the authority of CONSTANTINE. This edict gave an intire liberty of conscience. No person was to be any longer restrained from embracing christianity, but every one was set at liberty to profess the religion he liked best. This was the purport of the edict. EUSEBIUS himself carries it no farther, and there was nothing in it which LICINIUS, or any other pagan prince, who thought it his interest to relax the severity of former edicts, and to keep measures of moderation with the Christians, might not grant without becoming a Christian. Many other favors, more considerable and particular to christianity, were granted afterwards. EUSEBIUS sounds them high *: and they were great, no doubt, tho they did little more than re-establish Christians in their former rights and possessions, remit unjust and cruel sentences, restore confiscations, and recal from banishment and

* EUSEB. passim in hist. et in vita CONSTANT.

the mines such as had been condemned to them. In all these instances, the authority of LICINIUS concurred with that of CONSTANTINE: and if paganism was not extirpated, christianity was in a good degree established, whilst they governed the empire jointly. When they quarrelled, the same political motive, that made LICINIUS change his conduct and persecute the Christians, made CONSTANTINE persist in shewing favor to them. He raised them to the highest dignities, intrusted them with the most important commands, and increased the strength of a party in the empire which was zealously attached to him.

NOTWITHSTANDING this he trimmed with the other, and it is evident that his zeal for christianity was at least as much political as religious. EUSEBIUS makes him very devout and pious, and compares, in one place, his palace to a church in which assemblies of the faithful were held. But as the flagrant crimes he committed are inconsistent with the devotion and piety ascribed to him by ecclesiastical adulation, so the whole tenor of his public acts demonstrates that ZOZIMUS had some reason to say, he favored the pagan rites in order to please the senate, tho he meant to establish christianity. Thus he permitted, even about the time that he held the nicæan council, and by a solemn rescript, that the aruspices should be publicly consulted; nay he commanded it on the occasion of some reputed prodigies that had happened. Thus again, he gave countenance, at least, to several superstitious sports that were celebrated in acknowledgment of victories obtained, and to several sorts of enchantments that were deemed effectual to procure health and other divine favors. Many instances of the same kind may be produced, to shew what measures CONSTANTINE thought himself obliged in good policy to keep with paganism, even after he had vanquished LICINIUS, and put him to death. But it will be sufficient

ficient that I mention one more, which was the strongest of all, and which leads to the second of these general truths, that have been observed to result from all the histories of this great revolution.

THAT several offices, which were not only pagan in name, but in their functions too, were possessed and executed by those who professed christianity, seems to me much more clear than the distinctions and excuses that are brought in favor of the practice. The practice was authorised by the example of CONSTANTINE, who held to the last the supreme pontificate of the pagan church. I know that some writers have ventured to deny the fact, against the evidence of history and antient inscriptions. I know too, that much casuistry has been employed by BARONIUS and others, to shew that christian emperors might assume the title, and wear the robe, without superstition or idolatry; for these authors are pleased to suppose, that they did no more. But they contradict themselves when they excuse even this, by urging, that the authority of supreme pontiff was necessary to keep the senate and the bulk of the people, who were strongly addicted to the old religion, in subjection to the imperial authority; for how could the authority of supreme pontiff have this or any other effect, unless it was exercised? And how could it be exercised, without taking some share in the superstitious discipline signified by that mystic robe*, which GRATIAN is said to have refused to wear for that very reason? But if GRATIAN was thus scrupulous, and his successors after him, of which we may have leave to doubt, CONSTANTINE was not so; or he might wear the mystic robe of pontiff with as little regard to the significations of it, as one of the OTTOMANS had, very probably, to those of the robe he wore, and whereon the revelations of the apocalypse were expressed in embroidery. The power and in-

* ZOZIMUS.

fluence of this office had been great at all times, and therefore the emperors had kept it like that of the tribunes in their own hands. But this power and this influence were never greater than now, and the office of pontiff was grown more considerable than that of consul. It is very probable that CONSTANTINE dared not divest himself of it: and I believe the best reason that can be given why he did not make himself sovereign pontiff of the Christians is this, that he found it necessary, or at least expedient, to continue high priest of the Pagans. The absurdity, however, was equally great, whether it was owing to his misfortune or his fault. The absurdity, I mean, of presiding over a church he intended to subvert, and not presiding over that which he intended to erect.

THE consequences began to appear very soon, and have continued ever since producing, under various forms, in various ways, and with little or no interruption, an uniformity of mischief. The pre-eminence and dominion over conscience, which a religious society had acquired among the Christians whilst they were a sect in the empire, did not only continue, but were vastly extended and increased when this religion became the established religion of the empire. They were extended and increased in the exercise, and therefore in the effect of them. No powers were taken from this order of men, not even those to which they had the least pretence after this great change. On the contrary, many were added to them, and the weight of that civil authority, on which they usurped, served to enforce their usurpations. Their pre-eminence and their dominion over conscience had been so far from promoting charity, and maintaining unity, that they had promoted and maintained a perpetual strife and contention among Christians. If Christians suffered much by heathen persecutions, they suffered much by their own intestine divisions. They could not, indeed, make

make war, and massacre one another, nor disturb, in that manner, the peace of the empire. The authority of the emperors, and the strength of the roman legions kept them in awe, and made such excesses impracticable. But their divisions were such, that the sect might have been dissolved, perhaps, whilst it was a sect, and the very name of christianity have been lost, if the salutary remedy of a persecution, common to them all, had not sometimes intervened to make them remember, that they were all of the same religion. These disorders, however, being confined to a sect, affected the roman state no more than ours would be affected, if any disputes should arise about inward light and spiritual gifts among the quakers, and if those peaceable persons should fall out, call names, and excommunicate one another. But when the empire became christian, these divisions became fatal to the public tranquillity and welfare.

CONSTANTINE had some experience of this in his own reign, towards the end of it especially. But he might still hope, and the submissive behavior of the clergy towards him might encourage him to hope, that however divided they were concerning speculative points of religion, he should hold them fast to his interest by their own, and being master of the shepherds, should be master of the flocks, as it has been hinted already. He pursued this principle therefore. He added to the dignity of ecclesiastical persons, by the regard he shewed them, and by the honors he affected to do them. He added to their power and authority, by the wealth, the privileges, and immunities he bestowed upon them, and by the laws he made in their favor. All this tended, in appearance and in pretence, to the support and improvement of a spiritual power alone. He meant, that this should be distinct from the civil; that they should be independent of one another, and both dependent
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on him; and he did not see that this was a distinction without any real difference. He does not seem to have enough considered two things, which long experience has made manifest since, and which one would imagine he should have foreseen. He should have foreseen, that ecclesiastical magistrates would be always less dependent on the emperors than the civil, and were for that reason less fit to be trusted with power. It was obvious, that civil magistrates were the creatures of his will, whom he could make and unmake at pleasure, and not only deprive of the offices they held, but of all right to any magistracy whatever; whereas these ecclesiastical magistrates, whom he admitted by a legal establishment into the empire, were elected independently on him into particular offices, and had a right to this sort of magistracy in general, which he could neither give nor take away. He should have foreseen, that an absolute power over private consciences was in nature, and might prove in effect, a much greater power than his own; that the church might turn against the state; from the companion become the rival, and from the rival, the tyrant of it. This happened in four centuries after his time. The constitution of the christian church, before CONSTANTINE laid the foundations of that spiritual tyranny, which he and his successors raised; and this spiritual tyranny, established and grown into full strength before CHARLES the great, laid the foundations of that temporal tyranny, which he and his father established in the bishops of Rome, the remains of which are still existent.

SECTION XXVI.

DURING this period, that reaches from the beginning of the fourth to the end of the eighth century, the religious society pretended directly to spiritual power alone, as it has been observed.

served. Indirectly, indeed, they assumed a share of the other, incroached on the civil magistrates, and opposed and insulted them, whereof there were several instances at Rome and Alexandria particularly *. But in the main, they expressed great respect and submission to the emperors. CONSTANTINE abetted

* No instance of this kind can be given greater than the whole conduct of CYRIL, the alexandrian bishop. This saint and father of the church was violent and cruel against all those who differed from him, even in expression; for NESTORIUS did little more: and yet, when he had prevailed on THEODOSIUS, by bribing most probably the eunuch SCHOLASTICUS, to turn at once from favoring NESTORIUS to declare against him, this wretch, in concert with pope CELESTINUS, persecuted the poor man to death with the most persevering and inveterate malice. He shewed the same violence of temper in usurping on the civil power, and in supporting these usurpations by riots, insurrections, and assassinations. He took upon him, without any authority from the civil magistrate, to punish not only Jews, but such Christians as he called heretics; to drive them out of the city, and to plunder their houses and churches, the spoils of which he abandoned to the mob, who were the instruments of his tyranny, for their greater encouragement. ORESTES, the governor of Alexandria, complained of these invasions and outrages, and attempted to restrain them, as it was his duty to do. But CYRIL, by exciting the common people, the most seditious that were to be found in any city of the empire, maintained, as it were, a civil war in that city, and called in another sort of mob to join with this in supporting it. He called in five hundred monks at once from their retreats in the mountains of Nitria. To one of these, named AMMONIUS, a fit instrument for his purpose, he gave the command of this secular and ecclesiastical mob, by whom ORESTES was attacked in the streets of Alexandria. He was rescued, indeed, and his life was saved, tho he had been wounded by AMMONIUS in the fray. The mob was dispersed, AMMONIUS seized and put to death, and CYRIL had the impudence to declare him a martyr, and to cause him to be honored as such.

It may not be amiss to mention another example of the revengeful and sanguinary character of this prelate. HYPATIA was a platonician lady, of so much wisdom, knowledge, and virtue, that she used to be consulted by the philosophers, and even the governors of Alexandria, and that ORESTES was particularly attached to her. To be revenged, therefore, of ORESTES, for HYPATIA does not appear to have given him any provocation, this woman was attacked by another ecclesiastical bravo, whose name was PETER, at the instigation of CYRIL, in the streets of Alexandria, where they stripped her naked, dragged her along, and made her suffer the most cruel outrages, till she expired.

It is not worth my while to quote any more instances of the usurpations and cruelty which the religious society exercised, whenever, and wherever, they durst. History is full of them. They were exercised at Rome sometimes, as well as at Alexandria, and wherever christianity prevailed.

them

them in the exercise of this power, and his successors sometimes thro bigotry, and sometimes thro policy, as we may collect from the different characters of these princes, made themselves parties, on one side or the other, in every ecclesiastical dispute that arose. This gave them much to do, maintained a perpetual ferment in the empire, and was almost as great an evil from within, as the inundation of barbarous nations was from without.

LET us not presume, like many divines, to account, by the short and fallible rule of human reason, for what providence directs or suffers. But we may observe with astonishment, that a religion, revealed by God himself, taught by himself in one country, where he sealed it with his blood, as strangely as that may sound to a mere theist, and propagated thro a great part of the world by persons commissioned by him, as well as assisted supernaturally by the holy ghost, should continue more than seventeen hundred years in a flux state. I affirm the more boldly, that it has continued in this state so long, because, tho it will be said, and is said every day in the pulpit, that all the important points of christianity, and every thing made necessary to salvation, are fixed and clear, yet the assertion is evidently false, when it is applied to theological, however true it would be, if it was applied to gospel christianity; and it may be proved to be so even out of the inconsistent mouths of those who make it. To whatever sect we addict ourselves, if we are saved, it must be on the faith of man, it cannot be on that of God; for the pure word of God neither is nor ever has been the sole criterion of orthodoxy. Theology has done by the word, as philosophy did by the works of God, and the same abuse has been made of both. Naturalists have built immense systems of imagination on a few sensible phenomena, inaccurately observed very often, and not always very fairly

fairly recorded. Divines have done the same, on a few intelligible and unintelligible passages, picked up here and there in the scriptures, and connected and commented as their purposes required. The first have not stopped where the phaenomena have ceased; nor the other, where the scriptures have been silent, or have not spoken clearly; which ought to be reputed the same, and to check our presumption alike. On the contrary, where they have had no rule to go by, like men freed from restraint, they have gone the greatest and the boldest lengths. This has been the case from the apostolical days to these, and to this we owe all the disputes that have puzzled religion, and all the mischief which these disputes have brought on the world. This must be the case too, till divines return to the gospel, as philosophers have returned to nature, and presume to dogmatise no farther than the plain import of it will justify, contenting themselves to leave things dark and ambiguous, which revelation has left so. How soon this will happen, I know not. Such a method is now, as it was of old, too sober for enthusiasts, the subject too barren for rhetors, and the avowal of ignorance too humble for doctors, who pretend to teach supernatural, as well as natural theology, and to assume to themselves, that knowledge, which CHRIST intended should be common to all who are to be saved by it, as ERASMUS somewhere or other observes *. But we must go back again to the primitive ages, that we may see in some few particular instances, the rise and growth of human authority in matters of religion.

It was foretold, that false prophets would arise among Christians, and it was natural that they should in such an age, in

* — ad paucos homines contrahimus rem, quâ CHRISTUS voluit nihil esse communius.

countries where the minds of men had been long prepared for every thing that appeared supernatural or mystic, and on the publication of a religion new and marvellous. Converted Jews might think, and in fact did think, that they had a right to take their share in building up and adorning a religion, which sprung out of theirs, and whose authority rested on that of their prophecies. Converted heathens might think, and in fact did think, that they had at least as good a right of the same kind, since some of the most sublime doctrines of christianity were such as PYTHAGORAS and PLATO had taught, and since the prophecies, urged from heathen records concerning CHRIST, were much more clear and express than any of those that were brought from the jewish scriptures. But there were other circumstances, which gave more immediate temptation and pretence to the false prophets that arose in the days of the apostles, and multiplied very fast afterwards, like swarms of insects from those dung-hills, the cabalistical schools of Jews, and the metaphysical schools of heathens.

THE christian system of faith and practice was taught by God himself, and to assert or to imply, that the divine Logos, who was incarnated to instruct as well as to redeem mankind, revealed it incompletely or imperfectly, is not less absurd nor less impious, than to assert, or to imply, that he performed the work of our redemption incompletely or imperfectly. Christianity therefore, as the saviour published it, was full and sufficient to all the purposes of it. Simplicity and plainness shewed, that it was designed to be the religion of mankind, and manifested likewise the divinity of its original. But then, this very simplicity and plainness was a stumbling block to some, and a pretence to others. The theology of those ages had accustomed men to think, that nothing could be divine, which was not mysterious, and that incoherent, obscure rhapsodies, which

which are frequently the language of ignorance or fraud, were sure characteristics of superior knowledge in the first philosophy, or of inspiration from above. The prophets, among the Jews, had spoke in this style; the heathen oracles pronounced aenigmas; the theology of Egypt and the East was unintelligible, and the metaphysical refinements of the greek philosophers were a mere jargon of words, supposed to signify most sublime truths, tho they had really no meaning at all. The Jews, therefore, who believed in the Messiah when he appeared, and the heathens, who heard that the divine Logos had appeared, could not fail to receive his doctrine agreeably to their prejudices and habitudes. A system of natural law, enforced by a divine mission, and a divine sanction, had nothing in it which was new to either of them; and the heathens knew, that the title of son of God had been given to ZOROASTER and to others. But the simplicity and plainness of his doctrine might surprise them the more, for this very reason. They could scarce fail to persuade themselves, that this simplicity and plainness must be the veil of something more marvellous and more worthy of a revelation. All was type and figure in the sacred writings of the Jews, and they were obliged to understand now of a spiritual, what they had till now understood of a temporal kingdom. All the gross conceptions of polytheism and idolatry were exploded. Heaven continued to be peopled as much as ever, but with inhabitants of another kind. In short, all the pompous rites and ceremonies of external worship were abolished at first among Christians, and God was to be adored in spirit and in truth. After such changes as these, it seems to me, that the converts to christianity could not, as they did not, fail, agreeably to their prejudices and habitudes, to embroider some of the tinsel of the religions they left on the religion they embraced, nor to make the spirituality of one as fit to create

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astonishment, and to maintain an attachment in the minds of men, as the carnality of the others.

THIS was done, and great means of doing it offered themselves. Christianity was taught first, and propagated afterwards, by word of mouth. So the apostles and the disciples received it, and so they instructed the converts they made in their several dispersions. Nor were these the sole preachers of divine revelation. Others arose who had not been taught in the same school, nor been commissioned to teach in the same manner. PAUL himself was one of these. He entered a volunteer into the apostleship. At least his extraordinary vocation was known to none but himself. He went about preaching his gospel, as he called it, before he had any correspondence, or even acquaintance, with those who composed the church of CHRIST at that time; and when he came among them he took the air of a master, submitted to none, but controuled and reprimanded even the prince of the apostles, as you pretended catholics affect to call St. PETER. The apostles, the disciples, and the first converts in general, were ignorant, illiterate persons. Such men, therefore, as deemed themselves more skilful in cabalistical interpretations of the scriptures, and more knowing in jewish and heathen theology, might assume the same rights which the apostles and disciples exercised; teach, convert, and form different congregations: or they might add to, and alter the doctrines, which the apostles and disciples taught, and thus form different sects, in the same churches, by assuming no other right than that which every member had, man and woman indiscriminately, the right of prophesying or preaching, as often as they pleased to suppose that the spirit moved them to it. The apostles opposed the false prophets that arose in their time, by epistles, by messages, and by revisiting the churches they had themselves founded, but often without

without effect, and always with much difficulty, as we may judge by that which PAUL found to maintain his authority in the church of Corinth, and in others.

ONE would think that the gifts of the spirit, among which this of prophesying or preaching held a first place, should not only have supplied the want of all other knowledge, and have put to silence the most learned and eloquent, but should have established, by the influence and energy of one and the same spirit, one and the same system of faith and manners in the whole christian church. This would have been the case too, it must have been so necessarily, if all those who pretended to gifts of the spirit had really had them; and it has always seemed to me that ORIGEN answered CELSUS very poorly, when, to justify or excuse the variety of opinions and sects among Christians, he urges those that abounded among the heathen philosophers. But many thought they had these gifts of the spirit who had them not, many pretended to have them who knew they had them not; and it grew so easy to impose the belief of them on the multitude, that SIMON, who had offered to buy them, might think himself well off that bargain, perhaps, and that the other heretics who arose might not find any want of them to establish their sects. The belief that they had them was easily wrought by sham miracles, by seeming or real austerity of life, by discourses filled with false sublime about spiritual beings and metaphysical or supernatural doctrines, and by other proofs of the same equivocal sort, in an age when enthusiasm was the epidemical disease, and when one great revelation gave occasion and pretence to so many little ones. That such was the temper of the age, and such the character of those who professed christianity in it, will appear the less doubtful to us, if we call to mind the several apocalypses that were current among the primitive Christians, the apocalypse or revelation of

St. JOHN

St. JOHN and that of CERINTHUS, for instance, if they were not the same, and if the reveries of a mad judaizing Christian have not got into the canon under the apostle's name: the apocalypse of St. PETER, that of St. PAUL, and that of Saint THOMAS likewise, all of which are now lost, and have been so long, but the style and matter of which may be guessed at with sufficient assurance by the style and matter of that which we have in our hands. That the apostles, to whom these are ascribed, were not the authors of them may well be. But the authors of them were Christians; and if all the fathers and churches did not receive them, as all did not receive the apocalypse admitted into our canon, yet many did, and that is sufficient for my purpose, especially when it is joined to so many other instances of enthusiasm as the first Christians gave, which cannot be denied, tho the terms may be changed, and madness and phrensy may be called divine illumination, mystical rapture, or holy zeal.

THE names alone of those who held different opinions concerning the most important points of christianity, and formed different sects, would fill a very long roll; and even a summary account of their doctrines would fill a treatise much larger than I design this essay shall be. Besides which, I am far from believing the greatest part of the absurdities, profanations and impieties imputed to them by IRENAEUS, EPIPHANIUS, CLEMENT of Alexandria, EUSEBIUS, and others, some as antient, and some more modern. What credit and what respect soever fathers and ecclesiastical writers may deserve on other subjects, sure I am that they deserve none, when they speak of those who differed from them, and on whom, for that sufficient reason, the brand of heresy had been once fixed. The parties of such men were their judges: and we know them only by the passionate accusations which their enemies brought, and the

the severe sentences which they pronounced. Even the writings against opinions that prevailed after long contests, and contests sometimes of dubious issue in the church, as well as the writings against christianity itself, were stifled in their birth, or destroyed afterwards by the vigilance of the orthodox, and the zeal of emperors who exerted their whole authority for this purpose; instances of which are to be found in the theodosian code, particularly. Nothing can be therefore more uncharitable, nor more unjust, for charity and justice are due to the dead as well as to the living, than to join in the common cry against the heretics, that arose in the first and succeeding ages of the church, to do this implicitly on the most suspicious testimony, and to do it in the full extent of abominations and absurdities imputed to them by ecclesiastical writers. I shall decline this proceeding, tho the custom be so established, and so sanctified in opinion, that he who declines it runs the risk of becoming an object of the same uncharitableness and injustice.

MANY accusations have been brought by Christians against Christians, that carry on their front as evident marks of calumny, as any of those which the heathen brought against the whole body of Christians, in the rage of party and the fury of persecution. The former seem even to have been invented on the latter, and they were applied to the same cruel use wherever the orthodox had power for it. The carpocratians, or the montanists, or both, for both were comprehended in the general appellation of gnostics, lay under the imputation of drawing blood from infants, and making up the sacramental bread with it. Can we doubt that this idle tale took its rise from another, which the heathens propagated against the Christians, whom they accused of sacrificing children and eating their flesh? That the celebration of nocturnal mysteries among the Christians might give occasion to some debauch, as it had done among

among the Pagans, we may believe. But that the promiscuous, nay incestuous use of women was a religious institution of any sect, or that the nicholaites prescribed this use of them on every friday, as one of the necessary means of salvation, I believe no more than I do the silly story, as circumstantial as it is, which TERTULLIAN refutes, of a dog tied to a candlestick in the love-feasts of Christians, which he pulled down and extinguished by catching at a piece of bread thrown out of his reach; after which, not only other devout persons mingled together in the dark promiscuously, but even fathers and daughters, mothers and sons, brothers and sisters, in one common incest.

THESE objections, and such as these, should not have been made by the orthodox, out of a regard to truth; nor should others have been insisted on as much as they were, perhaps, in point of prudence. The simonians were reputed magicians, like the founder of their sect. So were the carpocratians, the valentinians, and others. They pretended to charms and enchantments, to command the good, to constrain the evil spirits, and to exercise all the imaginary powers of this kind, which were believed in a superstitious age, under the notion of magic natural and theurgic. The imposition was gross, no doubt, and the practice a cheat. But if we had in our hands the apologies of these heretics, as we have those of the orthodox, I suspect that we should find the former ready to justify, or to excuse, themselves by the example of the latter. They might quote, unjustly indeed, but plausibly at that time, the precept of St. JAMES*, and the practice of the church as an example of both kinds of magic in one. The apostle directs, that prayers should be said over the sick, and that they should be anointed with oil in the name of the Lord; the effect of which ceremony

* Chap. v.

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was to be the cure of their infirmities, and the remission of their sins. Your pretended catholic church employs it so late, that, tho you believe piously that it serves for the remission of sins, you cannot discover, by experiment, whether it serves as effectually to the cure of diseases. But in the primitive church, the remedy was employed for both, and the sick took it betimes. It was a secret, might the apologists of heresy say, both of natural and theurgic magic, and they might pretend that several such had been discovered by them, or by their illuminated masters. They might proceed farther, and quote all the pompous things that christian apologists used to advance concerning the power they pretended to exercise daily over daemons, whom they conjured, subdued, and expelled out of the bodies of men, when all the exorcisms of the heathens had failed. The apologists of these heresies, who writ later, might urge still greater authorities to justify their pretensions. They might appeal, for instance, to the constant and universal practice of their adversaries themselves, even in that age, who admitted neither children nor persons grown up to baptism, till the impure spirits were driven from them by exorcisms, and by the holy blowings of priests upon them, which superstitious ceremony was brought gravely as a proof in the dispute with the semi-pelagians about grace, and was supposed necessary to precede baptism, as baptism grace.

THE truth is, that several of the superstitious notions, institutions, and customs of the eastern and egyptian nations crept into christianity, round about thro judaism at first, and afterwards directly. Every one took of this tinsel, as I called it above, what he liked best, or what he thought might be best adjusted to improve the christian system. This was done by jewish converts, in the spirit of the cabbala, which taught them, under the pretence of explaining, to create mysteries where

there were none, and by heathen converts, in the delirious spirit of metaphysics, which they had caught from the pythagorean and platonic philosophy. It was common to all Christians. It was not confined to those who were called heretics, because they differed from those who assumed the title of orthodox. If the former assumed the pompous title of gnostics, and despised the first preachers of christianity as ignorant and illiterate men, the latter grew gnostics soon, without assuming the title, tho CLEMENT of Alexandria maintained, that to be a good Christian, it was necessary to be a good gnostic. Thus ignorance and learning conspired to turn the plainest religion that ever was into a chaos of theology, from which it has never been reduced again to an uniform, consistent, and intelligible system. It seems too that the teachers of it have never designed that it should be so reduced; for they have proceeded, in every age, as if religion was intended, says the author of Hudibras very sensibly, in his burlesque style, for nothing else but to be mended. God drew light out of darkness: men have drawn darkness out of light; and whilst many have pretended to be their guides, they have wandered different ways without any guide at all; for it is in this case most true, that the blind have led the blind, and they have all fallen, some into one ditch, some into another. All have pretended submission to the authority of God. All without exception, orthodox as well as heretics, have submitted, in truth, to the authority of man. Numberless human institutions have divided a world that the divine might have united, and instead of universal peace, founded on universal benevolence, the natural effect of the latter, they have caused and maintained perpetual discord, hatred, wars, persecutions, and massacres. I said that christianity became a chaos of theology, and the image is proper. It has been composed of jarring elements ever since.

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Obstabatque aliis aliud. _____

THESE divisions and contentions were so general in the primitive church, that St. JEROM supposes them to have given occasion to the institution of bishops: and I will observe by the way, that I may make my court to your clergy and ours, that even on this hypothesis bishops may be reckoned of apostolical institution; since the reason of instituting them commenced in the days of the apostles. This reason was, according to St. JEROM *, because there would be otherwise as many schisms as priests, and because every one of these, drawing men to his private opinions, which was, I believe, the original meaning of the word hereby †, the church of CHRIST would be otherwise broken. Those assemblies, which we call councils, had been convened for the same purpose, in imitation of that which was held at Jerusalem, and wherein the schism breaking out at Antioch, and fomented or authorised, at least, by the opposition of PETER and PAUL, was compromised. But neither of these means proved effectual. Bishops quarrelled, disputed, intrigued, when they stood single: and when they assembled in councils, they anathematised, that is, they cursed and damned one another. Various gospels, various epistles, were current. They were all received, in some of the churches at least. What they contained, that are not come down to us, we know not. But we may well believe that they gave occasion to diversity of opinions, since we know that the boasted chain of tradition was not uniform in some of the most important points, and since we know that the disputes which arose in christian congregations, of how great or how little moment soever, were pushed with the utmost violence. The dispute just mentioned could not regard essentials; for about essentials the prince of the apostles could

* Adv. LUCIF.

† Ad EVAG.

not err, nor would have yielded to a new comer who had never conversed with the Lord, and who could pretend to no more of the gifts and illuminations of the spirit than himself. Such again was the dispute about the celebration of easter, in which, trifling as it was, much acrimony was shewn, many synods were held, and a * bishop of Rome was on the point of excommunicating all the churches of Asia. I cite no more of this sort, which regarded chiefly discipline and outward observances, wherein there were some who affected greater evangelical purity, some who asserted evangelical liberty, and some who practised a sort of spiritual licentiousness. But I proceed to observe, that other disputes arose, wherein the most essential points of christianity were supposed to consist. These were disputes about faith more than works; and tho such of the disputants, as grew, by time, accident, management, or violence, to be reputed orthodox, damned those who differed from them; yet the points on which they differed were so undeterminable by revelation, and so incomprehensible to reason, that they remain, after all the mischief they have done, still undetermined for want of any criterion. Of the disputes about grace, predestination, free-will, election, reprobation, sanctification, justification, and other sublime theological doctrines which St. PAUL pretended to teach and to explain, and which it were to be wished that no man had presumed to teach after that great apostle, since they appeared obscure even to St. PETER, I shall say nothing. It will be sufficient that I say something of the opinions that were entertained, and of the disputes that arose, in the primitive church, concerning the divine and spiritual natures.

Now concerning these particularly, we must observe that they were derived much more from the heathen than the jewish

* VICTOR.

theology.

theology. As much use as the latter made of angels in their scriptures, and as fond as some writers have been to make MICHAEL pass for a second essence in the trinity, and GABRIEL for a third, it has been the opinion of learned men, that the Jews did not know, before the captivity, so much as the names they gave to these heavenly messengers, after it. But to begin higher, and at the first principle of all theology. It has been shewn, in one of these essays, on grounds of very great probability, that the one Supreme Being was known to the heathens, that he was acknowledged even by those among whom polytheism and idolatry prevailed, and that he was worshipped too, wherever a crowd of imaginary divinities, that superstition introduced, did not intercept this worship. It must be confessed, that this happened sooner or later in all those countries to which our traditions extend. They had ungenerated and generated, supercelestial and celestial gods, whole gods and half gods, and angels and daemons, and genii and spirits, and souls, in all their systems of theology. This monstrous assemblage made the object of vulgar adoration. But we know that philosophers thought more reasonably at all times, or that their inward doctrine was less absurd than their outward, and that theism was taught more purely, and that religion was made more intellectual by those of them who refined on this gross theology, like PYTHAGORAS and PLATO, whose philosophy had spread during some centuries before christianity began, and was taught in the famous school of Alexandria, both when it began and long after. From this school there came some of the greatest advocates, and some of the greatest enemies, of christianity, some of the greatest saints, and some of the greatest heretics. It could not happen otherwise, for many reasons, and among the rest for this. The sect of POTAMO was established at this time, and the mode of choosing particular opinions in every sect, without an entire attachment

ment to any one, was prevalent, as it has been said, I think, already. This mode had a great influence on the christian system. Many instances of it might be produced. That of ORIGEN may stand for all. He was zealous, but learned. He applied himself to the study of the scriptures, and took infinite pains to establish the text, and fix the sense of them: but he was imbued so strongly with cabalistical and metaphysical notions and habits, that he taught many whimsical doctrines, and gave much advantage to men every way his inferiors, to such as JEROM among the antients, and such as BEZA among the moderns.

CHRISTIANS who formed their opinions concerning the Supreme Being in this school, or out of it, on the best principles of heathen theology, formed them very different from those of the Jews. They went into extremes on both sides. The Jews believed not only the monarchy of God over all being, but his unity; and were famous for their aversion to polytheism and idolatry, at least after their seventy years captivity. If they had not received this faith from their patriarchs, they might have learned it from the Egyptians. Nay their patriarchs might learn it by their commerce with this people. I do not say that they did. But this I say, that it is more easy to shew how they might, than divines have found it to give a sufficient reason why MOSES, who took so many institutions from Egypt, of much less importance and efficacy towards the good government of a rebellious and obstinate people, neglected to inculcate the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, and of a future state of rewards and punishments; which other legislators, who were not more learned than he was in all the learning of the Egyptians, took from them, and employed to the best purposes. But altho the conceptions, which the Jews entertained of the Supreme Being, were thus far very orthodox in the eye
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of reason, and altho their psalmists and their prophets strained their imaginations to express the most elevated sentiments of God, of his works, and of the methods of his providence; yet this eternal, this infinite Being was represented in their histories, and in the whole system of their religion, as a local tutelary deity, carried about in a trunk, or residing in a temple; as an ally, who had entered into a covenant with their fathers; as a legislator, who had writ their laws with his own hand; as a king, who had actually held the reins of their government; and as an industrious magistrate, who descended into all the particulars of religious and civil administration, even into the most minute and meanest. Thus were the Jews accustomed to familiarise themselves with the Supreme Being, and to imagine that he familiarised himself with them; to think him constantly employed about them, as about the nation he had chosen for his elect and favorite people, and to figure him to themselves receiving their sacrifices, and listening to their prayers, sometimes, at least, as grossly as LUCIAN represents JUPITER. This will appear in the eye of reason to be one extreme.

THE other carries a greater appearance of reverence to the Supreme Being, but is little less absurd: and whilst the direct tendency of the former notions was to promote superstition, and to make God the object of it, the indirect tendency of those I am going to mention was to promote polytheism and idolatry. It would not be to the purpose to collect many things, which pagan monotheists have said of the Supreme Being. PLATO himself would have done well, notwithstanding the sublime expressions concerning the divine nature, which are to be found in his writings, to keep the reserve on this subject, which he professes in one of his letters; and upon the whole, the heathen and christian divines both would have done much better than they did, if they had followed more closely and more

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constantly the example of SIMONIDES, who owned himself unable, after several delays, to answer the question HIERO put to him, "quid aut qualis esset Deus." The divine nature cannot be explained by human words; for it cannot be conceived by human ideas: and therefore none but delirious metaphysicians, who employ words, that impose by their sound and have no determinate ideas affixed to them, will ever attempt this explanation. All that the wit of man can do is to speak cautiously and reverently of it, according to those general notions of wisdom, and power, and majesty, and all other perfections, which we are able to collect, "à posteriori," that is, from the works of God, and which serve still more to shew our ignorance than our knowledge.

SENSIBLE of this, the heathen divines in their sober moods represented the Supreme Being as hidden from us in the depths of darkness, or in excess of light; a first self-existent cause of all existence; a real being, but above all essence; really intelligent, but above all intelligence; and lest such notions as these should carry men not only to think very truly of the incomprehensibility of God, but to imagine, according to the grossness of their conceptions, that the Creator was too far removed from his creature, the workman from his work, and the governor from the governed, the heathens invented a chain of beings from God to man, and a more extensive system of divine natures. The Jews had brought the first and only God, that they acknowledged, too near to man, and had made him an actor immediately and personally, as it were, in the creation and in the government of the world. This was too absurd for heathen divines. It could never enter into the conception of such as PLATO, for instance, who declared, or made the first God declare in the *Timaeus*, that the whole animal world must have been necessarily immortal, if it had been an
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immediate effect of the first cause. The same men would have deemed it a profanation, as well as an absurdity; and to avoid both one and the other, they assumed all those inferior gods, and ministering spirits, which became the objects of so much idolatry.

THE pythagorean and platonic schools imagined two sorts of emanations from the Supreme Being, as it has been hinted. Some of these were supposed to go out of the deity, and to be participating beings. So they were called, and this class was numberless; since it contained all the inferior and younger gods, and all the spiritual beings, from the soul of the world, which PROCLUS, or one of the same mad tribe, calls the elder sister, down to the soul of man, which he calls the younger sister. Other emanations, two only, were assumed to remain in the deity, and to be emanations, that do not emanate, goings out, that do not go out, the Logos or first mind, the Psyche or the first soul, one of whom was the Nous of ANAXAGORAS, the Demiurgus or the maker of the world, and the other a living self-moving principle, that gives life and motion to all that lives and moves. This was a trinity in the godhead, or this was the godhead, the "To theion," such as several of the latter platonists, who turned dogmatists, and laid aside the name of academicians, conceived it to be. True it is, that scarce any two of the heathen trinitarians held the same language, no nor any one of them in two different places. It was the language of men, who rambled from one arbitrary hypothesis to another; and what I am to observe particularly here is, that altho they spoke sometimes of the monad, or first unity alone, as God, yet they ascribed often so much to the second god, that the first became in some sort a non-entity, an abstract or notional being, a being and no being, without essence or nature, because above them, and rather an intelligible than an intelligent principle.

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Thus they left, in some sort, no place to the one true God in their conceptions, whilst they endeavoured to raise him above all conception, and whilst some, like the Jews, employed him too much and in too trifling a manner in the formation and government of the world, they banished him almost intirely out of the system of his works.

I HAVE mentioned these notions the rather, because their indirect tendency in their opposition to judaism is to promote polytheism and idolatry, as I said above; and because, notwithstanding this tendency, they come the nearest to those that prevailed most in the christian church, to those particularly that remained unfixed during three centuries, and that required the greatest efforts of human authority to reduce them, when they were fixed, into one uniform profession. On all these accounts it is proper to speak a little more largely of them.

S E C T I O N XXVII.

I HAVE spoken somewhere of the ditheistical doctrine. It was very antient, no doubt, tho not so universally professed as PLUTARCH represents it to have been. OROMASDES and ARI-MANIUS were the good and the bad principle among the Persians; OSIRIS and TYPHON among the Egytians. PYTHAGORAS has been suspected, not convicted, of holding this doctrine; for by his Duad, or evil principle, he might mean nothing more than matter: and PLATO did only seem to lay some foundation for it, by his hypothesis concerning the original of evil. CERDON or MARCION, or some of the gnostics, introduced it into christianity, and the sect who held it continued under the names of manichaeans and paulicians from the third till the end of the ninth century. As repugnant as this doctrine is to our most clear and best determined ideas, it seemed to account for

for the existence of evil as well as good, and for the supposed irregular, unjust distribution of them, consistently with the belief of a Supreme Being, infinitely good. This was enough for such arabian and persian philosophers, as SCYTHIANUS, TEREBINTHUS, or MANES, and indeed for most other philosophers, in ages when a little superficial plausibility was sufficient to convert any hypothesis, against the evidence of reason, into a dogma. I have recalled it in this place, because it leads me to make two observations, that will cast some light, the second especially, on the obscure and confused theology of which we are going to make mention. The tritheistical doctrine appears then to be as antient as the ditheistical, that is, more antient than our most antient traditions, not only by many direct proofs, but even by this, that the primitive ditheists seemed to borrow from the other system, when, to improve their own, some of them altered it so far as to place a mediating principle between the good and the evil god. A strange kind of tritheism surely, or rather a system which partook of both, and was neither. We may observe in the next place, that the second god of the ditheists kept his rank but ill, and was degraded, from a coequality and coeternity with the first, to be an inferior, a created, a fallen being. He was, indeed, even in this state a very powerful being; since he could transport the son of God from the desert to the top of the temple, and afterwards to that of an high mountain. That Jesus had fasted forty days and forty nights, and that he was hungry, ought not to lessen our admiration of this diabolical strength; since we are not to consider it as bodily, but as spiritual strength, and this the son of God could exert, as it appeared by his miracles, tho he was in the body. The devil, notwithstanding this circumstance, of which he could not be ignorant, confided so much in his own strength, and was so impudent, that he tempted him, that he tauntingly quoted

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passages

passages of the scripture to him, as JESUS quoted some to the devil, and in short, that he insulted him so far as to bid him fall down and worship him *. These facts must needs give us a very high opinion of the rank which the principal devil held among spiritual natures, and may induce us to think, that the devils, over whom the Christians exercised so much power afterwards, were devils of inferior sort: such as SCYTHIANUS, TEREBINTHUS, and other magicians used to invoke from the tops of houses; in which exercise the two I have named fell down and broke their necks, according to EPIPHANIUS, or one of them at least. But still the devil, the first and greatest of the diabolical society, was a degraded being. He began to be so among the pagans. Such the Christians allowed him to be, and he would have passed no longer for a first principle, nor a god self-existent and independent any where, if the heretics here spoken of had not revived and propagated this abominable opinion.

THE very contrary happened in the tritheistical system, after the establishment of christianity: and the second and the third divine hypostases grew by degrees not only into a similitude of nature, a coequality and coeternity, but into a sameness with the first. Let us descend into some particulars, concerning the original and progress of this theology. If it is matter of curiosity, it is matter of importance too.

I SAID, that the pagan doctrine of a trinity was more ancient than tradition. But if we could believe those ingenious persons, who find whatever they have a mind to find in the Bible, we should believe it to have been not a pagan but a jewish doctrine, not a philosophical hypothesis, but a divine revelation, not only older than tradition, but as old as the memorials

* — Si cadens adoraveris me. MATTH. chap. iv.

MOSES

MOSES had of the creation. We are told in the first chapter of Genesis, that when God closed the work of the creation, he said, "let us make man after our image and likeness *:" and altho he is made to speak, on the same subject, in the singular number, immediately afterwards, yet christian divines assure us, that the father addressed himself in these words to the son and holy ghost, or to the first of them at least, and not to angels, nor any inferior intelligences, as he is said to have done in the Timaeus of PLATO. This difference may deserve our observation the more, because PLATO in his writings acknowledged a trinity; whereas there is no direct nor clear hint, and much less any express declaration, of a trinity in this place, nor in any other part of the writings of MOSES. There are indeed, among a multitude of vague and obscure expressions in the books of the Old Testament, some that seem to intimate like this a plurality of divine beings, and these have been hawled to signify the christian trinity, tho they were too equivocal and too dark to serve the purpose of leading men to the discovery of it, and therefore to serve any purpose at all. But the divines I have mentioned would do well to consider, that they have a much less right to conclude, that the authors of these books, wherein the unity of the godhead is every where established, meant to teach a plurality of hypostases in it which they assert, than any man would have to conclude from passages, that speak of God in the singular number, in books where polytheism is constantly asserted, that these authors meant to teach the unity of the godhead, which these divines deny that they did. He who is persuaded, as I am, that many of those, who were polytheists in one sense, were monotheists in another, might assert the latter proposition without any absurdity. But these divines cannot assert either without the greatest, and especially since they know in how vague and loose a sense the word

* Faciamus hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram.

god

god is employed in the scriptures, where it signifies sometimes a king or a chief magistrate, a prophet or a messenger from God, as we find in Exodus *, in SAMUEL †, in the Psalms §, in the gospel of St. JOHN ||, and perhaps in other places.

BUT besides: if the doctrine of a trinity was found in express terms in the pentateuch, we might be surpris'd, with some reason, that MOSES had taught it to a people so strongly addicted, as the Israelites were, to the worship of many gods, and so little able to conceive the equality of three to one, and of one to three, a trinity in an unity, and an unity in a trinity; to a people to whom he would not teach the doctrine of the immortality of the soul and of a future state, on account of the many superstitions which this doctrine had begot in Egypt, as we must believe, or believe that he knew nothing of it, or assign some whimsical reason of this omission. But even in this case, which supposes an express mention of the trinity in the pentateuch, we could frame no conclusive argument to prove this doctrine mosaical in it's origin. The religion, as well as government, of the Egyptians, was more antient than that of MOSES. He was learned in both; he borrowed from both; and no man of common sense can believe it more probable, whatever he may pretend, that the slaves instructed their masters, than that the masters instructed their slaves. If an express mention of the trinity was made in other parts of the Old Testament, the argument would be still less conclusive, because the Jews had been acquainted with schools wherein this doctrine was taught, either as an hidden or public doctrine, long before these books were renewed by ESDRAS, I use bishop HUET's *** expression, before some of them were writ, per-

* Exod. chap. iv. ver. 16. ibid. chap. vii. ver. 1. † 1 SAM. chap. xxviii. ver. 13. § Psalm lxxxi. || Gosp. St. JOHN chap. x. ver. 34.
 ** In Demon. Evang. "instauravit."

haps,

haps, and before the canon of them was completed, we know very certainly neither by whom nor when.

IF this doctrine was not mosaical, neither was it platonical in it's origin, and much less was it invented by the latter platonists in imitation of the christian trinity. PLATO speaks of one most simple being, the first intelligible. He speaks of a first mind, and a first soul, that soul of the world, some materials of which were left by God, in the bowl * in which he made it, to be mingled up into the souls of men; for it was but reasonable, that the soul of man should be less perfect than the soul of the universe. That PLATO was sincerely a dogmatist I am far from believing, and I have on this head more regard to TULLY than to St. AUSTIN. But the latter platonicians, who were such, taught this doctrine, like others of his theological and metaphysical whimsies, for in him and them they were whimsies, in that style. They were often a little less intelligible than he. What we do not understand in PLATO, we must not expect to understand better in PLOTINUS, in JAMBLICUS, in PROCLUS, nor in the summary of his doctrine by ALCINOÛS, nor, in short, in any of those writers whose heads have been turned with pythagorean and platonic theology. It was all the unmeaning jargon of egyptian and eastern metaphysics, and it did not acquire more meaning and perspicuity among the Greeks. On the contrary, I can easily persuade myself, that this jargon became still more obscure by the supposed improvements of grecian philosophy. But still the first principles of it, and of this doctrine in particular, were more antient than the philosophical æra in Greece. STRABO says, that the colleges of the egyptian priests were desert in his time, and he lived two or three centuries sooner than PLOTINUS, PORPHYRY, and JAMBLICUS. But there is no color to conclude

* Crater is the word MARS. FICIN. uses.

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from hence, that the theology these priests had taught was lost and forgot, when these philosophers arose among others, and the school of Alexandria flourished. There were men still famous for their knowledge, an ABAMMON, an ANEBO for instance; and JAMBLICUS, who answered PORPHYRY'S inquiries in a manner too mysterious not to be genuine, cites the authority of egyptian scriptures and traditions. The author of the intellectual system mentions a passage which we may well take on his word, without consulting the original, wherein JAMBLICUS speaks plainly of three divine hypostases in the egyptian theology. EICTON, an indivisible unity worshipped in silence. EMEPH, the same probably as KNEPH, and HAMMON or PTHA, or OSIRIS, an active principle that was called by different names according to the different powers and energies ascribed to it. These were the PHANES, URANUS, and CRONUS, of ORPHEUS. The three gods praised by the pythagoricians. These were the three kings, the first good, the first mind, and the first soul, of PLATO. PYTHAGORAS had been instructed in the orphic mysteries by AGLAOPHEMUS, and PLATO was the next who received a perfect knowledge of all these divine things out of the pythagoric and orphic writings, according to the testimony of PROCLUS, in the first of his six books concerning the platonic philosophy.

Thus it appears that the notion of a trinity made a part of egyptian theology, and had been communicated to the Greeks even by ORPHEUS, that is, five or six centuries before the babylonian captivity, and therefore long before ESDRAS, and long after HERMES. It is not worth while to make any observation on these dates, which would admit of several, nor to speak of the zoroastrian, chaldaic, or samothracian trinities, any farther than to observe, that DEMOCRITUS had written a commentary on the sacred letters of the Babylonians, and that both he and

HOSTANES,

HOSTANES, who lived in the time of XERXES, and was himself a Chaldaean, had taught the philosophy of that people or sect to the Greeks, and that this philosophy was understood to comprehend all the learning of the East. I proceed rather to observe, that this doctrine was taught with so much confusion, that the three gods were spoken of sometimes collectively, and that at other times each of them was spoken of alone. The second was sometimes, and most frequently, reputed the maker of this visible world. He was represented at other times to be the first god, what light is to the sun, and I have read that ATHANASIUS employed this comparison after the heathen divines, tho it be absurd even to ridicule, in his system or in theirs. Sometimes the third hypostasis was spoken of as the maker of all things, according to patterns existing in the second, and at other times only as a soul which animated the material world, and which together with it composed one mighty animal. But the general run of opinion was different and more uniform. None of these heathen trinitarians had ever imagined three gods, essentially one, and one god essentially three. Whenever they spoke of three hypostases, they all supposed them distinct and subordinate. RAPIN * acknowledges that PROCLUS did distinguish them so; but he asserts that PLOTINUS did not. Whence the jesuit took this, I am ignorant. But it is certain that far from confounding them, or saying that they were all one god, PLOTINUS has said the very contrary in many places, and particularly where he approves PLATO's explanation of the doctrine of PARMENIDES, and teaches a first, second and third unity in subordination.

* Comp. de PLATON et ARISTOTE.

SECTION XXVIII.

SINCE I have said so much on this subject, I will just mention some of the notions which these pneumatical madmen, Heathens, Jews, and Christians entertained concerning spiritual natures inferior to these. I observe then, that an affectation of investigating and explaining the original and first principles of things was the reigning folly of antient philosophers. Thus the systems of cosmogony were, like that of HESIOD, so many systems of theogony, and the physiology of the universe was nothing better than a wild rhapsody of fables and allegories. When these would not pass, except on the ignorant and superstitious vulgar, they proceeded to a more refined manner of philosophizing. What they could not account for by any knowledge they had of the sensible world, they endeavoured to account for by the hypotheses they framed of an intellectual world. The sensible phaenomena here below, to speak according to their conceptions, passed before them, and disappeared like the figures of a moving picture. They saw nothing permanent, nothing primarily efficient, a multitude of effects, no cause. They looked up to the heavens. Their senses were struck. They were surpris'd into idolatry first, they admired afterwards, and the more they examined, the more they admired. But their reason was not satisfied, nor the ends of their inquiries attained; their reason was not satisfied, because they discovered nothing but effects above as well as below, no self-existent, self-moving and intelligent causes. The ends of their inquiries were not attained, because they inquired after such causes as these, instead of resolving all ultimately into the infinite wisdom and power of one first efficient cause, which is the proper conclusion of every physical inquiry. It solves every difficulty to a reasonable mind, that has inquired as far as the phaenomena lead us; and if it did not, the

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want of a sufficient reason in them would be no reason for seeking one out of them. It would be a reason for stopping all inquiry.

HERE we may fix the beginning of metaphysics. The ends of their researches were unattainable. Physics could not reach to them. But instead of abandoning these objects, philosophers resolved to change their method, to begin where they had hoped in vain to end, and to invent what they had flattered themselves that they should discover. For this purpose, the ideas of PLATO were devised, which some imagine to be the same with the numbers of PYTHAGORAS *. The first strangely absurd, the second quite unintelligible. I shall speak, therefore, of the first alone. Now the second hypostasis, or the first mind, is according to this hypothesis an architypal world, which contains intelligibly all that is contained sensibly in our world. These are the things which truly are, and the phaenomena, which appear realities to sense, are nothing more than their faint, transient, and fallacious images. These are the eternal, immutable patterns of things; not only of simple ideas which we receive, but of complex ideas which we make; not only of substances, but of modes and relations. There is a first whiteness, or a first sweetness, as there is a first pulchritude, or a first gratitude, a first bigness or a first littleness. These are, therefore, the true objects of science. Some of the heathen divines supposed every one of these pretended abstract ideas to be a first principle or a divine being, and there are christian divines who scruple not to talk of them as of eternal incorporeal essences, independent of God himself. PLATO erected a mystic ladder, and he makes SOCRATES advise his auditors to climb by it into the region of forms, that is, from opinion to knowledge. MALEBRANCHE has no need of it. Things out of the mind he sees in God; and concerning things in it, he interrogates the Logos.

* BRUC. de convenientiâ numerorum PYTHAG. cum ideis PLAT.

PYTHAGORAS and PLATO had learned of their eastern masters, and had taught others, to imagine a confused multitude of spiritual natures besides these, and besides the three first principles, under the different names of gods, angels, daemons, and genii, spirits above the moon, good, happy, and immortal; and spirits below the moon, where death, misery, and all that is evil resides. In this system all is intelligible above, all is sensible below. Nor was this number of gods and other spiritual natures confused alone. It was indefinite too, and liable to be increased as philosophical purposes, and public or even private superstition, required. The latter pythagoricians and platonists, whom I confound because their doctrines were confounded together, far from softening the gross and most palpable absurdities of which we have spoken, imagined, besides all these beings, and immaterial entities residing in the first mind, an inconceivable number of eons, that is, of immortal spiritual beings proceeding by irradiation, emanation, or some other metaphysical generation, from the first being, and inhabiting the heavens and the stars. Thus if they did not determine the number of spiritual natures in general, as the number of angels was not determined by the Jews, they reduced them into determinate classes at least, and made them more apparently, and more immediately, dependent on the three hypostases that composed their deity. These were not called gods indeed, tho they might have passed for such of the generated kind at least; and tho there were some persons who held the four first eons to be the tetrade of PYTHAGORAS, nay tho some were absurd enough to call the first self-existing spirit an eon, that is an emanation, and therefore a contradiction as monstrous as that imputed to the sabellians, who assumed, it has been said, that God the father was his own son, and God the son his own father. But the word god began to be more sparingly used,
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and for that reason these doctrines might be, as they were, the more easily received by many who professed christianity. The Jews, I suppose, might hold these emanations flowing from the divine essence, like beams from the sun, just as well as their ten superior lights called sephiroth; and the Christians might well admit cons into their system, since they, as well as the Jews, admitted cherubim and seraphim, archangels and angels. From the hypothesis, therefore, of a trinity of supreme but subordinate gods, subordinate to one another, a trinity of ranks or orders of beings was derived. A multitude of unities proceeding from the first unity, and superior to the first mind; a multitude of minds proceeding from the first mind, and superior to the first soul; a multitude of souls proceeding from the first soul, and superior to all other natures; for they dreamed too of an universal nature sometimes, I know not whether in or out of the Deity, from which all particular natures and all plastic principles flowed.

By these means sufficient provision was made for superstition and theological speculations. The same presumption, and the same misapplication and abuse of human reason that misled the heathen, misled the christian world, and erected the most extravagant hypotheses, that delirious imaginations could frame, into dogmas concerning divine and spiritual nature. The heathen had in their power that rule of inquiry, and that criterion of truth, which God has given to all his rational creatures in the manifestation of his nature and attributes, as far as we are able to collect them from the system of his works, and from the course of his providence. It was therefore a great presumption, and a great abuse of reason, in those philosophers, to neglect this rule and this criterion; to inquire often without one, and to judge often against the other. But the christian divines have done worse. They have another rule,
and

and another criterion, besides these, supernatural as well as natural religion, the word as well as the works of God. One of these might carry their knowledge farther than the other, and it carries indeed this kind of knowledge, such as it is, a great way; but they were inexcusable when they pretended to acquire any knowledge, on such important and awful subjects especially, beyond both. They did it however. Metaphysical heathens and cabalistical Jews imposed their resveries on christian fathers; and they imposed them on the whole christian church, mingled up with those of their own overheated brains.

BUT there is another cause of this pneumatical madness to be mentioned. It was not due alone to the fondness philosophers had of seeming to account metaphysically for what they could not account physically; it was due likewise to a fondness of another kind, to a fondness of making man pass for one of those beings that participated of the divine nature. This had long possessed the heathen theists, and it possessed the Christians with more advantage. Neither of them pretended to such constant communications, and familiar conversations with the Supreme Being, as the Jews did; tho both of them boasted of divine influences, of inspirations, and of revelations made to them sleeping and waking. But then both of them boasted a natural, tho distant relation with the Supreme Being, not only the moral relation of creatures to their Creator, but the natural relation of descendants to their common ancestor, a cognation, as CUDWORTH calls it, a sort of spiritual consanguinity. Several hypotheses had lengthened the chain of being very far from God downwards: and as divinity had been hawled down, humanity had been hoisted up, sometimes by gross and corporeal representations, sometimes by such as were more refined and spiritual. Man was made after the image of God in more systems than one, or rather God was made

made after the image of man. The anthropomorphite herefy represented him with all the members, the shape and figure of an human body; and how the idolatrous heathens represented all their gods, and none more than JUPITER himself, in human bodies, and in human operations, is enough known. But there were other systems in which the similitude and natural relation between God and man were represented under images more refined and spiritual.

IN the jewish system, however, we understand the words of MOSES, the Supreme Being made the body of man of the dirt of the earth. But the human soul was a portion of divine breath, "*divinae particula aerae*." God breathed it into his face, and he became a living soul *; as God is said, in scripture language, to be the living God. In the platonic system, inferior intelligences were commissioned to make the whole animal kind, lest they should have been all immortal; but God reserved to himself the soul of man, which he made of the same substance as the soul of the universe, only a little less perfect, as it has been said. In the system we speak of, the divinity is allied to humanity as effectually as the pride of man could desire, as effectually as in either of these. We assume, and the latter platonicians as well as their founder assumed, that man is compounded of body and soul. As PLATO asserted, that all souls were made at once, so they asserted, that all souls were made of the same nature. Human souls, therefore, proceeding from the first soul, which was sometimes confounded with, and sometimes distinguished from the soul of the universe, and this soul being superior to all natures, except the minds proceeding from the first mind, and the unities proceeding from the first unity, the relation between God and man was not very remote; whether

* *Inspiravit in faciem ejus spiraculum vitae, et factus est homo in animam viventem.*

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they thought that the three hypostases composed one deity, as two substances composed one man; or whether they thought, that the three were distinct subordinate subsistencies, and the soul the lowest of them. The relation, I say, was not very remote either way; and these philosophers might think their hypothesis the more decent for not making this relation closer. PROCLUS therefore, or PLOTINUS, or one of that tribe, had reason, you see, on this plan of theology to call the soul of the world the elder sister of the human soul: and if ORIGEN did not come fully up to all these extravagances, he came very near to them, when he asserted, that there was no difference, but that of merit, between the souls of archangels and angels, of devils and of men. The soul of CHRIST, according to this father, who was perhaps the greatest of the fathers, was of the same nature as all other rational souls, and was inseparably united with God, or made one with the word *, only on account of superior merit in a pre-existing state.

THUS human pride, as well as human curiosity, was indulged by heathen philosophers and by platonising Christians. They grew up into a sort of pneumatical madness, or metaphysics were the dotage of physics: take which of the images you please. What these wild or dreaming philosophers could not do by any hypothesis about body, they attempted to do by the hypothesis of a soul: and since they could not make man participant of the divine nature by his body, however animated up to rationality, or with whatever adventitious powers they might suppose it endued, they thought fit to add a distinct spiritual to his corporeal substance, and to assume him to be a compound of both. A great variety of hypotheses was built on this one; but immortality was common to them all.

* —inseparabilem cum Deo fecerit unitatem— cum Verbo Dei unum efficitur. ORIG. de princip. lib. I.

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In all of them, man was allied to God by some metaphysical genealogy: and even those of them, which, giving him immortality, exposed him to eternal damnation by it, were fondly received. He who considers what our manner of knowing is, what the faculties of our minds are, what the means we have of acquiring knowledge are; and how uncertain, how precarious, how confined it is in the highest degree of it; will think the soul as unfit to be participant of the divine nature as the body. Nay PLATO, whom I quote on these occasions, "instar omnium," was so little able to prove the existence and immortality of the soul, and talked so much nonsense about the essence and essential properties of it, that he was obliged to have recourse from natural to moral arguments, which are indeed more plausible, but not more conclusive.

WHEN these notions were once established, it was no hard matter to persuade men, nay it was no hard matter for those, who had a disposition and a temper of brain prone to enthusiasm, to persuade themselves, that by various methods of purification, and by intense meditation, which were in truth so many methods of growing mad, they could abstract themselves from all sensible objects, wrap themselves up in pure intellect, and be united to the Supreme Being. This madness has prevailed, and still prevails, under some form or other, and with little difference, in the East and in the West, among Christians and heathens, among the orthodox and heretics. I need not quote instances. They have been frequent and notorious in China, in the East Indies, and in Europe. PYTHAGORAS and PLATO taught, that the supreme good of men was to be like God, and to be gods at last. Such opinions as these were held, with some variety of expression more than of substance, by the manichaeans and other heretics. The most orthodox fathers spoke of the communion of men with God, as of a mystery

stery unknown indeed to men and angels till it was revealed, but suspected by the heathen philosophers, who were impelled to desire it by a natural instinct. A strange assertion this must appear, and equally false in every part. The communion of man with God was not a suspicion, it was a dogma, true or false, and an article of the platonic faith? for PLATO too required faith in traditional doctrines. It was not any particular instinct, that impelled the heathen to desire this communion, it was their pride and absurdity, the very human affections and passions from which these men pretended to be freed, that produced this presumptuous desire.

SUCH extravagant doctrines concerning divine and spiritual natures being taught with much confusion in the schools of heathen theology, they could not fail to be taught in those of christianity with the same confusion, and to produce all the different opinions, that divided the christian church. None of them knew very distinctly what they meant by the word spirit and spiritual substance, which were so often in their mouths. That they meant in general nothing more than breath, like animal breath, and a thin subtile matter that escaped human sight in the ordinary way of seeing, is evident. They said, after ZOROASTER and the magi, that God was original light, or an intelligent fire. They said, that this light was incorporeal, and yet they talked of it in such a manner as described a very corporeal light, invifible, however, to all eyes that were not fortified like those that enjoy the beatific vision. In short, spirituality did not imply incorporeity, and if one of those great divines was at hand to be asked what he meant by spiritual substance, he would answer in some metaphysical jargon; he would tell us, perhaps, that it is a substance "ab essentialitate fuccifa," which are words I have read, but cannot translate.

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SECTION XXIX.

BUT it is time I should return to speak of the trinity, and to shew what discordant opinions arose about it among the Christians; for among the heathens, tho there were different opinions, yet it was rather a secret doctrine, in which philosophers instructed their scholars behind the curtain, than a doctrine which they published to all men indifferently. Now it is impossible to conceive any thing more monstrous than some of these opinions, or more litigated, or longer unsettled than others. The least we have to observe of this kind is about the first hypostasis, and yet something of this kind is to be observed about that. For instance, tho we cannot explain God's manner of being, and tho to attempt it is unpardonable presumption, yet we may, and we must assert, that he is not a system of matter; because there arise, from the contrary supposition, a multitude of absurdities, that cannot destroy the demonstration of his existence, but that are inconsistent with it: notwithstanding which, the fathers of the church spoke of him sometimes, in such terms, that to make out any sense in what they said, we must understand them to have thought him material, at least not immaterial, and what they thought him then it is not possible to conceive.

BUT the various doctrines that were taught about the second and third hypostasis, the second especially, are still more beyond all conception extravagant and profane. Concerning these, and one or two more, it is necessary, that I should descend into some particulars, in order to shew, not only that private authority has imposed private opinions, that is, heresies, but that public authority, the authority of the whole christian church, has imposed opinions which are, therefore, deemed

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orthodox;

orthodox; altho many of them are as absurd as any of those which are deemed heretical, many of them as disputable, many of them as little warranted by the gospel, and many of them as incompatible with true theism; because if they do not deny God, they do something as bad, nay worse in PLUTARCH'S sense, and, in common sense, they defame him. From a consideration of some few of these opinions and doctrines, it will appear how unsafely we trust, in matters of religion, to the authority of other men, which may lead us, and has led all those who have submitted to it, under pretence of making them better Christians, to be little if at all better than atheists. From a contemplation of the consequences of these opinions and doctrines, it will appear that theology has made christianity ridiculous to men of sense, I mean the christianity that has been established by ecclesiastical and civil authority, and a perpetual bone of contention to fools. It will appear that the atheistical objection to religion, which has been mentioned, groundless as it is, receives a color from the inventions and the conduct of that order of men, who have arrogated to themselves, exclusively of all others, the name and the power of a church, and whom Christians are accustomed to think and to call the church.

THERE have been reports, for such stories deserve to be esteemed no more, that SIMON, who was a Samaritan, declared himself among that people to be the father, among the Jews to be the son, and among the Gentiles to be the holy ghost; that he passed the operations of his magical art for miracles, and that he broke his neck at last in attempting to fly before NERO, notwithstanding which he was adored at Rome. This latter circumstance, indeed, was founded on a blunder that has been since detected; tho it imposed on JUSTIN the martyr in the second century, and which is much more strange, on ERAS-

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MUS* in the sixteenth. MONTANUS pretended to be the paraclete in the third century; or that God who had preached and suffered in CHRIST, inhabited by the holy ghost in him. The excuse he made for coming so late, when JESUS had promised that he should come so much sooner, was the unpreparedness of the world to receive any sooner that austerity of religious observances which he prescribed and practised. They were incredibly great, and such as may render it probable that this impostor died the death of the traitor JUDAS, that he hanged himself in a fit of despair, as christian writers have affirmed. Such tales as these would not deserve to be mentioned, if they did not serve to shew the fanatical spirit of those ages, and to take off our wonder at all the heresies that arose in the christian church, by observing how easy it was to suppose a divine mission, or even to assume in opinion a divine nature. The appearance of false prophets, as well as their success in seducing, had been foretold; and it was the character of the times which encouraged one, and promoted the other.

THESE false prophets were very numerous, and their success very various. But there was no article of christian faith and doctrine which admitted of so much doubt and dispute as the divinity of CHRIST first, and his rank in the godhead afterwards. CERINTHUS denied his divine nature. MENANDER asserted that he was a true man. SATURNINUS that he was only the shadow and appearance of a man. BASILIDES that the CHRIST did not suffer, but that he took the form of another, of SIMON of Cyrene, I think, who suffered under his form whilst he stood by and laughed at his own supposed crucifixion. EBION maintained, like MENANDER, that CHRIST was a mere man, the son of JOSEPH. In calling him a good or a just man, he had the authority of St. PETER on his side, who calls him so in one place

* Vid. Ep. 831. in IRENAEUM.

of

of the Acts, and even this he did not want; but in denying his resurrection from the dead, as he did when he affirmed that the body of CHRIST remained in the grave, tho his soul went to heaven, he had this great apostolical authority against him *. In fine, and to fill up the measure of heretical phrensy, the seditious held that the same person had been SETH first, and was JESUS afterwards; and the ophitæ, as they were called, that he had been the serpent who tempted EVE; so that he, who redeemed mankind by his blood, had made redemption necessary by his wiles, according to these madmen.

THAT there were no madmen at the same time among the best and most orthodox Christians, if it may be said with truth that any orthodox belief was settled so soon, we must not believe. There were many such, and the proofs are at hand, both in their writings, and much more in the anecdotes concerning them. But that which deserves our particular observation is, that the madness of those who are reputed orthodox never ran so high, as it did after the orthodox belief on this great article had been settled; if propositions, the very terms of which are sometimes ambiguous and sometimes quite unintelligible, may be said to have been settled. Certain it is, that after this the orthodox fathers held such language about the incarnation of CHRIST, as many of those who were reputed heretics would have scrupled modestly and piously to have used. These words, the son of God, were understood figuratively, I presume, and not literally in the case of FOË, who assumed this appellation in India a thousand years before the coming of CHRIST, and in the case of ZOROASTER, who assumed it in Persia, perhaps, as antiently. They must have been understood even thus very falsely, in both those cases. But they might have been so understood, with some propriety of figure, in the case of CHRIST,

* — Virum probatum à Deo, justum à mortuis suscitatum.

who

who was at least the Messiah promised by God, foretold by the prophets, and sent in due time. If this had been the judgment of the church, the principal difficulties about his incarnation had been anticipated, as they were by the nestorians, who held that there were two persons, and not two natures only, in CHRIST, and who denied that the virgin was the mother of God. But the church having determined that these words, the son of God, should be taken in their literal sense, it is astonishing to consider what profanations followed concerning this second generation of the son; for the first had been before all worlds, that is, from all eternity. These profanations collected from the most approved writers alone, to say nothing of the creeds that are so solemnly recited in christian churches, would fill a volume. I shall mention a few only, which they, who are at all conversant in the writings of antient and modern divines, will acknowledge to be fairly quoted.

IT has been said then by the most orthodox*, piously and reverently too, as they and other divines assure us, “ that the
“ father having chosen the virgin MARY for this second gene-
“ ration of the son, he loved her as his spouse; he employed
“ the angel GABRIEL, whom he made his pronubus or para-
“ nymphus, that is, his brideman, to procure her consent,
“ without which there can be no lawful marriage; and having
“ obtained it, his virtue overshadowed her, which he tem-
“ pered so that her human nature might be able to support the
“ divine embracement. In this private embracement, she con-
“ ceived, the holy spirit flowing into her, and producing the
“ effect of human seed. Thus the child partook of the two
“ natures of his parents, the divine nature of his father, and
“ the human nature of his mother.” In such gross terms, and
under such gross images, has the mystery of the incarnation

* ERAS. adv. ep. LUTHERI.

been

been explained. The words of St. AMBROSE are too obscene to be translated. Take them in latin therefore. "Non enim, says this modest archbishop, "virilis coitus vulvae virginalis" "secreta referavit, sed immaculatum semen inviolabili utero" "spiritus sanctus infudit." St. AUSTIN softens the terms, and changes the image a little. But if he does not appear quite so obscene, he must appear at least as mad as the others. "God" "spoke by his angel, says this saint, and the virgin was got" "with child by the ear *." There were those who asserted that CHRIST did not assume his body in the virgin's womb, but that he brought it from heaven, and passed thro her as water passes thro a pipe †. They were called heretics for their pains, and yet surely that doctrine might have been sung or said in the churches, as decently and with as much edification, as those hymns were, in one of which it was said, that the virgin conceived, "non ex virili semine, sed mystico spiramine," and in the other, that the Word or Logos entered at her ear, "et exivit per auream portam."

SUCH extravagant and profane notions and expressions, as have been last mentioned, came into fashion chiefly after the nicaean council, which CONSTANTINE thought it necessary to convene. How ill he judged, and how ill his successors judged on similar occasions, long and woful experience has manifested. What passed before his time shewed, that attempts to explain divine mysteries must be of necessity endless; and what passed in and after his time, that it is to no purpose, at least to no good purpose, to impose any authorised definitions of them. What revelation leaves a mystery must remain such: and there cannot be a greater absurdity than to imagine that human authority, call it how you please, ought to determine, or will determine,

* Deus loquebatur per suum angelum, et virgo per aurem impregnabatur.

† AUG. de tem. ferm. 22.

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to submission those who think that such definitions are not conformable to their true criterion, which is the revelation itself. The only difference is this. The men who dispute and wrangle on such points as these, wherein neither morality nor good government are concerned, cannot do much hurt, if they are left to dispute and wrangle among themselves; whereas, if public authority takes notice of them so far as to meddle in their quarrels, and to decide any way, civil disorders are sure to follow, and the blood of nations is spilled in wars and massacres, to extinguish a flame which some hot-headed priest, or delirious metaphysician, has kindled, and which it does not extinguish neither.

WHAT revelation leaves a mystery must remain such: and if any thing was ever left a mystery, the doctrine of the trinity was so. CHRIST had no where called himself God. His apostles called him Lord *. PETER had once declared him to be a man: and PAUL preaching to the Athenians speaks of him rather as a man than as God. He makes no mention of the son of God, nor of the holy ghost. These inconsistent writers talk often a different language on the same subject, and contradict in one place what they have said in another. How they came to do so in this case, let others account; but let them account for this conduct of the apostles better than the greatest antient and modern divines have done. According to them, PETER was afraid of scandalizing the Jews. The Jews believed one God, had never heard of the son, nor holy ghost, and would have been revolted against christianity more than they were, if they had heard the man, whom they had seen crucified and buried, called God. PAUL was afraid of confirming the Gentiles in their polytheism, by preaching to them that CHRIST was God. The prudence of this method, by which the young in CHRIST were fed with

* ERAS. ubi supra.

milk, and those of riper years with solid food, for the whole mystery was revealed to them, has been extremely applauded by the most approved doctors of the church. I am unwilling, however, to take this for the reason of the conduct which the two apostles held. It favours too much of an outward and inward doctrine, the double dealing of pagan divines. It seems unworthy of men commissioned by CHRIST, inspired by the holy ghost, and able to enforce all they taught by miracles. It bears too near a resemblance to the unrighteous cunning of the jesuits, who are said to conceal the humiliation and passion of the saviour from their neophytes in China. But whatever reason the apostles had for it, which they who boast to be their successors have no right to determine, this was their conduct. The divinity of the Word grew by slow degrees into general belief among Christians: the divinity of the holy ghost by degrees still slower, and the coequality and consubstantiality of the three hypostases last of all. It fared with the son, in the first ages of christianity, much as it has fared since with the mother of God. Strong figurative expressions, which the apostles employed on some, which other doctors and saints employed on all occasions, and which were animated, doubtless, by the opposition of heathens, Jews and heretics, might contribute to exalt the son at the expence of the father's supremacy; as we know very certainly that by such means and on such motives as these the virgin acquired the title of *deipara*, to whom, if she is not a goddess avowed in express terms, divine honors are paid, and her intercession is implored with the father and the son. She is so plainly distinguished from both, that her intercession with either carries more propriety along with it, than the intercession of the son with the father; since these two consubstantial persons cannot be intelligibly distinguished from one another, and since it is of the utmost absurdity to advance that the same person intercedes with himself.

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WHAT has been said will appear evidently true, if we look into the anecdotes of the apostolical and following ages; or if we consult, with due discernment, those who have made them their study. Many of the primitive Christians, struck with religious awe, had a very reasonable scruple of using any appellations which were not contained in the scriptures. Many of them dared not give that of the true God to CHRIST before the nicaean council, nor several after it: and even the most orthodox, who scrupled not to call him very God of very God, begotten not made, when the council had pronounced, were still afraid to give this appellation to the holy ghost. Nay from the time that the macedonians were condemned soon after the arians, in another council, and even to this hour, the holy ghost has not been deemed God by generation, but by procession or spiration, that is, by the breathing of the father thro the son, or by the joint breathing of the father and the son; of which difference in an identity of nature we must be content to say what ERASMUS said, "*fatis est credere.*" In short, the orthodox doctrine of the trinity was never taught explicitly and positively by any divine authority. It was a vague opinion in heathen theology, which intended no more, perhaps, than to personify the wisdom and goodness of the supreme omnipotent Being. It has been a theological dispute in all ages among Christians, and the precise definition, according to which we are obliged to profess that we believe it, is founded on authority intirely human, and therefore undeniably fallible, imperial and ecclesiastical authority.

IF it be said, that the decisions in favor of the second and third hypostases have been made by councils, under the influence of the holy ghost, I shall only say, the question is begged ridiculously, when the influence of the holy ghost is supposed

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to prove the very point in dispute, his divinity; and that they, therefore, must have no small share of stupidity, of ignorance, and effrontery, who can insist on such an answer in this age. If it be said that the councils, which condemned the opinions of PAUL of Samosata, of SABELLIUS, of ARIUS, of PHOTINUS, and of other heretics, were guided, in the canons they made, and the anathemas they pronounced, by the unerring rule of scripture and uniform tradition; I shall only ask, what that scripture was? It was not the old Testament most surely; for there is no reason to allow that this Testament contains any notices of the trinity. Was it the new Testament? But we may defy the ablest chemist, that ever worked on those materials, to extract from them such a trinity, as that is which the christian church acknowledges. Passages that seem favorable to it, in part, may be, as they have been, produced. But then passages that are really inconsistent with it, in the whole, may be, as they have been, opposed to these: and the famous adjective *homousios* will not be found consecrated by scripture language; tho even this word does not signify very determinately what it has been applied to signify, if identity alone be the greatest, and similitude but a less unity, as the learned say*. As little grounds are there, in any part of the new Testament, even in the epistles of St. PAUL, for that impudent analysis which school divines and others have presumed to make of the Deity when they have talked so much nonsense about processions or emanations, persons, relations, notions, or terms, and the indwelling of these divine beings in one another. Certain figurative and vague expressions, of which there are many, have been picked up here and there, and have been dragged to countenance, if that was possible, such opinions. Theology has solemnised the reveries of enthusiasm in many instances. Let

* ——— *Consimilis essentia.* ERAS. *Identitas maxima est unitas: minor unitas est similitudo.* MART. Lexic.

me quote one that occurs immediately to me. IGNATIUS, disciple of St. JOHN, and bishop of Antioch, was brought before TRAJAN. The emperor inquired who he was. The saint answered, that he was one who had gained the friendship of the son of God, whom he carried about in his breast; as he might well do, since it was written, "I will dwell and walk in them." TRAJAN condemned this theophorus, or god-carrier, to be exposed to wild beasts at Rome. It is not necessary, that I should make any applications of this story to what I have said of enthusiasm and theology. Almost daily experience will make them for me.

NOT only the scriptures, which are come down to us, are very far from being vouchers of the trinity we profess to believe; but we may assure ourselves, that many of the scriptures and traditions, that obtained credit in the primitive ages of christianity, deposed against this trinity. Scriptures stood in opposition to scriptures, and tradition was not uniform. There were various gospels, and various epistles. All these were composed and altered, received and rejected, according to the different traditions, and the different systems of evangelical history and doctrine, that prevailed in different places, and among different persons. Thus, for instance, EPIPHANIUS owns, that SABELLIUS, who denied any distinction of persons in the godhead, took his doctrine from the gospel of the Egyptians; and the socinians of our age may boast, that they derive their pedigree from PAUL of Samosata, a great bishop of the third century. This century, the latter part of it especially, may be included in that character which ERASMUS gives of the fourth, and which will suit some others. "It was matter of ingenuity to be a Christian. Faith was rather in the writings than in the minds of men: and there were almost as many creeds as persons that professed christianity." The disputes concerning the

the divinity of CHRIST continued from the apostolical days to these, without any oecumenical decision. Then, indeed, there was one given by the council of Nicæa, which did not, however, decide, for a long time, nor even at last, by scripture and tradition, but by dint of persecution, and by the force of the secular arm.

IT has been said, that the greatest lights, which appeared in the christian church after the apostles, appeared in and about the fourth century, to the end of which century, at least, I think that we protestants concur, not very wisely, with you papists in reverencing fathers and councils. This judgment I shall not contradict, however, on the present occasion. But then we must make it more impartially than it is generally made. For instance, ATHANASIUS, GREGORY of Nazianze, CHRYSOSTOM, AMBROSIUS, AUGUSTIN, JEROM, were men of some parts and learning with extraordinary zeal. But so were ARIUS, EUSEBIUS of Nicomedia, the other EUSEBIUS of Caesarea, PHOTINUS, and MACEDONIUS. That such men as these should be divided, in their opinions concerning the trinity, cannot seem strange to any person who considers the nature of this doctrine, how it came into the church, how it grew up there, and how open to dispute it remained three hundred years after CHRIST. To believe three gods, three substances essentially different, or three subsistencies, as they were called by some, in the god-head, distinct and subordinate, the second to the first, and the third to the second, was not hard on the principles of heathen theology, in which such a trinity had been taught. But on the principles of jewish and christian theology, such a belief could not be admitted without manifest inconsistency; and it is not conceivable, that PHILO could reconcile PLATO and MOSES, when he talked of a second god. To save this inconsistency, and to avoid as much as possible all appearance of poly-

polytheism, several expedients were devised. Some, like *SABELLIUS* and his master *NOËTUS*, denied a distinction of persons in the god-head: so that God the father was, in the system of these heretics, as it is said, his own son, and God the son his own father; nay the father, the son, and the holy ghost suffered together in the passion and person of *CHRIST*, since they were but one person under three notions and appellations. Some, like *PAUL* of Samosata before the nicæan council, and *PHOTINUS* at that time, or immediately after it, maintained, that *JESUS* was called the son of God only on account of his sanctity; that the word descended on him, and then returned to the father; and that he did not commence the *CHRIST*, till he had been baptised in the Jordan.

As some were afraid of destroying the unity by the trinity, others were afraid of destroying the trinity by the unity. *ARIUS* thought to save both, by opposing the unitarians, who took away all distinction of persons, and the trinitarians, who held, that they were all equal. He made the distinction of persons as strong as he could, in contradiction to the former; and he was so far from acceding to the latter, that he denied the son to be either in rank or nature equal to the father, and the holy ghost to be so even to the son. The strict trinitarians, who became afterwards the sole orthodox, might hold the father to be alone eternal in this sense, "*quod careat origine;*" for "*duae personae ab ipso sunt, ipse à nullo.*" So *HILARIUS* expressed himself. But he and the rest of them believed an eternal generation of the son, and procession of the holy spirit, who had no beginning in time, tho they had an original in nature, the nature of the father. The arians, on the other hand, denied this community of nature, held the father alone to be the Supreme God, and the son to be the first of all creatures, but a created being. If this doctrine had become orthodox,

as it did very nearly, notwithstanding the decision of the nicaean council, the macedonians would have formed no sect. The divinity of the second hypostasis failing, that of the third would have fallen of course; which it is plain that ARIUS saw, when he urged nothing, and the nicaean council added nothing to the creed concerning the holy ghost. But the heretics of those days were so afraid of admitting any coequality with the Supreme Being, that they opposed the divinity of the third hypostasis, even after that of the second had been established. They were easily defeated. The same sort of proof as had served in one dispute served in the other: and tho the orthodox themselves distinguished generation from procession, yet the scripture joining the son and the holy ghost so often together, and CHRIST having ordered baptism to be administered in the name of the holy ghost as well as of the father and the son, the divinity of the holy ghost was confirmed, and these councils employed, very wisely, authority instead of argument. It was impossible, indeed, to shew, by any subtilty of logic, that this doctrine was not polytheistical; since the admission of three, or of three hundred gods, is equally so. There remained, therefore, nothing to be done, but to make a mystery where they found none: and having decreed, that there are three gods, to decree at the same time that there is but one; for so the athanasian doctrine must sound to every man who does not comprehend, and that is every man living, all the profound metaphysics that have been employed to distinguish away the apparent contradiction, unless he give his understanding up to a jargon of words, and can fancy he believes without any clear and distinct ideas.

IN this manner was the fundamental article of christianity imposed at first, without a plain and harmonical concurrence of the scriptures, or of tradition; tho such a concurrence, at least, was necessary to make it a revealed doctrine, and of di-
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vine obligation. It continues to be imposed still: and there is but too much reason to apprehend, that these theological attempts, to persuade mankind that three distinct persons in the godhead make but one God, have induced some to believe that there is no God at all: just as the pretensions of heathen philosophers, to knowledge really unattainable, induced several to assert, that there is no knowledge at all. If I was to write the history of arianism, it would be a part of my subject to shew, with how much difficulty the orthodox doctrine prevailed against it; how it revived often even under CONSTANTINE, much more under some of his successors; and was, at last, drowned in the blood of those who professed it. The athanasians and the arians were, in some respects, like the prafini and the veneti. The principal difference between the first was in the words they used, and between the last in the colors they wore. Neither the divines, nor the chariot drivers, were left to contend by themselves in the schools, and in the circus. Men, women, children, all the world, took part on one side or the other. The state was disordered by the circensian, and the church and the state both by the synodical contests. The civil power, which should have put both down, kept both up: and magistrates were as partial in one case, and as bigot in the other, as the vulgar. It were to be wished, that the comparison would hold in one circumstance more; for, in the reign of JUSTINIAN, the prafini and the veneti were both abolished.

SECTION XXX.

THE accounts we have of ATHANASIUS and of ARIUS are come to us in the writings of the former, and of those of the same party, and, therefore, may be deemed extremely partial, as they are extremely violent: and yet very little sagacity is necessary

cessary to discover, even in them, that the faint had less moderation, and not less ambition, than the heretic; that he had the spirit of intrigue, as much as EUSEBIUS of Nicomedia; and that he was one of those churchmen, whom pride and obstinacy of temper, under the name of zeal, render equally fit to persecute, and to bear persecution. The authority of the persons, who were at the head of this dispute, deserves, in a word, no consideration. But as the athanasian doctrine was confirmed by the first and all other councils, except a very few, it may be proper to inquire what regard these councils deserve. Now as to that, we may say boldly, because we can prove invincibly, that they deserve none; whether we judge of them analogously to those that have been held in our time, or near it, or whether we judge of these primitive councils by what we know of them from cotemporary, and the most orthodox authority.

THE first attempt to silence ARIUS, and to condemn his doctrine, was in a provincial council held at Alexandria. The letters OSIUS carried thither from CONSTANTINE seemed calculated rather to compose and reconcile, than to animate and condemn. This was certainly the aim of EUSEBIUS of Nicomedia in whom CONSTANTINE had much confidence, that of the emperor himself, and not improbably that of OSIUS too. This council had not been unanimous in their subscriptions, and nothing had been formally decided against ARIUS in it. But yet I think that the terms, which made so much noise in the nicæan council afterwards, were employed in this; the terms I mean of one nature or substance, and three persons or subsistencies; for it was grown to be a point of honor among most of the prelates and great men of the church, not to suffer that the founder of their religion should pass for any thing less than a God, even the Supreme God. This circumstance

might encourage ALEXANDER, the bishop of Alexandria, or rather his prompter ATHANASIUS; and ARIUS might think it a victory not to be soon defeated. He might think, that if his doctrine could stand the first brunt of opposition, it had as fair a chance of becoming orthodox as the other. Thus the dispute continued, and the disorders occasioned by it at Alexandria, where it was carried on with open violence. It spread; it gained the court. The influence of the clergy on private conscience, and the influence of private conscience on public tranquillity, began to shew themselves in a dangerous manner. CONSTANTINE saw, and apprehended the consequences. To prevent them, he resolved to call together a general council, and to preside in it; for so in effect he did. He flattered himself, that an ecclesiastical dispute would be best determined in an ecclesiastical assembly; and that a parcel of wrangling priests would be silenced by a synod representative of their whole order. He resolved to support their decrees, whatever they should be; about which it is plain enough, both by the language and the conduct he held, that he was much less solicitous, than he was to have any decision that might put an end to the dispute: for which purpose there is room to suspect, that he took, among others, one method, rather political than fair. I say, that there is room to suspect this. I dare say no more in opposition to that profusion of learning, which has been employed to defend the first nicaean council, and to prove the doctrine of the trinity that was settled in it to be an oecumenical decision. Mr. SELDEN published in latin, from an arabian manuscript, the antiquities of the church of Alexandria, written by EUTYCHIUS a famous patriarch of that church, in the ninth or tenth century. Now this author having given a list of these patriarchs, from HANARIAS a cobbler, who was the first of them, down to ALEXANDER, who was the eighteenth, relates, that CONSTANTINE summoned a council at Nicaea to determine the

dispute between this patriarch and ARIUS. The council consisted, he says, of two thousand and forty eight, whereof three hundred and eighteen were unanimous in declaring the divinity of CHRIST. The rest were divided by a great number of different opinions, "*sententiarum discrimine multiplici*;" they could not agree among themselves, but they all opposed the three hundred and eighteen. SELDEN produces two authorities more, to confirm that of EUTYCHIUS: the authority of JOSEPH, an egyptian presbyter, in his preface to a version of the councils into arabic, from antient christian monuments; and that of ISMAEL IBN ALI, a mahometan historian of reputation. They speak to the same effect: and by the concurrent testimony of all three the orthodox doctrine of the trinity was not that of the whole council, nor of a majority of the fathers. It seems to have been rather a profession of faith drawn up by the bishop of Jerusalem for the emperor, "*quam descriperat ei episc. Hierosolymit.*" the emperor had it read in the synod: three hundred and eighteen approved it out of the whole number: these were unanimous, the rest could agree in nothing, "*nec inter se concordēs, nec in fide suā.*" It was necessary to the design of CONSTANTINE, therefore, that the decision of a party in the council should pass for an oecumenical decision. On the whole, there is room for the suspicion I have mentioned; for if it should be objected, that these testimonies were given some centuries after the events happened, the same objection may be made to the most approved of greek and roman, jewish and christian, ecclesiastical and civil, sacred and profane antiquities, as Mr. SELDEN observes. EUTYCHIUS and JOSEPH were learned antiquaries, they were both orthodox. They wanted no materials, and their bias was strongly in favor of the nicaean council. EUTYCHIUS declares his approbation of the doctrine, and JOSEPH compares the three hundred and eighteen to the angels for their excellency, and to the stars for their

their splendor. The prejudices of these men were in favor of the doctrine and council, to both of which the mahometan historian must have been very indifferent: and, in this particular respect, his testimony may be deemed more credible than that either of ATHANASIUS, or of ARIUS, would be *.

IF CONSTANTINE flattered himself that this expedient would impose an uniform belief, the event shewed that he was much deceived. Such disputes are in their nature not determinable: and all attempts to determine them by dogmatical decisions are palliative remedies, of as bad consequence as no decision at all, and of worse when a submission to them is exacted by fraud, or force and violence. He was not yet acquainted with the pertinacious spirit of the clergy, who never give up a point which ambition or interest, enthusiasm or humor has made any of them advance; tho the peace of mankind and the lives of millions be at stake, in a quarrel that concerns neither natural religion nor even the essentials of revealed religion. Experience soon informed him better; for tho arianism was condemned, and the reverend fathers racked their brains to find out words that might establish not a similitude of the son to the father, but a sameness and consubstantiality with him, nay tho the chiefs of the sect seemed to submit to the authority of the council, like the bishops of Nicomedia and Caesarea, yet the arians were arians still. They seemed to submit to it; but in truth they submitted to that of the emperor, who would have a decision at any rate. The council made no converts. He made

* N. B. Since I have mentioned mahometan testimonies concerning the establishment of the trinitarian doctrine, may I not be allowed to observe, that this doctrine gives the mahometans as much reason to say that the revelation which MAHOMET published was necessary to establish the unity of the Supreme Being, in opposition to the polytheism which christianity had introduced, as Christians have to insist that the revelation which CHRIST published a few centuries before, was necessary to establish the unity of the Godhead against pagan polytheism?

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some hypocrites, who answered his purpose enough, by playing with words so dexterously as to adopt athanasian terms and retain arian opinions.

How should the authority of this council have any weight with those who thought like ARIUS, when it had none with those who thought like ATHANASIUS? And it had none even with the very best of these. Notwithstanding the zeal of St. GREGORY of Nazianze for the nicaean doctrine, it is evident that it had none with him. He maintained his opinions as independently of this council, to which they were conformable, as ARIUS could maintain his, that stood in direct opposition to it. How else can we account for what he says in a letter to PROCOPIUS? "I am determined, says the saint speaking of councils, "to avoid all such assemblies for the future." He declares that he "had not seen any council whose conclusion had been "happy, nor who had done more to cure than to increase and "aggravate evils." He speaks in other places to the same effect. But what he says in his book about bishops, to whose characters he was much less favorable, tho he was a bishop, than St. JEROM was to their order, and what he says in some of his orations or sermons, particularly in his farewell sermon, when he quitted his bishopric and retired to his solitude, go to the bottom of this matter, and shew how impossible it was that a council could be assembled in this famous fourth century, when so many important articles of faith were settled, that deserved any more regard than that of Trent. Men were raised to the episcopal dignity too easily, he says, without regard to their morals, and without any other merit than a great desire to be bishops. The ignorance of these, however, was the least evil; for there were others who became the "ludibria" may-games of life, indifferent about the faith, and ready to take any side, followers of the modes and customs of the times, not of the laws

laws of God. Lions to their inferiors, but fawning dogs to the great. He continues. When they have nothing else to boast, they boast of their very iniquity. This is that mystery of iniquity, which has overspread almost the whole world. He describes some of these pastors of the church indulging themselves in all the effeminate luxury of the age, and patrons of their own vices in the vices of others, giving others leave to sin that they might sin with greater licence themselves. He paints, in a sort of contrast with these, some who put off their bras for gold, who wore long beards, solemn countenances, and modest habits; whose heads were reclined, their walk and gesture as composed, as their mien and their voice soft and gentle, "*vocem pertenuem.*" They affected wisdom in all their outward air, but they had none in their minds, where it should principally reside. He compares the noise and confusion of their assemblies to those of the circus and the theater. He complains that they were iniquitous and absurd judges of things; "*iniqui et absurdi rerum judices.*" That names directed their hatred and their friendship; and that they did not blush to contradict themselves before the same auditory. In short, he congratulates himself that he should fit no longer among those cranes and geese. He leaves them to their thrones and tyranny. He bids them be insolent by themselves. He bids them adieu. "*Valete, pergite. Ego me ad Deum convertam,*" says the saint.

I MIGHT collect many more anecdotes like these from the writings of St. GREGORY, and might strengthen them too by other very orthodox authorities both before and after his time: by that of St. CYPRIAN, for instance, who wrote about a century before, as high an opinion as he entertained and propagated of bishops and of the whole ecclesiastical order; and by that of Sulpitius Severus, who wrote about a century after his time.

time. I will quote the last particularly, because it occurs to my memory as I am writing, and is very short. SULPITIUS SEVERUS, a zealous Christian of the fifth century, says, that in his time the best of the clergy*, those who did not addict

* THO I have not quoted St. CYPRIAN as particularly as I have quoted St. GREGORY of Nazianze, in the text, it may be proper to do so in this note, that you may see the character of the Christians, and even of the martyrs or confessors of the third century, as fully as you have seen that of the bishops and councils of the fourth century. St. CYPRIAN then speaks to this purpose in his book "de lapsis:" that the Christians of his age were given up to insatiable avarice; that the clergy were unsound in the faith, and licentious in their manners; that the men were effeminate, and disgraced their beards; that the women were coquet and lewd: for he accuses them here of prostituting their members*, that is, the members of CHRIST to the Gentiles; and, somewhere else, of lying with the christian priests. He says, that not only rash swearing, but perjury, insolent contempt of their superiors, poisonous malice, and obstinate hatred prevailed among the generality of Christians. He says, in particular, that many bishops, despising their holy function, were taken up with secular affairs; that they deserted their flocks, wandered into the provinces of others, traded, exercised usury, got fraudulently into the possession of estates to which they had no right, grew rich, and left the poor to starve. Such was the purity of an age famous for martyrs and confessors, and at the same time, for the greatest dissolution of manners. Nay, even confessors themselves fell into the same dissolution, and were guilty of the most abominable crimes, "fraudes, stupra, et adulteria," as the saint assures us in his famous and favorite book, "de unitate ecclesiae." He adds, that injustice, insolence, and perfidy might be learned of these confessors, and he cautions Christians against following their examples, "ne — mo — de confessoris moribus discat." Such was the clerical order; such were those martyrs or confessors, who obtained by their sufferings the greatest fame and authority in the church, at a time when many articles of faith were determined, and many more were on the point of being determined in the next century. As little credit as CYPRIAN may deserve in other cases, he deserves much in this; for he advances nothing improbable, nothing which must not have been of public notoriety when he wrote. It may seem strange, indeed, that so great a stickler as he was, for episcopal dignity and authority, and for the pre-eminence of the religious over the civil society, should transmit such a character of them to posterity. But this may be accounted for, perhaps, by assuming, for I grow very apt to assume, by conversing so much with ecclesiastical writers, who assume much oftener than they prove, that the saint applied to every bishop especially, and even to every priest, what modern divines applied to the pope, when they maintained, in the case of JULIUS the second, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, that no vices whatever could degrade this dignity, nor lessen this authority, unless there was a suspicion of heresy.

* Prostituere gentilibus membra CHRISTI — cum viris, iisque clericis concumbentium.

† Vid. CUPICCIARDIN, at the end of his ninth book.

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themselves to trade and usury, nor live in fine houses, nor attend to the improvement of their great estates, did something worse; that they waited for presents which were made to them, and disgraced the dignity of their ministry by a venal sanctity, and by the price they set on the exercise of it. These complaints were not arrows shot in the dark. All of them were published at the time. Some of the keenest were so in a sermon preached, before the whole court and people of Constantinople, in the church of Sancta Sophia. They are more than sufficient, therefore, to take away all that respect for councils, even for the nicæan, which has been founded so high by divines in all ages from the fourth downwards. They may serve likewise to take off our wonder at all the revolutions to which the orthodox doctrine of the trinity was exposed in an age when councils contradicted councils; when four or five hundred fathers of the church, for I think there were so many at Rimini, to say nothing of the council of Seleucia and others, could prevaricate about a doctrine so lately established, and when arianism could revive in this short space of time so much as to make one orthodox doctor * complain that, except a few, who were of his party you may be sure, all the rest of the ten provinces of Asia had not the true knowledge of God; and another †, that the world was surprised to find itself arian. “Miratus est orbis se esse arianum:” in short, when not only a great number of the “gens linigera,” the surplice-wearing crowd, but LIBERIUS the bishop of Rome, and that great column of orthodoxy, OSIUS, became fautors of the arians.

THE truth is, that whether laymen came into these synods or not, as St. GREGORY of Nazianzen complains bitterly that they did, the spirit of the court was the spirit that directed the determinations of councils. A succession of princes like VA-

* St. HILARY.

† St. JEROM.

LENS would have made the whole roman empire arian. A succession of princes like JULIAN might have made it pagan again. But a succession of princes like THEODOSIUS, like him, at least, in his religious character, banished arianism to the Goths, among whom it was at last extinguished by RECAREDUS in Spain, tho not by means as gentle as MARIANA would insinuate. If christianity was not propagated, as the religion of MAHOMET was, yet is it true to say that the system of christian theology, which has passed for the christian religion ever since, and has done so much hurt under that notion, was established by the sword, and by every kind of persecution.

THE orthodox opinion concerning the divinity of JESUS had two advantages over the other, which could not, as I think they did not, fail to produce great effects on all those who were zealously affected to christianity, or who desired, for any reason religious or political, to maintain the fervor of others. The first of these advantages was this. The orthodox belief gave a greater lustre to christianity. If the other came more nearly to the truth, and contradicted human reason less, yet this held out more of the marvellous: and the marvellous in matters of religion, that is presumed to be revealed, will impose and affect more than truth and reason. This was an advantage which the ablest of the fathers saw and improved: and therefore some of them always maintained it with a zeal, which would have been called heretical obstinacy, if they had not happened to be declared orthodox at last, against those who were willing to soften certain terms for the sake of peace and union; and they preferred to both these the keeping it intire. They succeeded. They took every other advantage that the course of events offered, or intrigue could procure; they improved them all by this, and they transmitted to posterity the orthodox doctrine after many struggles.

EVERY

EVERY able man saw and improved this advantage ; but the other was of a nature to make itself felt by every man who embraced christianity, for it proceeded from the pride of the human heart. That the Supreme Being should send an inferior being, who was for that reason called his son, to redeem mankind, and to give them a more perfect law, might be thought sufficient to satisfy divine justice, that required, according to them, a victim to be offered up, and even an honor more than sufficient done to creatures whom he had placed in the lowest rank of intelligent beings and moral agents. But that he should send his son, who was consubstantial with himself, in glory equal, in majesty coeternal, to fulfill such purposes as these, might be thought such a mark of favor and predilection as raised the sons of men to a much higher rank in the scale of being. Agreeably to this notion, we find that the angel in the apocalypse would not suffer St. JOHN to adore him, but declared himself a fellow-servant to the evangelist, and to all those who had the testimony of JESUS *. This respect was not shewn even to ABRAHAM, nor DANIEL, before the incarnation of CHRIST and the redemption of man, which is a mystery that the angels acknowledge and reverence †. They acknowledge it, and by that they acknowledge the dignity of the human nature. Thus far ERASMUS § carries the observation. But a right reverend archbishop || of our church carries it much farther, at the close of one of his sermons, where he observes very pathetically, that when the angels fell, God left them in their fallen state ; but when man fell, he sent his son, his only begotten, his dearly beloved son, to redeem the race by his sufferings and

Vide ne feceris, conservus tuus sum, et fratrum tuorum habentium testimonium JESU. Apoc. c. xix.

† — In quem desiderant angeli prospicere. St. PETER, 1 ep. c. i.

§ Cateches. 6.

|| TILLOTSON.

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passion.

passion. One of these divines raises us to an equality with the angels, the other to a superiority over them.

THERE are a multitude of other instances, ready to be brought, wherein fathers of the church and councils have imposed their own imaginations, and, perhaps, their mistakes, for revealed doctrines and divine truths, cursing and persecuting all those who dissented from them. These instances do not fall within the bounds I have set to myself. One of them, however, shall be just mentioned, because it has been the subject of much controversy, and the cause of much disorder in many countries, and is so at this time in France. Our countryman PELAGIUS appeared in the beginning of the fifth century. He was called the britannic serpent. His first antagonist was the surly, foul-mouthed controversialist JEROM: his greatest was AUSTIN. He was condemned by councils, and excommunicated by popes. But he was a great genius, a great divine, and a great philosopher; and if he was too much a stoician in his theology, he might have reproached those who opposed him, St. AUSTIN particularly, for mingling too much platonism in theirs. The principal objection to his doctrine was, that he ascribed too much to freewill, and nothing to grace. But it may be, that if he magnified too highly the sufficiency of one, he extenuated, rather than rejected, the use and efficacy of the other. The semi-pelagians at least, who dissented from the african bishop about predestination and grace, avoided the extreme into which PELAGIUS was understood to go, and maintained a necessary concurrence of freewill and grace; by which they avoided the absurd circular reasoning of those who make faith necessary to obtain grace, and grace necessary to produce faith. Man was to co-operate with God in their theology, and salvation was open to all who did so. This doctrine appears moderate, reasonable, and no way repugnant to the ideas of divine justice and
goodness;

goodness; whereas that of an absolute predestination, of election and reprobation, is scandalously so. A Jew accustomed to believe that God had chosen one nation to be his peculiarly, and exclusively of all others, might fall easily into an opinion, that a divine partiality for particular men had succeeded and taken the place of a divine partiality for a particular nation. But it has been, and it must be always, very impolitic in divines to fix such blasphemy on the great master of their artificial theology, if St. PAUL may be understood naturally and coherently in another sense. The apostle meant, as LOCKE † explains his meaning not very naturally perhaps, nor coherently, to assert the right which God has over all the nations of the earth, to raise and to favor one, to depress and reject another, according to his good pleasure and the impenetrable secrets of his providence. The Jews were rejected nationally, because they refused nationally to receive the Messiah. But those of them who received him were not included in this rejection. He had chosen them nationally, by virtue of his sovereignty. By virtue of the same, he had rejected them nationally likewise: but of personal election or rejection among those who embraced christianity, and so became the people of God instead of the Jews, the apostle had no intention to speak; if this expofitor guesses well. Thus indeed we must understand St. PAUL, to reconcile his doctrine a little to common sense *, to common equity,

† Vid. LOCKE in his paraph. and notes. 7.

* I SAY a little; because it may be observed, that when Mr. LOCKE asserts, on this occasion, that God proceeds to favor or reject nations arbitrarily, and by the right of his sovereignty alone, without any regard to their moral character, he prostitutes still, in some degree, that of God himself, and sacrifices a great deal too much to his respect for St. PAUL. In order to soften the absurdity of the apostle, who meant, as it appears plainly enough by the context, notwithstanding this ingenious device, just what CALVIN supposed him to mean, he destroys the great sanction of natural law, by which the virtues of societies tend necessarily to their prosperity, and the vices to their misery. Surely this doctrine of absolute predestination,

equity, and to such notions of the divine perfections as it would be much more impious to disbelieve, than to disbelieve him. But St. AUSTIN thought fit to understand him otherwise, and to believe the apostle according to his own interpretation of some passages, in defiance of common sense, common equity, and true theism. St. AUSTIN, whom other fathers and councils have followed, St. LUTHER, St. CALVIN, and St. JANSENIUS, have supposed a mystery where there is none, except in the style of a writer the least precise and clear that ever writ: and under pretence of explaining this mystery they have blasphemed, as St. PAUL himself did, if his sense was theirs. They have made a god, such as no one, who knows what he says when he says he believes a god, can acknowledge: and they impute to him, what they who believe a devil might impute with great propriety to that wicked spirit. This strange and impious doctrine has been transmitted to us from the fifth century, and tho disputed by some, is held in general to be orthodox. They who agree in little else, agree in this. Jansenists, lutherans, calvinists, and I am sorry to say that the divines of our church, who are better theists than to adopt so abominable a doctrine, are obliged to swear that they do, when they subscribe the thirty nine articles. Whether St. PAUL intended to teach it is made to some persons, but I confess not to my self, doubtful: that St. AUSTIN did, and that CHRIST did not, teach it, is certain; and yet this doctrine is one of those which theology has imposed for a christian doctrine, and by which the peace of the world has been disturbed in every age of the church. The truth is, that the church has been in every

nation, and that of unlimited passive obedience, are doctrines of the utmost absurdity, tho taught by this apostle; with this difference however, that one teaches us to submit to the arbitrary will of man, and the other, that God proceeds in his government, as human tyrants do, by arbitrary will. One is absurd: the other both absurd and impious.

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age an hydra, such a monster as the poets feign with many heads. All these heads hissed and barked and tore one another with fury. As fast as some were cut off, others sprouted out, and all the art and all the violence employed to create an apparent, could never create a real uniformity. The scene of christianity has been always a scene of dissention, of hatred, of persecution, and of blood.

SECTION XXXI.

THIS the atheists object, and Christians cannot deny. It is necessary, therefore, in order to justify the christian religion from this reproach, that we proceed to shew, by instances still stronger and more modern than those that have been already produced, how these disturbances, far from being the natural effects of religion, have proceeded solely from the constitution of the christian church, by which the peace of the world was laid, in the first ages of christianity, and still lies at the mercy of an order of men, who indulge their passions, and find their account several ways in disturbing it. We have proved, by undeniable evidence, that the whole body of the clergy, some few good and learned but not infallible men excepted, was ignorant, contentious, and profligate; and that councils were riotous assemblies, governed by intrigue, and celebrated with noise, confusion, and the greatest indecency. This was the state of the church in the fourth century: and it did not grow better, if it could not grow worse, afterwards. On the contrary, as learning and knowledge decreased in the latter empire, the impositions of ecclesiastical authority grew up to such an height, and were so confirmed in the course of nine centuries at least, that when learning revived, tho they were detected, they could not be exploded. A christian church, for I use the
word

word here in the improper but common acceptance of it, having been established in the empire by CONSTANTINE, as well as the christian religion, and both of them being supposed to have the same divine original, the power and discipline of one became as independent of the civil authority, as the doctrines of the other. According to this system, the clergy did not compose, in the empire nor out of it, wherever they were admitted, an order belonging to the state that admitted them; nor incorporated with it, as a member of the same body, independent on it as a subject. But they composed, more properly, an order distinct from it, the member of another body, the subject of another state. Churchmen were busy and troublesome inmates, in every family where they were received. They lived at the expence of it, they acquired government in it, and they had often an interest contrary to it. This was the case whilst the empire continued intire. The authority of the empire extended itself over many provinces and different states. So did that of the church. Even the conquerors of one were conquered by the other. Thus it happened in the West, if not in the East, and the Goths christianised, if the Saracens did not. When the empire was broken to pieces, the church remained intire, and the same ecclesiastical authority and discipline subsisted, where the same imperial authority and government were no longer acknowledged.

BUT it is necessary I should shew you, in some particulars, the truth of what is advanced, in general. ——— Whilst the Christians were a sect in the empire, they had private judicatures of their own, and they avoided the pagan tribunals, not only because they might think that it was below the dignity of saints to submit to be tried by them, but chiefly because it was prudent to conceal from unbelievers that Christians went to law with Christians, and that notwithstanding the sanctity of
their

their profession, the greatest crimes, even that of incest, were practised among them. That these were their reasons, is plain from what St. PAUL writes to the Corinthians in the fifth and sixth chapters of his first epistle. Tho absent in body, yet present with them in spirit, he judges the incestuous man, and delivers him over to Satan. Neither he, nor they, had any right to judge those who were out of the church. But they had a right to judge those who were in it, or they pretended to have it. Incest might have been punished by a pagan judge. But the incest of a Christian was to be punished by Christians, as far as they could punish by excommunicating and delivering over to the devil, but even thus in order to the salvation of the criminal; that the spirit may be saved in the day of our Lord JESUS, tho the flesh be destroyed. St. PAUL asks, "dare any of you, "having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, "that is, the Heathens, and not before the faints, that is, "your fellow Christians? Do you not know that the faints "shall judge the world? Know you not that we shall judge "angels?" After which, the apostle directs such as have any controversy together to take the meanest or most contemptible Christian for their judge, rather than to go to the tribunals of the impious. I understand the passage, as ERASMUS explains it, more agreeably to the drift of this whole argumentation than others. St. AUSTIN, he says, gave it the same sense; but I wonder this judicious critic did not observe how absurdly the faint reasoned, when he thought he was obliged, by this passage, to take upon himself the judgment of causes, because he was a bishop *. The reasoning of St. PAUL, however excellent in his time, could not be applicable in that of St. AUSTIN. The empire was then become Christian. The faints were judged by faints, in the public tribunals; and the apprehension of

* Divus AUGUSTINUS, in libro de opere monachorum, ait sese ex hoc PAULI loco cogi ad suscipienda judicia causarum, quum esset episcopus.

giving scandal to the heathen was a vain pretence, on many accounts.

THE truth is, that there was in those days, what has been seen very often since among the clergy, a sort of holy ambition, which proved as strong a motive in the hearts of good men transported by a mistaken zeal for the church, whose cause they confounded with the cause of religion, as that profane ambition, which meant nothing more than to advance, under pious pretences, the grandeur, wealth, and dominion of the religious over the civil society, was in the hearts of hypocrites and knaves. Innumerable such examples charity will incline us to believe that there have been, and without going farther than our own country and the last age, such LAUD seems to me to have been, an ambitious, tyrannical priest, but a pious man.

THESE two sorts of ambition helped one another mutually. Neither of them could have done so well alone; but both concurring, from very different motives, they soon established a church as independent on the state, as conjunctures well improved, and the characters of princes well managed, could make it. The emperors were mostly favorable to them, for one of these two reasons, and sometimes for both. As far as bigotry prevailed, they looked on the constitution of the church to be of the same divine original as the doctrines of it. They received the former on the faith of those from whom they received the latter. They had as good authority for one as for the other; and however the clergy might differ about points of doctrine, and some of discipline, the whole order agreed to inculcate the same respect for the hierarchy, or the holy principality, that is, for their own order. CHRIST had established his church on the model of the jewish. The near correspondence of ecclesiastical

cal polity, under both dispensations, shewed a sameness of original; and the near correspondence of the terrestrial hierarchy, with that which had been imagined in heaven, proved that it was divine. All this was shewish. It passes now. It might well pass then. But yet, I think, there was another reason for favoring the church, which the emperors felt more sensibly.

THE notion of a formal alliance between the church and the state, as between two independent distinct powers, is a very groundless and whimsical notion *. But a fraudulent or silent compact

* I HAVE heard of a sermon preached by one doctor SENIOR, a fellow of Trinity college in Cambridge before king CHARLES the second at Newmarket, in the days of passive obedience and non-resistance, and afterwards printed. His text was taken from the 14, 15, and 16th verses of the 4th chapter of Exodus, or some of them, wherein God directs MOSES to take AARON, the levite, because he knew that AARON could speak well to the people, and joins them together in commission, that they might assist one another mutually; that AARON might be instead of a mouth to MOSES, and that MOSES might be instead of God to AARON. What other applications the good doctor made of these texts I know not. But I am informed by one *, who has read the sermon, that he established on them a supposed alliance between the church and the state: or rather between the church and the king. By this alliance, the well-spoken levite was to instil passive obedience to the king into the minds of the people, and to insist on it, as on a law of God. The king, on the other hand, was to be the nursing father of the church, to support her authority, to preserve at least, if not increase, her immunities, and to keep her in the full possession of all the advantages she claimed. The church performed her part, and had a right, by virtue of this alliance, if the king did not perform his, to teach this doctrine no longer, and to resume her independency on the state and on him. This was the purport of the sermon at least: and Warburton took his hint, possibly, from it, and turned it to serve his purpose, that is, to lay down the same principles, and to banter mankind, if he could, by not drawing directly and avowedly from them the same conclusions. Doctor SENIOR's authority is, no doubt, as good in this case, as that of DEMARCA, or even of BOSSUET. The first, a time-serving ^b priest, interested, and a great flatterer, if ever there was one, and who made no scruple to explain away whatever he had found himself obliged to say in favor of the state. The latter

* Mr. LEWIS, who was himself of Trinity college.

^b When DEMARCA was made bishop of Conserans, and could not get his bulls dispatched, he explained away all he said to limit the papal power. He sent this book to INNOCENT the Xth, with a letter, whereby he retracted many things he had said, asked pardon for his errors, and promised for the future to support, with all his force, the prerogatives of the church of Rome. After this he writ "de singulari primatu PETRI," to flatter the same pope.

compact between princes and priests became very real, as soon as an ecclesiastical order was established. The emperors admitted and revered, or appeared to reverence the divine right of the clergy. The clergy, in return, made use of their influence over consciences to establish an opinion of a divine right in them. They were no longer deified after death, as they had been whilst the empire was pagan; but they were made sacred during their lives: and as bishops ordained one another and their subordinate priests, by the imposition of hands, so they ordained emperors and kings by crowning them and by anointing them with holy oil, which angels were sometimes employed to bring down from heaven. As they made their own office, so they made that of emperors and kings, independent of human institution, and the divine appointment was signified, or rather conveyed, in both cases by their ministry. By this alliance of the hierarchy and the monarchy, religion, that should support good government alone, was employed to support good or bad government alike, as it had been by St. PAUL: and the worst of men, and the greatest usurpers and tyrants, were not only passively obeyed, but served and courted by the most eminent saints of the church, when no ecclesiastical interest prevailed to alter their conduct; for then the most fulsome panegyrist became the most virulent libellers, and they, who had preached submission, preached rebellion.

SUCH infractions of this alliance, or compact, happened sometimes; but in general it held: and a joint usurpation on

was as wise, if not as cunning, as learned, and a much better man, tho not so much in the favor of Mr. WARBURTON, who gave them characters in his assuming style without knowing any thing of them, and who has the impertinence to pronounce of the greatest scholar, the greatest divine, and the greatest orator of his age, that he was * a good sensible man. He was all I have said of him: but he was an ecclesiastic, and a subject of France.

* Vid. the last edition of the alliance between church and state demonstrated.

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the liberties of mankind was the effect of it. We have observed already, that CONSTANTINE meant to govern the christian flocks by their pastors. Neither he, nor his successors, perceived, that the imperial and kingly power might be controuled in time by the very expedient by which they hoped to govern more absolutely. Neither he, nor they, apprehended soon enough, that if a degree of ecclesiastical power was necessary to maintain religion, religion might become an expedient to render this power exorbitant. The clergy employed it, to serve the ambition of princes. Why should they not employ it, to serve more effectually their own? All this happened in time, and was brought about by slow but sure degrees. The church claimed at first ecclesiastical jurisdiction, as it was called, alone; cognizance of sins against the laws of God, rather than of crimes against the laws of civil societies, and of matters purely spiritual that related to the consciences of men, and that the civil power could not properly judge. But then among these objects of ecclesiastical jurisdiction, discipline and manners, two very vague appellations, and liable to be much extended, were contained. Sins were multiplied by variety of doctrines; and as they were punished by discipline, they were multiplied too by that. Things that could not be deemed spiritual were hawled in as things appertaining to spirituals. Thus ecclesiastical jurisdiction was extended: and the emperors confirmed it, not only by referring such matters to the judgment of synods and spiritual courts, but by their positive edicts.

THAT they were indifferent enough about doctrines, and more solicitous to establish uniformity than orthodoxy, may be well suspected of several. CONSTANTINE favored the nicaean doctrine, in hopes to establish uniformity by it. But when he found that it received different interpretations, and that ATHANASIUS was a principal obstacle to all terms of accommodati-

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on, he shewed favor to the other. He persecuted ATHANASIVS, he hearkened more than ever to EUSEBIUS of Nicomedia, and when he came to die, he died in that city, a little after he had been baptised by EUSEBIUS. Some of your writers, indeed, would persuade, that he was baptised at Rome by SYLVESTER, in order to give some color to that impudent forgery of his donation to that pope and the roman church. But how should they persuade, by fabulous traditions, and such anachronisms as even Jews would blush to own, against the tenor of authentic history, and the monuments of the age; for such we must repute the dates of his edicts to be in this case? I think that his successors, who appear the most attached to reigning orthodox opinions, might act on the same principle. They discovered, and they might have discovered sooner, that these theological disputes are indeterminable in their nature. They imagined, and they might well imagine after what they had seen, tho the notion be not absolutely true, that tranquility could not be preserved in the state without uniformity in religion. To procure this uniformity, therefore, councils provincial and general were called and held on every occasion. They were called and held, the general councils at least were so, by the imperial authority, and not by that of the patriarch of Rome, nor that of the patriarch of Constantinople, in the first ages after the establishment of christianity. They were composed, no doubt, much like those that have been above described, that is, very scandalously; and they would have decreed to little purpose, if their authority had stood alone. But that of the emperors bore them out. The emperors wanted only a pretence to force an uniform submission to some decision or other; and their authority was just sufficient for that purpose in vulgar prejudice. Thus the allied powers, the hierarchy and the monarchy, have acted ever since. These farces were renewed in every age: in every age their consequences

quences were more or less tragical; and this is the authority to which the christian world has been resigned in matters of religion.

SECTION XXXII.

THE religious society rose very fast, by such means as these, to great pre-eminence over the civil, in the empire, and to an influence over private consciences, that rendered their disputes, sometimes about trifling ceremonies, and sometimes about unintelligible speculations, a new source of dissention among mankind, unknown to the pagan world, and even greater than any of those that provoke the most barbarous nations to excesses of cruelty. But there were other means, which encreased this pre-eminence and influence vastly, and enabled the church to do still greater mischief to the state. One of these means we may reckon to have been the improvement that was made in the hierarchical system. Christianity was a numerous sect before CONSTANTINE, or CONSTANTINE would have been a Christian no more than LICINIUS. But the same order and the same polity, which were established afterwards, could not be established either in particular churches, or in the church in general, whilst it was a sect. There was a sort of mixed government, aristocratical and democratical, in the churches, and some of these might correspond and convene together. But in the first case, there was not power sufficient to enforce subordination, nor facility, nor safety enough in the second, whilst these churches were dispersed far and wide under heathen governments. Presbyters or elders ruled the churches. They were all bishops, that is, overseers, alike, and coequal in rank and power, till factions arising, one presbyter was appointed by the apostles, or chosen by the faithful, to govern the rest, and was styled the

the bishop "*eminentiae gratiâ*." Pre-eminence and subordination were established, for much the same reason, even among these superior presbyters or bishops. When metropolitans or arch-bishops began to be known in the church is not very certain. But I suppose it is certain, that the bishop of a church established in any metropolis presided in every assembly over the other presbyters of the province, even before the reign of CONSTANTINE. Thus you see, that the democratical form of church government, which obtained in the days of the apostles, when every one was a teacher that would be so, and when they themselves had no other authority among the faithful than that of first preachers of the gospel and first founders of churches, grew early to be aristocratical. You see, likewise, how early this form began to tend to the monarchical. It tended to it in every succeeding age more and more. As CONSTANTINE changed the religion, he made great changes in the constitution of the empire, in the military order, and in the civil administration. He created new and higher offices in the state. So did the clergy in the church. He constituted vicars over the governors of provinces. So primates were raised above metropolitans. The *praefecti praetorio* had a rank above the vicars. So patriarchs had, whenever they got it, over primates. The ecclesiastical power rose up from a rough and broad basis to the form of a pyramid; and if the last stone was not laid to crown the fabric, it was attempted to be laid. In plain terms, if there had been an uninterrupted succession of popes, like GREGORY the seventh, during a century, the West might have seen as well as the East a whimsical but real empire founded on superstition. A reputed vicar of God, the pope, might have governed here as absolutely, as a reputed divinity, the dairo, did there. But the fates of the dairo and the pope have been much alike. The former is deposed, confined, and still adored. The latter has been much degraded, if not deposed.

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His power is confined, if not his person; and tho his thunder be heard no longer, he maintains the pageantry of an ecclesiastical JUPITER.

It may appear matter of wonder, that a body of men as ignorant and as profligate as that of the clergy shewed itself to be, as soon as it figured in the empire, should be able to assume, under pretence of religion, a power equally exorbitant in the exercise, and mischievous in the consequences. But our wonder will cease, if we consider another of the means that were employed to bring this about. Superstition took the place of religion, and faith of morality. To profess a belief of what no man understood, and to perform all the external duties which the church required, passed, in those days, and I apprehend they do so still among many, for the sum of religion. The athanasian creed had little intention to make better men, and better citizens. The eight or nine creeds of the arians had probably as little; and yet an assent to these creeds would have covered a multitude of sins, better than charity: and the vilest of men would have had a fairer chance for salvation, in either of these sects, for the merit of believing, than the most virtuous of men, out of it, for the merit of acting all their lives as such. A religion, which consisted in the profession of an implicit belief, and in the practice of certain external duties, was much more grateful to the generality of men, than a spiritual religion that shewed itself outwardly by a strict practice of all the duties of public and private morality. As soon, therefore, as theology and superstition had introduced such a religion in the place of original christianity, the one passed easily for the other; the inclinations of mankind helped the deception; the vices of the laity were indulged, the vices of the clergy were covered, by it. The solemn manner in which these men officiated imposed on the vulgar of all ranks, who were seduced by the eye, and led

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by the ear. The very habits of bishops and priests contributed much to the same purposes, as St. GREGORY of Nazianzen observes in one of the discourses to which I referred above. The venerable ephod, the cassock of SAMUEL, the humble walking staff, and those ornaments of the head that denoted virginity*.

BUT farther. Lest all this should not be sufficient to keep up the false notions of religion, which could alone maintain a profligate clergy in the pre-eminence and authority they had usurped, another expedient was employed. It was of such a nature, that it might have been thought more proper to expose and aggravate, by the contrast it created, than to conceal and atone for the general turpitude of the clergy. But the promoters of it knew what they did. They trusted to the absurdity of mankind, and they followed, with confidence and success, the example set them by the clergy of the most antient nations. The order of the magi, for instance, was not less ambitious, nor more virtuous probably, than they were: and the same might be presumed of other ecclesiastical orders that had flourished in the East. But in all these orders, there had been particular men, and sects of men, who retired from the world, and dedicated themselves to lives of seeming sanctity and real austerity, by which they maintained a reverence for the grossest superstitions, and for the much larger part of the same ecclesiastical body who remained in the world, and were not exempt from the corruptions of it. PYTHAGORAS had imitated these institutions; and the Jews, who had borrowed much from the Greeks after ALEXANDER's expedition had brought them acquainted, seemed to have copied in the same instance after him. If the sadducees might be said to resemble the epicureans, and the pharisees the stoicians, sure I am that a nearer resemblance might be

* Cernimus venerandam ephodum, et SAMUELIS diploidem, scipionem humilem, capitis ornamenta virginibus peculiaria, &c.

found

found between the effenes and the disciples of PYTHAGORAS, who were behind the curtain, and who lived in community. The effenes confined themselves to Palestine; but the therapeutae were a sort of hellenist effenes, who dispersed themselves, as the Christians had done, into Greece and other countries, but principally into Egypt; for which reason one of the names was better known to JOSEPHUS, and the other to PHILO. Nothing can be more admirable than the sanctity and austerity of this sect, whether appearing in the world or hid in their solitudes. EUSEBIUS, whom an improbability seldom stopped, would have made Christians of them; as several antient and modern divines have endeavoured to do after him, but to no purpose. Christianity was little spread, scarce known, and scarce distinguished from judaism, when PHILO gave an account of this sect. But this sect had been long in fulness of fame, before it was imitated by Christians; for it had been so even before christianity.

THE decian and other persecutions first, religious melancholy and even a desire of fame afterwards, might carry many Christians to lead an anchoritic life, as PAUL and ANTHONY did in the deserts of Egypt, about whom ATHANASIUS and JEROM have published so many stupid lies. The cenobitic life began much about their time; for it was in the fourth century that BASIL instituted his order. But this institution did not come into great vogue, till the want of it was more felt in the very beginning of the sixth century. It was then that BENEDICT founded his order in Italy, from which so many others sprouted up, like the suckers of a great tree. Monastic institutions multiplied in every age, in the West particularly; for they grew more and more necessary, in every age, to the church, as the ecclesiastical order in general gave more and more scandal, and as the usurpations of the roman pontiffs, who made great ad-

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vances towards a spiritual monarchy, increased. Enthusiasm, abetted and conducted by the policy of the church, was a principal motive to such establishments: and indeed no other motive could have filled these numerous societies. The fervor in every one was great at first: and they renewed, in the opinion of mankind, that simplicity, that innocence, that zeal, and that devout austerity, by which primitive Christians were supposed to have distinguished themselves. But this fervor soon grew cool, and luxury, and vices of all kinds, as prevalent in these religious societies, as in any other parts of the christian church. The expedient however, that served to maintain ecclesiastical pre-eminence and authority, did not fail for this. The secular clergy had been provided for amply, that they might have the means and encouragements necessary to make them answer the ends of their institution, and that no excuse might be left them for neglecting these ends. But when they turned into scandal what was designed for edification, and forfeited, therefore, their right to all they enjoyed by the beneficence of the faithful; when they should have been reformed, or their revenues should have been given to others, instead of this they kept their possessions tho they broke their conventions with the public, and the public was at the expence of enriching another clergy. Just so again, and as fast as this other clergy grew corrupt, nothing was taken from them; but new orders of the same kind were founded to screen them and the secular clergy both, or to atone for the iniquity of both: and that eternal bubble, the laity, paid the whole immense and growing charge.

Thus have things continued to the present age: and the religious society, among Christians, has imitated successfully the policy of religious societies that flourished, above three thousand years ago, in the pagan world. You must not be surpris-
ed

ed at this assertion. It is easy to shew, that the vast variety of religions, which prevail in the world, are derived ultimately from a few general principles, common to all men, because they arise from the common fund of human nature: and that in consequence of this, many rites and ceremonies, many institutions and orders, must descend, sometimes with more and sometimes with less affinity, to the latest posterity. They descend, like torrents of water, which are not the same to the sight nor taste, when the length of their course, the soils thro which they have passed, and the mixture of other streams, have purified some, and rendered others more foul. But they descend from the same springs: and like those mighty rivers which preserve the freshness of their waters very far into the sea, they preserve much of their original character, as they roll along through the vast ocean of time. Turn your eyes even at this day to the East. You will discover rites, ceremonies, institutions, and orders of men, wherever the devastations of barbarous nations have not destroyed the people as well as the religions of countries, much like to those which prevailed in the same countries in the remotest antiquity. The bramins have a sort of allegorical polytheism; as I suppose that their predecessors the brachmans had. They hold the prae-existence and transmigration of souls; they abstain from flesh; they retain the notions of pollution and purification; they wash away sins in the waters of the Ganges; they pretend to abstract themselves from sense, and to contemplate the Supreme Being by intense meditation. The brachmans were possibly a sect of gymnosophists: and there are at this time joghies and faquirs in the East, who carry their austerity and penance to such surprising excess, that the carthusian monks, or those of La Trappe, compared with them, may pass for sects of luxurious sybarites. Should any of these reverend fathers hear it said, that they are descended from antient, and outdone by modern idolaters, they would be extremely scandalised:

scandalised : and yet nothing is more true. It is as true, as it is to say that they serve the same purposes.

WHILST the eyes of mankind were dazzled by these appearances of sanctity which some few of the religious society, who devoted themselves without knowing that they did so for the rest, held forth, the rest pursued the designs of their ambition with great art, and uninterrupted perseverance. They could not have been achieved with less of either ; for even contrary systems were made to co-operate in promoting them, poverty and riches, humility and ostentation, the want and the excess of authority and power. This I mean. The secular clergy not only screened themselves behind the apparent sanctity of the regular, which cast a lustre on the whole church ; they not only imposed by the religious merit of others, but they accustomed the world by degrees to reverence them for the wealth and dignities they enjoyed, and for the pomp and magnificence with which they affected to appear. As the true spirit of religion decayed, and as that of superstition took its place, this was more easily brought about : and he, who imagined that he paid honor to a successor of the apostles, paid it in reality to the patriarch, the primate, or the metropolitan ; dignities which ecclesiastical ambition had assumed, on the model of those which had been created in the state.

THE eastern church rose by much the same means, but could never rise to the same power, as that of the West. Many reasons of this difference will occur to those, who are conversant in the history of the church, and in that of the latter empire. I shall insist on one, which was the principal, and in the consequences of which the western provinces were most concerned in those days, as they were alone concerned afterwards. The reason is this. The opportunities, of advancing early and succefs-

successfully towards a monarchical form of government, were much more favorable in the West than in the East. The patriarchs had a sort of tetrarchical, or ethnarchical authority, for I suppose it is not easy to distinguish them, and besides those ensigns of honor, which primates and metropolitans affected to have as well as they, the patriarchs assumed one which had belonged to the emperors solely, and enjoyed it in common with them; that I mean of lights or fires carried in solemn pomp before them. From the institution of this dignity there were three patriarchs, the patriarchs of Rome, of Antioch, and of Alexandria. He of Rome remained alone in the West; but in the East two others were added, a patriarch of Constantinople, and last of all a patriarch of Jerusalem. It is said that the bishop of Rome, Leo the first, opposed strenuously the erection of this patriarchate. If he did so, altho it was evidently an advantage to him that the East should be divided into many patriarchates, whilst he alone was patriarch in the West, and might hope to be so of the West and the East too, we may venture to say that he did not judge of his true interest as nicely as popes have done generally, and as it became him to do in particular, who was thought to join in his conduct the character of the fox to the character, as well as name, of the lion.

GREGORY the first, and the great as he is called, saw the advantage of being sole patriarch in the West, whilst there were four bishops decorated with the same title in the East: and he resolved to improve it. If this rank had been given on a religious account, it ought to have been given surely, in the first place, to the bishop of Jerusalem; since christianity began there, and was propagated originally from thence; tho other churches, those of Antioch, of Alexandria, and of Rome particularly, might seem to be co-aeval with it. But these were great cities and had great dependences, whilst Jerusalem lay in ashes;
from

from which miserable state she never arose to her former grandeur, and whilst Byzantium was neither an imperial nor a christian city. The pre-eminence of bishops was determined, in some measure, by the pre-eminence of cities, so that when patriarchs were made, tho these were, as bishops had been, equal in authority, and tho their authority was confined to their patriarchates, and never, I believe, very well ascertained even in them; yet they might contend for a priority of rank among themselves, and he who held the first rank among them, would hold it of course in the whole church. That the pope of Rome, which was the sole imperial city during the first three hundred years of the christian aera, should claim this priority, and that other patriarchs should acquiesce in it, cannot be thought extraordinary, if it should be thought true. They might allow him this primacy, for ought I know. But if they did, they gave him nothing more than a feather to adorn his mitre. Not only other patriarchs were styled by the same pompous titles that were given to him, but bishops too. Popes were contradicted, reprov'd, censured, even by these; and nothing can be more evident than this, that they reputed the roman bishop to be, with regard to them, the first among equals, "primus inter pares" only: that is, he was bishop of the first see, "primae sedis," and had on that account a precedence, or nominal primacy. This indeed was little of itself, but it might lead to more. A seeming primacy might give one that was real: and as titles are often derived from powers, power might be derived in time from this empty title.

THUS the bishops of Rome, whilst they were only bishops, thought; and were, therefore, fond of a title, empty as it was, that could not be contested with them, nor was contested, till Constantinople was built, and the seat of the empire translated thither. Then it became disputable indeed which was the first see:

see: and if the title of oecumenical patriarch, which began to steal into use, as most ecclesiastical usurpations have done, and as, I believe, this did, tho LEO the first is said to have refused it, could have been obtained by him of Constantinople, all the advantages might have been lost to him of Rome, which he expected to reap with this title from his growing primacy. This GREGORY the first saw, and he neglected nothing to prevent it. Well may it be said that he neglected, and that he stuck at nothing to prevent it, when we consider the conduct he held towards PHOCAS. MAURITIUS was a good prince. GREGORY, the most fawning, the most canting, and the most ambitious of priests, had extolled his charity and his piety too even when he beseeched the emperor to revoke an edict he had made, and which the good bishop had executed, however, in the mean time. JOHN, the patriarch of Constantinople, passed for a pious prelate, and was of such remarkable austerity, that he acquired the name of the faster. PHOCAS was the most vicious and cruel of men. But JOHN assumed the title of oecumenical patriarch: and MAURITIUS favored his pretensions. These were irremissible crimes in both; whilst the merit of favoring the ambitious humility of GREGORY, who affected to take no higher title than that of servant of the servants of God, was sufficient to make a TRAJAN of PHOCAS. This inhuman usurper, not content to put the empress, her three daughters, and almost all the relations and friends of MAURITIUS, to death, caused the five sons of his master to be murdered* in his presence, and under the eyes of their father; who was afterwards stretched out on the bodies of these innocents, and made a sacrifice, on that bleeding altar, to the same unrelenting cruelty. This scene of horror communicated none to GREGORY. The revolution, however brought about, gave him, his see at least, the victory over his rival: and he thanked God, most impi-

* MAIME. hist. du pont. de St. GREG.

ously, for it. The three letters which he wrote on this occasion to PHOCAS and LEONTIA, in all the prostitution of flattery, the solemn reception that he gave their images, which he placed in the oratory of the martyr CAESARIUS, and the prayers which the senate and clergy offered up for the prosperity of these monsters, in a public thanksgiving, by his direction, are monuments of the infamous methods by which it was thought lawful to promote the designs of ecclesiastical ambition. GREGORY's design succeeded; for PHOCAS gave, tho not to him, yet to his successors, the title he would not suffer the fasting prelate to assume. But GREGORY's memory must be abhorred by every honest mind: and the impudence of your church, forgive the expression, in making this man a saint, nor the folly of many in ours who speak of him as such, cannot be attoned for by the modesty that has been shewn in preferring scarce any other pope to the same rank since that time.

THE roman pontiffs had more opportunities, and therefore greater encouragement than any others, to promote these designs both at home and abroad. There were no patriarchs in the West to share with them the lustre of this dignity. In a few generations after CONSTANTINE, the empire of the West, which he had weakened, fell into ruins: and as there was no emperor in Italy after the deposition of AUGUSTULUS by ODOACER, so the remains of the imperial dignity in that country were not sufficient to overshadow theirs; especially after they founded their primacy no longer on the authority of an imperial rescript, but on a supposed divine institution. On the contrary, theirs increased as that of the emperors died away. Italy lay exposed to the invasions of barbarous nations. So did Gaul, and Britain, and the other provinces. Of all these misfortunes, the roman pontiffs made their profit. The pre-eminence they had acquired, and much more their industry, their perseverance, and

and their skill, made them in some sort, and on several occasions, the protectors of Italy, and of Rome especially. About the middle of the fifth century, *ATTILA* took *Aquileia*, *Pavia*, and *Milan*, ravaged all the country we call *Lombardy*, and threatened even *Rome*. The bishop of this city went at the head of an embassy to him: and tho the fabulous circumstances, that have been invented to give a miraculous appearance to the success of the legation, deserve our contempt; yet the legation had success in appearance, since *ATTILA*, for some reason or other, left Italy: and *Rome* was delivered from her fears. In the same pontificate, *GENSERIC*, the Vandal, surprised and took *Rome* at the solicitation of *EUDOXIA*, who desired to revenge the death of one husband and to get rid of another. The pope, *LEO*, had not the same success on this occasion as on the former *. The arian was not so complaisant as the pagan. *Rome* was pillaged fourteen days together. But some of the churches were saved, the town was not burned, nor the people put to the sword: and all that happened less than had been apprehended was imputed to the intercession of *LEO*.

THE history of this fifth century, and of the three or four that follow, is extremely confused and dark: and yet we are able to discern a most surprising system of political conduct, founded on the same principles, and carried on thro the whole time, till that spiritual tyranny, which had done so much mischief under an aristocratical form before, and has made such havoc in the world since under the monarchical form, was fully established. I touch the subject lightly, but I must say something more upon it.

* *MAIMB. hist. du pont. de St. LEON.*

SECTION XXXIII.

THE bishops of Rome had, besides the advantages they procured to themselves, and those that time and accidents put into their hands, one original advantage which has been hinted at already, of the greatest importance to them at Rome, and every where else, from an habitual respect, that the subjects of the empire retained, and the conquerors of the western provinces contracted, for the antient capital of the empire. It was natural for the Romans, when Rome became christian, to desire, that their bishop should represent the sovereign pontiff, who had resided among them whilst they were heathens. Laical vanity might, and ecclesiastical ambition could not fail to desire this. The consent of both made all the papal usurpations easy: and the people in general liked better a voluntary subjection, for such it was at first, to their bishops, than a forced subjection to prefects or any other imperial officers. The popes took the pomp and state of the pontifex maximus, before they assumed the title: and the contests about their elections, bloody contests in the streets and in the churches too, shewed what an object of ambition the bishopric of Rome was, even before the destruction of the western empire. These pontiffs, in truth, derived their sovereignty more properly from NUMA than from CHRIST: and pagan prejudices had some effect, even when the world was become christian, in creating a respect for them. The title of oecumenical bishop extended, and realised, in some instances, their claims. But the title of bishops of the eternal city helped the imposition. This imposition of the popes did not prevail much among the arians; because of their opposition to arianism, and therefore, as they persecuted this sect, wherever they had power to do it, they were obsequious enough to arian princes, under whom they had not this power: an example whereof might be taken from the

the embassy of one of these popes, whose name I do not remember, and whom THEODORIC sent to JUSTIN to persuade that emperor to shew more indulgence to the arians in his dominions, lest the gothic king should take reprisals on the orthodox in the West. But wherever orthodoxy prevailed, these titles procured a great regard to the see of Rome, and an influence which the popes improved directly and indirectly, to confirm their authority where it was acknowledged, and to propagate it, under the notion of conversions to christianity, where it was not acknowledged.

THIS calls to my mind the mission, that GREGORY, the same I have spoken of already, sent into Britain. This example will shew what that christianity was which the popes propagated; and how the grossest frauds, that iniquity ever invented, or impudence imposed, were established under that venerable name. BRUNEAULT, queen of France, must pass for one of the worst women that ever lived; if the general consent of historians can establish a character. GREGORY held an intimate correspondence with this woman: and this intimacy with her, and with PHOCAS, is such a brand on his memory, that we might be surpris'd to find his name in the calendar of your saints, if we did not find that of another GREGORY, GREGORY the seventh, there. BRUNEAULT was extremely liberal to the ecclesiastical order. She built churches, founded convents, and had a great devotion to relics. So much liberality, and so much superstition, might have made a saint even of her too, notwithstanding her crimes: and she might have stood over your altars in company with her panegyrist. This pious queen contributed not only to maintain the authority of the bishop of Rome in France, where it was respected already, but to propagate it, where it was not yet known; for it is plain, that the conversion of the Saxons to papal christianity

stianity was concerted with her. The more immediate instrument of this conversion indeed was BERTHE daughter of CHARIBERT king of France, and wife of ETHELBERT king of the fourth Saxons. She protected, she introduced the missionaries: and the king and his subjects were converted to the roman religion.

I do not speak improperly, when I say the roman religion: for altho GREGORY says, in a letter to BRUNEHULT, only this, that "he heard the church of England had a mind to become christian *;" yet is it certain, that the Saxons had the knowledge of christianity, as it was taught in the first ages, before AUSTIN and his monks came to preach it as it had been modelled, and, to speak plainly, corrupted in the church of Rome and the other christian churches. The Britons had been converted long before to the christian religion: and the Saxons had a knowledge of it from them. On this supposition we may account, and on any other it is impossible to account, for the obstinate adherence of the Saxons, after their supposed conversion by AUSTIN, to the asiatic and most ancient rule of celebrating easter, which had been changed in the church of Rome, and which AUSTIN opposed. The Britons had been driven into a remote corner of the world: and the Saxons were a greater barrier than the sea itself between them and the continent. They retained, therefore, their religion as they had received it, and knew nothing of the additions that had been made to it since the time of their conversion, nor particularly any thing of the roman bishop's pretensions to a supremacy. As they knew, so they might, and so I believe they did, teach the Saxons: and it was neither hard for one to teach, nor for the other to learn, christianity, in a simplicity

* Indicamus ad nos pervenisse ecclesiam anglicanam velle fieri christianam. lib. 5. ep. 59.

that

that came nearer to that wherein CHRIST had taught it to the poor and the ignorant. But this was to be unlearned: and the sole object of AUSTIN's mission was to teach both Britons and Saxons a new-fangled christianity, and to inspire them with a foolish respect for superstitious usages, and with an abject submission to the see of Rome. That these were the points he labored, appears from all we know of the conduct he held, from his disputes with the Britons, from the instructions he asked, and from those which the pope gave him. The height to which he carried his legatine power, and the insolence with which he treated the british bishops, demonstrate the spirit in which he came, and the purpose he came for. The declaration, that these bishops sent him, or the abbot of Bangor by their direction, was modest but firm. They declared themselves subject to the church of God, and to the pope of Rome. But how? As they were to every godly Christian, &c. Other obedience than this, they say to AUSTIN, that they do not know to be due to him whom he called pope: and that they were under the government of the bishop of Caerleon upon Uske, &c.

THE Britons stood out against the usurpations of the popes many centuries. But the Saxons soon crouched under them. The Saxons were a fierce and a free, but they were an ignorant people: and therefore false notions of christian institution were easily imposed upon them. From notions thus imposed, the clergy derived pretensions to such powers, such immunities, and such pre-eminence of rank and dignity, as raised the bishops to an equality with princes and kings in some respects, and to a superiority over them in as many as were, or could be made to seem relative to religion; for in these "omnibus dignitatibus praeferunt" was a maxim which they had the front to avow, and which the civil society were stupid enough to admit.

mit. What they pretended to belong to them, they assumed: and what they assumed they justified by canons, that is, by laws of their own making. The ecclesiastical roman yoke was so well fixed on the necks of the Saxons, that it grew more and more confirmed, till the Normans came in, and then it did not become lighter; for they brought the same prejudices along with them*: so that our island was a province, and a farm, to the court of Rome near five hundred years longer. How easy soever it would be to descend into all these particulars, I should find it tedious: and you know that I never engaged to write treatises, nor any thing more than essays; if my part in our occasional conversations, extended on paper, can deserve even that name. But since I mentioned the few false notions, concerning christian institution, that imposed on the Saxons, and since I think the usurpations of the religious society have been founded every where else on the same, I will endeavor to expose them to you in a few words, to shew you how the first deception arose in the whole christian commonwealth, and how the monarchical tyranny of the bishop of Rome was grafted on it.

SECTION XXXIV.

I AM not a disciple of HOBBS, but I embrace truth wherever I find it, or whoever shews it to me: and he shews it to me, I think, when he maintains, that the present church of CHRIST, by which we mean in this place the whole body of Christians, is not the kingdom of CHRIST. This opinion, however, that it is so, grew early into belief, and will be supported as long as that order of men can support it, who have assumed, under pretence of being appointed to govern and administer in it, an

* Vid. BACON's treatise from SELDEN's notes,

establisht

establishment distinct from the civil, and a most unreasonable and unequal share of wealth and power in almost every christian state. No opinion, however, can be more evidently false. The express declaration which CHRIST made when he said, "my kingdom is not of this world," the conduct he held, the doctrines he taught, and the commission he gave to his apostles, prove it to be so. If it had been the divine intention to establish, at that time, the kingdom of CHRIST, he would have appeared, no doubt, more conformably to the expectations of the Jews in majesty and power. But they mistook the sense of their prophecies, it seems; their expectations were vain, and the purposes of infinite wisdom opened themselves in a very different manner.

THE Messiah shewed himself to the world in the lowest form of life, and avoided all appearances of affecting any higher rank, even that of the Messiah, which was distinguished from that of king; tho the Jews, misled by their prophecies, could not conceive the two characters to be distinguishable. He came not to reign, but to redeem; not to triumph, but to suffer; not to erect a kingdom, but to prepare men for that which was to be erected at his second coming. It may seem strange, that he could conceal himself, notwithstanding the signs and wonders that illustrated his birth, the proclamation of him from above at the time of his baptism, and all the miracles which he wrought, chiefly indeed out of Jerusalem, during the time of his ministry. But it is not strange, that he used all the means of keeping up this concealment of himself to the last, and in a great degree even from his disciples, on the hypothesis here mentioned. If he had declared himself publicly and plainly to be the Messiah, either the Jews would have taken him by force to make him king, as St. JOHN tells us, that they

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who

who had seen his miracles were ready to do *; or they would have looked on him, from the first, as an impostor, since he pretended to be the Messiah, and yet assumed no dominion, nor claimed any kingdom. In one case, the design of his coming would have been entirely perverted. In the other, the Jews might have laid immediate hold on him, and have taken away his life. In neither, could he have had the means, nor the time necessary to perform all the purposes of his mission, and to fulfil all the prophecies according to his own applications of them.

To prevent these effects of the mistaken zeal of the Jews, and to keep himself in the state of an innocent man towards the roman government, without being at the expence of more miracles for these purposes according to Mr. LOCKE, his conduct was reserved and cautious, his language mystical and parabolical. But the repeated declarations he made, during the course of his mission, that his kingdom was not of this world, were sufficient to keep him from being obnoxious to the Romans: and tho he owned himself to PILATE the king of a world to come, we see that PILATE found no fault in him, and that he declared him an innocent man, when he delivered him up to the Jews to be crucified. For what concern could PILATE or his master imagine they had in a world that was to come, in a future kingdom, in a kingdom of God, in a kingdom of heaven? In this manner, one part of the savior's intentions was answered. His innocence was averred. But there was another part. He was not only to be innocent, he was to die innocent: and of this he made the Jews the instruments by a sequel of the most artful behavior, which Mr. LOCKE develops with a sagacity that might give envy to the deepest

* Reasonab. of christian.

divine,

divine, that ever undertook to discover the oeconomy of infinite wisdom.

He contrived to appear guilty to the Jews, by the same declaration by which he appeared innocent to the Romans. He appeared a very extraordinary person to both: and well he might; but he spoke plainly to one as far as they were concerned, and darkly and ambiguously to the other. He pretended to no kingdom: CAESAR had no rival in him. But for this very reason, he became criminal to the Jews. The miracles he performed, the obscure expressions he let drop, induced some of the people to take him for the prophet that was to come, for the Messiah. But the scribes, the pharisees, and the bulk of the people, who hearkened, as he had bid them hearken, to those who sat in the seat of MOSES, could not easily take him for the Messiah, consistently with their prejudices; since he assumed no kingdom, nor pretended to any. Nay more, they could not have taken him easily for the Messiah, if they had been able to distinguish between the Messiah and the king; since he disguised one of these characters, as he disowned the other. This extraordinary person, therefore, was, according to their logic, an impostor. They were a rejected people, for not believing him to be the Messiah, on the faith of his miracles: and he kept them in this error. At least he did nothing to draw them out of it, that they might bring him to the cross, when his time should be come, and complete the redemption of mankind, without knowing what they did, but at their own expence.

He passed for a Galilean, tho he was born at Bethlehem, by which one proof of his being the Messiah was suppressed. Even his precursor, he who had baptised him, he who had been a witness when he baptised him of the descent of the holy

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ghost upon him, and had heard a voice from heaven declare "this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased," which voice, therefore, must have been the voice of God the father, even he did not know certainly that the son of God was the Messiah. When JOHN was in prison, he sent to ask JESUS, so little did he know him to be the Messiah, "art thou he that should come, or do we expect another?" The answer JESUS made was an appeal to his miracles, which proved him to be a very extraordinary person indeed, but which did not prove him in those days, and ad homines, to be the Messiah; for a belief of the powers of magic was not as ridiculous then as it is now, and the pharisees had prepared the people to believe these very miracles wrought by BEELZEBUB. The answers he gave on other occasions were not less equivocal, nor the language he held about himself at any time more explicit, than that wherein he declares himself the light of the world as long as he is in the world. He was so apprehensive of being taken for the Messiah, lest he should be taken for a king too, that he scarce owned himself even to his disciples, and that he commanded the devils who proclaimed him to be so, when he cast them out, to say nothing of it. If he declared himself more openly, just before his death, to be the Messiah, he claimed to the last no actual kingdom, no kingdom of this world, neither before his death nor after it, till he should come again in the glory of his father, with his angels to judge the world, and to render to every man according to his works.

THE resurrection, the ascension of CHRIST, and the coming of the paraclete or comforter who was to shew the disciples all things, and bring to their remembrance all things which he had said, made them understand more clearly and believe more firmly that he was the Messiah and the king. The prophets had spoken of him under both these characters confusedly: and the
Jews

Jews had been led, by these prophecies and by their partial interpretations of them, to imagine not only, that the Messiah and the king were to be one and the same person, in which they did not deceive themselves, but that all the glorious things, which had been foretold of him, were to happen at once, and as soon as he should appear, in which they flattered and deceived themselves very fatally. The disciples saw now, what they had not seen fully and clearly before. They saw that the two characters, and the offices belonging to each, were to be distinguished. They saw that their master had already appeared in one, and had performed and suffered all that belonged to it. They believed, therefore, that he would soon appear in the other, as he gave them reason to expect he would according to their apprehensions; that his kingdom, for the coming of which he had taught them to pray, would then come; and that when he was seated in the throne of his glory, his immediate disciples should also sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. He redeemed mankind at his first coming, and taught and exhorted them to prepare for his second, when they, who have believed in him, are to enjoy a glorious immortality. Then, and not till then, his kingdom will begin, properly and truly called so. The intermediate time is a time of regeneration and preparation. Divines talk of a kingdom of grace, but the expression is figurative, and apt to convey a false idea. The kingdom of glory alone is CHRIST's kingdom. He instituted none that was to precede it. He exercised no dominion, no co-ercive power, nor delegated any to be exercised by others.

If any such had been delegated by him, it would have been so, doubtless, to his immediate disciples the apostles, and to the seventy*. But when we examine their commission, we find

* N. B. I say the seventy both here and elsewhere, in conformity to the general run

find nothing of this kind in it. They were commissioned to teach or to preach to all nations, or, perhaps, to the lost sheep of Israel dispersed into all nations, that JESUS was the Messiah. They were authorised to say, after their master, that his kingdom would come, that it was at hand, that they who received them, and the gospel they taught, would be received into it, and that the state of those cities, who received them not, would be in that day, the day when the kingdom of CHRIST should come, less tolerable than that of Sodom. They were to baptise such as believed: and this baptism or washing was made a sign of regeneration, and admission into the church of CHRIST here, in order to admission into his kingdom hereafter. CHRIST gave his apostles another power, which seems to be consequential to that of baptising, and therefore connected with it, the power of remitting or retaining sins. Tho I do not pretend to dogmatise about the nature and extent of this power, yet I may pretend to say what it is not, and to what it does not extend. It is not a power to forgive or not to forgive, to cancel or not to cancel, sins, absolutely and definitively. Such a power belongs to the great searcher of hearts alone. The apostles might admit those, who professed their belief in CHRIST by baptism, into the church, and retain them in it as long as they held the same faith and brought forth fruits meet for repentance. They not only might, but it was their duty to do so, and St. JOHN censures very severely DIOTREPHES, in his third epistle, for a contrary practice. If he who had offended on any occasion appeared to be penitent, he might be absolved, that is, his sins were remitted, and he was retained in the christian church. If he was impenitent, he could not be absolved; his sins were retained, and he was to the brethren as an heathen man and a publican.

run of orthodox opinion, tho I know that we have no authority, but that of St. LUKE, for assuming this distinct number of disciples.

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In these cases, as in that of baptism, the apostles and their successors were merely ministers, who performed a ceremony, or pronounced a judgment. They could not refuse baptism to believers: and it was not they, but the church, the congregation of the faithful properly, who retained an offender in their body by remitting his sins, or drove him out by retaining them; that is, by refusing to remit them: for which assertion we have the authority of CHRIST, in the eighteenth chapter of St. MATTHEW's gospel, and that of St. PAUL's example in his proceeding with regard to the fornicator in the church of Corinth.

THIS power, which CHRIST gave to his disciples and to his church, was so far from being a co-ercive power, such a power as kings delegate, and those who govern under them exercise, such a power, in short, as may serve to shew that he meant to establish any kingdom in this world, that it shews the very contrary. "Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them, and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained." Again "whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." These expressions, taken together, point at the other world, the world to come; and the full effect of the promises and threatnings they contain is to be expected there, not here. In this intermediate state of preparation and probation, all that they, who are appointed ministers of the gospel, as such can do, by virtue of the power delegated by the first passage, is to advise, exhort, admonish, and to separate themselves, and to persuade the faithful to separate, from the impenitent and refractory. This is all the power which the first of these passages gives. The second gives no farther power, but it contains a promise which must not be understood according to the natural import of the words, nor without very great mitigations

gations of the sense; lest it should be understood to imply such an absurdity as it would be impious to impute to the word of God, how desirous soever divines may be to have it so understood. It would imply that CHRIST, when he comes at the last day in the glory of his father, and to establish his kingdom, will not come to judge the world, or the christian part of it at least, but merely to execute judgments already given, the judgments of the church. In short, CHRIST gave no co-ercive power to his apostles: and they who succeeded them exercised none, till they obtained it, or stole it, from the kings whose kingdoms were of this world. Then, indeed, excommunications grew co-ercive, and severely so: and powers that were tyrannical in their execution, and civil in their origin, began to pass for ecclesiastical and lawful powers, in the hands of men who had no right by their institution to any that are co-ercive or penal. But if that were true, which is evidently false, that CHRIST had given such powers to his apostles, as their successors claim and exercise too, wherever they are suffered to do so, yet there would be no reason to allow this claim now, nor was there any to allow it even in the primitive ages of christianity. CHRIST breathed on his apostles, bid them receive the holy ghost, and we are bound to believe that he inspired the same spirit into them by this act, which descended afterwards more manifestly upon them and the disciples under the figure of fire tongues. The gifts of the spirit were then common, and evidenced themselves by sanctity of life, and by many other unequivocal signs. But these signs, sanctity of life and miraculous operations, soon failed. Priests after that might blow on other priests, lay their hands on them, and bid them receive the holy ghost. But it was silly and impious both to persuade the civil society of Christians, that such priests, as these were generally, could either give or be worthy to receive the holy ghost. This they did however, and it was necessary to carry on this illusion, that

that they might carry on the other. As soon as they had persuaded that the church of CHRIST was the kingdom of CHRIST, and that this order of men was appointed to govern in it, there was a necessity of persuading likewise, that the same spirit, the same gifts and graces, which CHRIST had bestowed on the apostles for the establishment of his church, were conveyed down for the government of it by their order.

IF we had less experience of the powerful effects of ambition, avarice, and superstition, we might be surprised that some men have been hardy enough to assert, and others weak enough to believe, against the express declarations of CHRIST himself, that his kingdom is of this world, and that it began immediately after his first coming; tho he fixed the commencement of it, at his second coming, the time of which he left uncertain. There are many dark passages in the gospels, and when there are no others relative to any particular subject, the presumption of theology has a full scope. But when there are passages, the sense of which is determined and plain, these are to guide us to the sense of those that are ambiguous and obscure. To take a contrary method, to explain and pretend to fix the sense of what is clear by what is dark, may be called subtilty and deep penetration; but sure I am it deserves to be called absurd and impudent imposition. This now is the very thing that has been done in the case before us. Divines of all ages, all countries and sects have done it. They do it still: and BEZA and BELLARMINE, who agreed in nothing else, agreed in this.

I MENTION BEZA particularly, because he inferred, as I learn from HOBBS, that the commencement of the kingdom of God should be placed at the resurrection of CHRIST, from a passage in the gospel of MARK. In that, the words JESUS is recorded to have spoken are these: " verily I say unto you, that there

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“ be some of them who stand here, which shall not taste of
“ death till they have seen the kingdom of God come with
“ power.” These words, like those which he spoke of St.
JOHN to St. PETER, “ if I will that he tarry till I come, what
“ is that to thee?” are very dark indeed. They plainly relate
to his second coming, which is characterised by coming with
power. But then it will follow, that the persons spoken of
are still alive; which might have passed among the good peo-
ple of Ephesus, who believed, in St. AUSTIN’s time, that
St. JOHN was still alive, and only slept in his grave: and would
not pass, I presume, in these days. Shall we accept the con-
jecture of HOBBS? He thinks, that the words related to the
transfiguration, of which PETER and JAMES and JOHN, some,
not all, who stood by JESUS when he spoke them, were wit-
nesses. He thinks, that these disciples, having seen CHRIST
in glory and majesty, as he is to appear at his second coming,
the promise was accomplished by way of vision. But this is
conjecture only, and, tho ingenious, yet forced and certainly
not serious; for if these disciples did see him, they saw him in
a vision, and they neither saw him come, nor the kingdom of
God come, in any propriety of speech. There might be a more
probable account given, perhaps, why these words were spoken
according to the natural and obvious sense of them. But I use
none of the theological liberties of guess with holy writ, and I
content myself to observe on this occasion the absurdity of that
of BEZA. HOBBS takes notice justly, that if the kingdom of
God was to come, and did come at the resurrection, the ex-
pression was not exact, since all the disciples, not some only,
lived till CHRIST was risen from the dead. But the absurdity
of this interpretation is greater still. The ascension followed
soon the resurrection. Between these two events, CHRIST as-
sumed no more dominion than he had done before, nor shewed
any more signs of claiming or exercising kingly power. He
scarce

scarce shewed himself to the few, who were said to have seen him, in such a manner as they could know by it, certainly, that it was he whom they had seen. I say the few, because St. PAUL, who had not probably ever seen JESUS, deserves no credit when he affirms, against the whole tenor of the gospels, that he and above five hundred brethren at once had seen him after his resurrection. Both these events, the resurrection and ascension, passed in a very private manner. There were no eye-witnesses, properly called so, of his resurrection. There were few, of his ascension. But in whatever manner we can suppose them to have passed, if we suppose him to have risen from the dead, and to have ascended into heaven, with the same public pomp and majesty with which he is to be attended when he shall come to judge the world, and to establish the kingdom he foretold, yet we cannot assert that this kingdom came, or began at that time. As God, he reigns eternally; but the kingdom here spoken of was to have a beginning, and to say that it began when CHRIST, who had not then established it, returned to reign with his father in the unity of the godhead; or that it came, tho we continue still to pray that it may come, when CHRIST left the earth, or that he vested the apostles, or those who call themselves their successors, with a sovereignty in this imaginary kingdom, which he never assumed himself, is one of those paradoxes, which men, who find a color for any in the dark sayings of the scriptures, presume to advance.

MANY other paradoxes have been built on this, the common foundation of all ecclesiastical power: and it has happened in the course of these usurpations, as it has happened often in the course of others. Whilst the whole body of the clergy pursued, on one general maxim, an interest of ambition common to the whole body, particular members invented other paradoxes, which seemed to arise out of the first, and which became ma-

xims just as true as the first. Thus, that I may say in few words what I mean to say, and not to descend into a long detail of particulars, ecclesiastical as well as civil democracies became aristocracies; aristocracies became monarchies, and several monarchies were united into one empire, under those great conquerors, the bishops of Rome. The christian church bore some resemblance, after the establishment of it, to the state of antient Greece. Both were composed of several little governments. They were all Greeks in one, and all Christians in the other; but the quarrels of parties, in each of these, as well as the quarrels of one government with another, destroyed the public peace, and continued to do so notwithstanding all the judgments of the areopagus and all the decrees of councils. The feuds that arose in particular churches gave occasion or pretence to the institution of bishops: and those that arose between church and church, to the institution of metropolitans, primates, and patriarchs, one of whom pretended at last to be the vicar of CHRIST in his imaginary kingdom. In short, the clergy, like other usurpers, in order to maintain the advantages they had gained over the laity, or to carry their arms abroad in search of more, have found it necessary to submit to usurpations within their own body, and to groan under the very yoke they imposed.

EVERY innovation has been supported by some new paradox: and divine right has been claimed by all, on that fundamental paradox, in which they all agree. MARCHMONT will tell you that presbytery is *jure divino*. I shall tell you that episcopacy is so: and tho you are not a very good papist, you will tell us that popery is so. Let us be candid, and confess that none of them are so. To set an example of candor, I will own, that as monstrous as the papal pretensions are against which we protestants exclaim so loudly, they may be supported, by wresting
and

and torturing the scriptures, just as well as the principles in which we agree, that the christian church is actually the kingdom of CHRIST, and that a religious society was instituted to govern in it by his authority. These principles are laid in direct opposition to the plainest and most positive declarations which the Saviour made. But when they are once admitted, BELLARMINE and the other writers for the church and court of Rome are able to defend their monstrous pretensions so plausibly to well disposed minds, that instead of contradicting the scriptures, they seem to build upon them, not only on passages in the epistles of St. PAUL, who boasted that he was the architect of the spiritual house, and that he laid the foundations of it, but on the words of CHRIST as they stand in some passages of the gospels, and to make their work the more sure, as they imagine absurdly enough, on passages of the old Testament as well as of the new. Thus they prove the popes, as successors of St. PETER, to be vicars of CHRIST, to be infallible in all their judgments concerning faith and manners, and to have the supreme spiritual and even temporal power in every christian country. Such are the real pretensions of your church over all civil power, over all emperors, kings and princes. Such fables as your angelical doctor, such writers as BELLARMINE and BARONIUS have affirmed them. Councils have held the same language: and all they, who would take the temporal sword out of the hands of St. PETER, have been branded with heresy, the heresy of the politics, "haeresis politicorum." True it is, that some of your doctors, and even some councils have seen the folly, and blushed at the impudence of those who have carried these pretensions in favor of the papal authority so high. Many have writ against them, even in Italy: but both sides have concurred in giving to the church, understanding by the church the ecclesiastical order alone, a full and independent power over the state in spirituals;
by

by which they saw that they might preserve indirectly a tyranny they could not obtain directly.

S E C T I O N XXXV.

FROM the time of CONSTANTINE to that of CHARLES the great, the wealth and power of the church had grown from age to age, by such means as have been already mentioned: and the authority of that of Rome particularly began to overtop all others, by a stupid bigotry that increased as ignorance increased, and by the artifices which her bishops employed. But CHARLES the great raised these bishops to that exorbitant power and grandeur which enabled them to vex and oppress some of his own successors, and to tyrannise the whole western world: till in the reign of another CHARLES, several nations shook this yoke off their necks, and made it sit lighter on the necks of those who did not shake it off. When the Lombards had settled themselves in Italy, the popes began to play a game, which they could not play with the same advantage, for many reasons, in the reigns of the gothic kings. They fomented continual quarrels between the exarchs who governed for the constantinopolitan emperors, and the Lombards, in order to make their profit of them against both: and when they had drawn themselves into distress and danger, their refuge for protection was to France. They apprehended less the emperors, whose government was weak and oppressive, despised therefore and hated, and who were at a greater distance from Italy, and careless enough about it. They excommunicated the exarchs, and, in the dispute about image-breaking, the emperor himself. GREGORY the second and the third took advantage of this pretended heresy, and in their zeal for images, which suited the humor of the times and the prejudices of the people, the first of these popes took upon him

him to forbid not only in his own diocese, but every where else, that the orders of Leo the Isaurian should be obeyed: and the second excommunicated him, and absolved his subjects from their allegiance to him. Usurpation was soon added to revolt, and the people of Rome were made to swear allegiance to the popes. CHARLES MARTEL had abetted these ambitious and turbulent prelates against the emperor: and, when they were in danger from the Lombards, he saved them by the influence he had on LUITPRAND. But CHARLES MARTEL dead, Ravenna taken, and the exarchate conquered, they lay at the mercy of this people, who knew their double dealing, and had sufficient reason to complain of the conduct they had in the revolt of THRASIMOND duke of SPOLETO, and on other occasions. This might have defeated all their designs; and the power they had acquired might have been crushed under that of the Lombards, if they had not improved very dexterously a singular conjuncture to ruin the Lombards in their turn, and to finish on these ruins that stately edifice of spiritual and temporal grandeur which they had advanced very far on those of their antient masters the emperors.

WHEN PEPIN the short resolved to take the title, as he had the power, of king of the Franks, he thought it necessary, not only to remove all scruples from the minds of his people, who might esteem themselves bound by their oaths to CHILDERIC and the merovingian race, but to justify his new title to other christian nations. He might have done the first, perhaps, by some solemn farce, which his own clergy would have been ready enough to act. But to do both more effectually he chose to have the farce acted at Rome. He sent his messengers to question the oracle: and ZACHARY gave the best reason that ever pope, or oracle, gave for the sentence he pronounced. He pronounced, that the French were no longer bound by their oaths to CHILDERIC; since this prince had not kept his engagement

ment to them. The reason followed the sentence; for "such is the nature of conditional contracts, said ZACHARY, that if one party fails, the other is absolved from his promise*." This answer had a full effect. PEPIN was chosen king, and CHILDERIC deposed unanimously in the national assembly that was held at Soissons.

IF his holiness was not paid before hand, as antient oracles were most commonly, ZACHARY foresaw, that the time of payment would soon come, and he took the best method to secure it. He was at peace with the Lombards when he solved this famous case of conscience in favor of PEPIN; but as soon as they had conquered Ravenna and the Pentapolis, for Italy had a Pentapolis too, ASTOLPHUS their king determined, that the popes, who had been subject to the emperors, should be subject to him. The good men, who had revolted from their antient master, did not care to submit to a new power, the seat of which was in Italy, and which would be always at hand to keep them in awe, to controul and to punish them. STEPHEN the third was not ashamed to apply for help to CONSTANTINE, the son of that very LEO, who had been treated so insolently by the two GREGORIES. But the emperor having as little concern for the church and people of Rome as they deserved from him, STEPHEN did at last, what ZACHARY, more able than he, would have done at first; he had recourse to PEPIN. He was received in France with more than respect, with a ridiculous, and yet in those circumstances a wise appearance of veneration; if it be true, that PEPIN and his sons threw themselves at the feet of the priest to receive his blessing. He conjured them, in ecclesiastical cant, to defend the church of Rome, and the sepulchres of the apostles, that is, the dominion and sovereignty which the popes had usurped against the Lombards.

* MEZERAY.

The

The Lombards were Christians, and meant no hurt to the religion they professed. But the cause of the clergy and the cause of religion were made, by the logic of those times, as well as of ours, the same, when they were quite distinct, and even when they were opposite. PEPIN was glad to seize an opportunity of satisfying, at once, his own ambition and that of the roman bishops. STEPHEN anointed him, his wife and his children; declared them, after this holy unction, princes by the grace of God; thundered out excommunications against all persons, subjects or strangers, who should oppose them in any time to come, and confined CHILDERIC on the same day to a monastery, as he confined the children of CARLOMAN, PEPIN's brother. PEPIN made two expeditions into Italy, reduced the Lombards, usurped on them the exarchate they had usurped on the Greeks, and gave it to St. PETER: such was the style.

CHARLES made several of these expeditions, and in them an absolute conquest of the Lombards. He confirmed what his father had done, and did still more for the church. He gave the exarchate and the five cities to the roman see most certainly; but it is as certain, that he did not make an absolute alienation of them, without any reserve of sovereignty over the pope and them. His grant of Mantua, of Parma, of the two Sicilies, and of other dominions, is a mere supposition, and as ill founded as the pretended donation of CONSTANTINE to SYLVESTER and the bishops of Rome. If this has succeeded a little more to their advantage than the other, one reason of this success may be found, I think, in the passages of the time we speak of here. Whatever pope forged the donation of CONSTANTINE, I incline to think that it was forged long before the tenth century, and that it lay dormant, among other records as authentic as itself, till an opportunity of employing it to some pious use was found. Thus it might be employed

as an inducement to PEPIN to make, and as a justification of him for making, a grant of the exarchate to the see of Rome, without any regard to the rightful claim of the greek emperor: and in this sense I choose to understand those who have called this grant a restitution, as if PEPIN, when he seemed to give, did only compound with the popes, who had as good a right as forgery could communicate to the whole western empire.

IN this pretended act, CONSTANTINE is made to declare his intention to be not only that the see of Rome should have the supremacy over those of Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, and Constantinople; but that the pontifical throne should be exalted gloriously above the imperial *. He is made to give the palace of Lateran, his diadem, and all his imperial ornaments, to SYLVESTER and the popes his successors. He is made to constitute the inferior clergy, "*romanae ecclesiae fervientes*," in the ranks of patricians and consuls. In short, he is made to say in express terms, that he yields and abandons to SYLVESTER, the universal pope, and the pontiffs his successors, the city of Rome and all the provinces, places, and towns of Italy, or the occidental regions †: and that for this reason he thinks it "*congruum*" proper to transfer his empire into the East; since it is not just, that an earthly emperor should reign where the prince of priests, and the head of the christian religion is established by the emperor of heaven §.

* *Amplius quam nostrum imperium terrenumque thronum sedem sacratissimam B. PETRI gloriosè exaltare.*

† *Contra dentes et relinquentes universali papae romanam urbem, et omnes Italiae seu occidentalium regionum provincias, loca, et civitates.*

§ *Quoniam ubi principatus sacerdotum et christianae religionis caput ab imperatore coelesti constitutum est, justum non est ut illic terrenus imperator habeat potestatem.*

I HAVE

I HAVE quoted this extraordinary piece a little the more at large, because it has been avowed genuine by the court of Rome, and has been published as such by one of the LEOS; for which reason it may stand very properly here as an instance of the most impudent forgery, which the religious society ever attempted to impose on the civil, and may render all that remains to be said of these forgeries and usurpations the more probable. I know that BARONIUS gives it up, and would fain persuade mankind, that this act was forged by the Greeks to cast a reproach on the roman church. I know too, that he gives up the decretal epistles, and I do not suppose, that there is any man who would have the front at this time to defend either. But these candid acknowledgments come too late, to save the honor of Rome. Her advocates defended both, as long as they could impose on ignorant ages. Nay they attempted it even after the resurrection of letters. When these impositions could pass no longer, and when they had done the work they were designed to do, they were abandoned, as many other forged acts and false traditions have been. But are men, who confess perjury when they are convicted of it, to be received as good witnesses in any case? I think not, and therefore I insist, that the forgery of the donation, as well as that of the decretals, since these have been mentioned too, may stand as proofs of the little credit we ought to give to any of those that are brought in justification of the papal pretensions to temporal or spiritual rights.

THESE rights have in truth no better foundation than the compact I have mentioned between princes and priests. It began under CONSTANTINE, but it never appeared so grossly as under PEPIN and CHARLES the great. On which occasion it may be worth while to observe how much a worse bargain

CONSTANTINE made with the church than the others made with the pope. What CONSTANTINE gave was immediate and real. The returns he had to expect were future, and such as never answered his expectations either in his own time, or in that of his successors, either in promoting the grandeur, or in securing the peace of the empire. The emperor was the bubble of this bargain. That which PEPIN and CHARLES the great made with the church, already established and powerful, was better, and in some degree the reverse of the other. Their advantages in this alliance were immediate as well as those of the pope: and who should improve them most was left to the skill and management of their successors. In the mean while, if they could not cheat one another, they bantered the rest of the world egregiously. The pope gave the title of king to PEPIN, and that of emperor to CHARLES. These princes gave temporal dominion to the pope, and raised the opinion of his spiritual dignity and authority as high as the examples they affected to give of reverence and submission could raise it. Thus, by fortifying his usurpations, they strengthened their own: and whilst we admire the conquests whereby CHARLES extended his empire and that of the pope together, it is impossible not to laugh when we figure to ourselves the two usurpers kneeling to one another, the emperor asking the blessing of a man he made head of the church, the pope acknowledging the imperial sovereignty in a man he made head of the empire, and each bestowing most generously what neither of them had any right to give.

As these alliances were made on principles of human policy, and dictated by private interest alone, they were kept accordingly. CHARLES the great seemed to foresee, that the alliance he had made would not be very well observed, and that the church would find means to transgress, instead of keeping
within

within the bounds of it. He had received his crown from the pope; but he was so afraid that future popes might claim from this precedent, strained to their purpose, a right to give it, that he would not suffer any prelate to set it on the head of his son, who was elected and crowned in his presence at Aix. He ordered LEWIS to take it from the altar, and to crown himself. But LEWIS profited ill of this lesson. Even in his reign, the popes, who felt their strength, began to improve every opportunity of extending their prerogatives by encroachments on those that belonged to the emperors. Thus, for instance, a LEO presumed, under the pretence of a conspiracy against himself, to condemn capitally some persons without the imperial authority. The matter was examined, but the pope was not censured, he was rather screened by the imperial court, as we may presume from the extreme resentment which the people of Rome shewed after his death, and from all the indignities they offered to his memory. Thus again, a PASCHAL seized on some of the principal men of Rome, officers of the emperor, and free from any crime but that of maintaining the imperial rights. He ordered their eyes to be put out; their hands and feet, and after these their heads, to be cut off, in the Lateran palace. An army was sent to Rome to punish this usurpation of power and excess of cruelty. His holiness purged himself of the crime by oath. But his holiness was forsworn, and having escaped the punishment, did not seem concerned to conceal the perjury; for he declared afterwards, that the persons he had caused to be executed were guilty of high treason, which he must have understood to be high treason against himself, and absolved the murderers because they were of St. PETER's family. All this and more that weak prince the Debonnaire endured from the popes, who came to such a pitch of power and insolence, by the bigotry of the age, and by the advantage they took of the troubles which arose in the empire, that
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in the second generation after CHARLEMAGNE CHARLES the bald was obliged to purchase the empire of the pope by very great concessions. He quitted all right to jurisdiction in Rome, and the country about it, and instead of reserving to himself that of making the election of popes valid by the imperial confirmation, he is said to have yielded that of creating and of crowning emperors to the pope.

S E C T I O N X X X V I .

AN universal and public dissolution of manners, into which the clergy in general had fallen, might have brought disgrace on the whole order, sufficient even in those ages to have opened the eyes of the laity, to have stopped their profuse charity to the church, and to have converted their blind submission into a just indignation. But, besides the favorable circumstance already mentioned, that apparent sanctity of the few which served to screen the vices of the many, it is true that this dissolution of manners received some checks from time to time. One of these I will point out. The synod, or the assembly of the states, for it consisted of laity and clergy both, which was held at Aix in the reign of the Debonnaire made some reformation in convents, where the debauchery was scandalous beyond all measure. Rules were established of stricter discipline for monks and nuns, and the episcopal order was restrained from some excesses. Bishops were forbid to adorn their habits with gold and jewels, to wear swords and belts, to dress in scarlet and to make war. I am far from believing, that new constitutions made, or old ones renewed, had an entire effect, or produced a real reformation, but they might save some of the worst appearances, which was enough for a church wherein a spirit of policy, not a spirit of religion, prevailed. Thus
much

much too might be easily brought about, when the exercises of true piety were changed into superstitious practices; when it cost so little to be a good bishop, a good priest, a good monk, or a great saint, that it was necessary rather to disguise than to restrain their passions; and when these men could acquire such holy characters by no greater merit than this, and even make themselves amends for disguising or restraining some of their passions by indulging others. Pride, revenge, avarice, and ambition, had only their names to change, and their effects were consecrated with the greatest applause. It is easy to conceive too, that these vices of the mind were pursued with greater application, and by more persons in the common cause of the church, when sensuality and debauchery were a little more restrained; and that this kind of reformation, instead of making the clergy better men, made them only more dangerous enemies of the state.

LAYMEN assisted to reform the clergy without much success, churchmen continued to incroach on the laity with great success, and the breach of that alliance which PEPIN and his son CHARLES the great had lately made between the imperial and papal power, as CONSTANTINE had made one before between the monarchy and the hierarchy, grew wider and wider, and disturbed the whole christian world. It could not happen otherwise, when once the bishops of Rome had resolved to be monarchs as well as the emperors, their rivals at least, perhaps their masters; and when they had acquired strength sufficient, which they were not long in acquiring to make these attempts. Examples may be produced of churchmen, and assemblies of churchmen, who have opposed, on some few occasions, the most violent excesses of papal tyranny. The particular motives they had are not always developed in history. But particular and temporary motives, arising from particular conjunctures, they must

must have had, whenever they held such a conduct. Tho they had some dependance still on princes, even when the popes were grown bold enough to claim and exercise over these a most exorbitant power, yet their dependence on the pope was double wherever his supremacy was established; which I presume to have been the case in all the christian countries of the West soon after the end of the eighth century. Princes had it in their power to shew favor, in many respects, and to deal out some degrees and kinds of punishment to the members of the religious society, as we have accustomed ourselves in this essay to call the clergy. The popes had their share of this influence too, and their share was, on the whole, the greatest. But there was another influence, arising from another interest, which centered in them alone.

Of this influence princes could have no share; for it arose from an interest contrary to theirs. Princes and priests had agreed in incroaching on the rights of the civil society, according to the true spirit of their alliance, whilst the government of the church was aristocratical. But when it became monarchical the scene was changed. The groundless distinction between spiritual and temporal power had been long established, and had taken full possession of the minds of men. The former had been exercised from the time of CONSTANTINE, with no small confusion, by different churches, in different countries, and in all with much dependance on the civil power, and a real subordination to it. But CHARLES the great did, in effect and in consequence, unite the dispersed powers of the western church under one direction, and raise the pope from an oecumenical bishop, with limited and disputed prerogatives, to be a spiritual emperor, with a large share of temporal dominion. This new ecclesiastical constitution, for such it may be truly called, which he made, or to which he gave occasion, might be of immediate

mediate advantage in many respects of ambition to himself. But this, like many other temporary expedients, proved fatal in its consequences. As the division of the Lombards into several dukedoms weakened their power, and prepared the way to the destruction of it; so the union of all the churches of the West under one head strengthened ecclesiastical power, and prepared the way to all the conquests it made. As soon as the religious society had an emperor of their own order at their head, the successors of CHARLES had no longer a prevailing influence over them. They thought it no longer necessary to keep fair with those princes, to help them and to be helped by them in plundering and subduing the civil society, as they had done before. They affected independency on all authority that was not ecclesiastical, and hoped to obtain, by conquering the emperors themselves under the papal banners, much greater advantages than those they had obtained already by their alliance with the imperial authority.

THE contests which the popes, supported by this spirit in the clergy, raised, under the immediate successors of CHARLES the great, continued during the course of many ages, and brought infinite mischief, as well as disgrace, on christianity that was not answerable for either. The points in dispute were few, but they were very important: and to suffer a decision of them in favor of the popes, was nothing less than to acknowledge their sovereignty in every christian state, as well as their supremacy in every christian church. The emperors conferred benefices, and invested the prelates by the staff and the ring. The election of the popes themselves, how much soever they had been raised above all other bishops, was so far from being independent on the emperors, that it was not reputed valid till it had been confirmed by them nor did they confirm it till the person elected had taken an oath of submission and obedience to

them. One of these prerogatives was necessary to maintain that share of influence which they had left themselves over the clergy in their own dominions, and the other to check the farther growth of that monarchical power which they had helped, as well as suffered, the popes to assume in the church, and which the ecclesiastics were but too ready in every place to abet; for the bishops did not seem to perceive either time enough or strongly enough what chains they were preparing for themselves. Both the prerogatives were the more necessary to be maintained, since CHARLES the great had thrown so immense a share of temporal power into the hands of the prelates as well as of the popes, by the earldoms, baronies, and other estates of much authority as well as dignity in the empire, which he gave them. Besides which, it is to be considered, that if any of the power which the emperors exercised in the investitures was usurped, it was usurped on the christian congregations, not on the popes: and if the popes had usurped this power out of the empire, in Britain and elsewhere, the emperors might very well think it too much to suffer, that they should profit of their own usurpations, and of those which had been made by others. As to the superiority of the imperial over the pontifical authority in general, it had not only been acknowledged in the days of heathen emperors and heretic princes, such as the gothic kings were, but it had been exercised by the greek emperors in matters of doctrine as well as discipline, and had been recognised most solemnly in the days of CHARLEMAGNE, in every respect of dominion and discipline at least. Many authentic monuments proved the acknowledgment: and the recognition of the imperial sovereignty was so recent, when the popes began to shake it off, that as no impudence less than that of the court of Rome could deny it, no ingratitude less than that of the popes could forget so soon, to
whose

whose favor they owed much of their spiritual, and all their temporal grandeur.

SECTION XXXVII.

THUS the cause of the emperors stood, whilst that of the popes was founded on nothing better than assumption, forgery, and the most barefaced usurpation. They assumed, and their advocates assume still, that CHRIST established a kingdom when he was on earth. They call it his church, and play with the ambiguity of the word; for when they mean to speak of the supposed actual kingdom of CHRIST on earth, the word church signifies the whole body of christian people; and when they mean to speak of the governors or government of this supposed kingdom, the same word is used to signify the whole ecclesiastical order, with the pope at the head of it. To say in plain terms that CHRIST established a religion, a rule of faith and manners, the conformity or nonconformity to which is to be rewarded or punished by CHRIST himself in another life, and that he commissioned certain men to preach it, and to commission others to preach it, would not lay a foundation sufficient for the immense building that has been erected, and is still kept up, tho it has tottered long. They were glad at first to found their primacy on an imperial rescript. But they soon assumed that CHRIST instituted a sovereign pontiff to govern this church or kingdom, that this pontiff was PETER the prince of his apostles, and that he did this agreeably to all laws divine and human; nay that he would not have shewn common discretion, if he had neglected to leave such a vicar behind him as might execute all his own powers. They assume that the popes are the successors of PETER, that they have all his powers as he

had CHRIST's, and are, as he was, the vicars of CHRIST*. They assume a multitude of other things, relative to these, which it is unnecessary I should stay to enumerate. Now of these assumptions, which are the principal every man is a competent judge who can read the gospels; for we must own that no powers like those which are assumed can belong to the church now, nor could belong to the apostles themselves, unless they are evidently contained therein: or else we must beg the question most absurdly, as our protestant writers, and the least papal of yours, such as DU PIN and GIANNONE, that I may quote a lawyer as well as a divine, have done. They supposed that CHRIST established a society distinct from the civil, in every society where his religion should be received, by the commission given to his apostles and disciples. Let us suppose this to be true, for the sake of argument. Let us suppose, in consequence of it, that this society had a power to make laws for it's own advantage and better government, provided these laws did not disturb the established order of the state, as every other particular and lawful society has by common right according to them, but not according to truth in so great a latitude. When all this is yielded to them, all that will follow is, that such a society had a power of making by-laws to which all the members of it, that is, all ecclesiastics, were subject, and they alone. I say ecclesiastics alone, that the church sophists may not impose on us by an equivocal use of terms, nor employ the word church in one sense, in one part of their argumentation, and in another sense, in another. If they say, and they do say, that the legislative power spoken of was given to

* Quod divino et humano jure ita semper factum reperiretur, CHRISTUM suorum apostolorum principem constituisse PETRUM. This is cited by CASAUBON in his fifth exercit. on BARONIUS. Omnis potestas mihi data est in coelo et in terrâ. MAT. xxviii. 18. This is the text. The papal commentary follows. Non videretur dominus discretus fuisse, ut cum reverentia ejus loquar, nisi unicum post se talem vicarium reliquisset, qui hæc omnia posset. Vid. aut. glossar. in extrav. unam sanctam.
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the religious society, exclusively of the civil, their argument drawn from the rights of particular societies is good, as far as their society is concerned. But if they say, and they do say, that the civil society of Christians was and is subject to these laws, they beg the question, and they grow absurd. The comparison is no longer just, nor the argument good; for tho it be granted, that the by-laws of a particular society may govern that society, it is denied, that they can be laws to the whole community. Laws to the whole community, no power that is not the sovereign power in that community can prescribe. I know that the trite distinction between spiritual and temporal is always at hand. But I ask, is this power co-ercive or not? If it be not so, a power which begins and ends in spirituality cannot be very dangerous nor oppressive. But if it be co-ercive, they may call it spiritual as long as they please; it is what I just now said, the power of a particular society to make laws, not for themselves alone, but for the whole community; and as much as the church advocates endeavor to disguise the absurdity, and to evade the consequences, this is what they mean.

If this was not their meaning, to what purpose should they insist so much, or at all indeed, on the great superiority of the clergy as a more holy order over the laity, and of spiritual power and dignity over the temporal? This they have all done from CYPRIAN, first a magician, and afterwards a father of the christian church, down to that learned bigot DODWELL, who wrote dissertations on him. This they do even in this country, and at this hour, as openly as they dare; for let us not be deceived by the low cunning and dissimulation of some. Whoever asserts that the ecclesiastical order is of divine institution, and by that institution independent of the state, whatever alliance this order may think fit to suppose has been made with it, says in effect all that

that they say who speak more openly, more honestly, and more consistently. GIANNONE, who writ at Naples, carries these notions so far, that he lies open to ridicule in this particular, how respectable an author soever he be in general. He quotes CICERO to shew that, in the roman commonwealth, they who presided over the affairs of the state presided over those of religion, by a custom derived from their forefathers; and that nothing is more worthy of princes and men, distinguished by their knowledge in human affairs, than to be so likewise by their knowledge of those that are divine. He says that the two characters of king and priest were united often in heathen governments. But that the christian religion proposing a much more noble object than the meer prosperity of states and the public tranquility, the dignity of the priesthood among Christians is separated from the imperial dignity, and raised as much above it as things divine are above things human, as the soul is more noble than the body, and as eternal happiness is preferable to that of this life. He tells us afterwards, that notwithstanding this wide difference, the two characters may be united in the same person, by an accession of the temporal to the spiritual dignity, not by any accession of the spiritual to the temporal. The reason he gives is, because ecclesiastical dignity, being the greatest, cannot become an accession to or a dependence on the least; whereas the least may be in that relation to the greatest: and thus you see that a priest may stoop to the exercise of regal power, but a king cannot be raised up to the exercise of ecclesiastical, no, not to that of a country curate.

If a man, of as much knowledge and as little bigotry as this historian, could publish to the world, for I do not think he believed, such extravagances, in the eighteenth century, we cannot be surpris'd that these, and greater than these were taught, and piously believed too, in the ages of ignorance and superstition.

tion. But if the primitive clergy maintained such notions in speculation, they could not maintain them in practice. They had been sheep among wolves before CONSTANTINE. They were sheep, under the conduct of shepherds, after him: and these shepherds or principal pastors were the emperors. They became in process of time wolves among sheep: and emperors themselves were often the sheep they preyed upon. It is not only true that the emperors meddled very far in matters of religion, in matters of doctrine, I say, as well as of discipline; it is not only true that councils were summoned by their authority; but it is true likewise that the clergy had recourse to the same authority, to confirm their canons, and to give them the force of laws. The nicæan canons were confirmed by CONSTANTINE; those of Constantinople by THEODOSIUS; those of the council of Chalcedonia by MARCIANUS: and we need go no farther than the theodosian code, tho we might do so, to prove that the by-laws of the religious society acquired the force of laws, even in points of discipline that concerned this society alone, by the imperial, not the ecclesiastical authority, and by being inserted among the imperial constitutions. So that not only the ratification of the emperors was necessary to the doctrines they taught; but the by-laws they made, for the government of their own society, were subject to the civil power.

It would not be hard to shew, by a multitude of examples, that the church had no more claim allowed in those days to judicial and executive power, nor to the immunities and privileges she enjoyed, than she had to legislative power; that is, no more than the emperors allowed her: unless we should call the power of excommunication, which I suppose bishops exercised both before and after CONSTANTINE with the advice and consent of their presbyters alone, wherever they durst, a part of executive co-ercive power. But if this may be called
executive,

executive, it cannot be called co-ercive. It was a censure, it was an exclusion from christian congregations; but this censure, and this exclusion, operated on the imagination alone: and, the punishment being imaginary, the power was so too. It was nothing more till the increase of ecclesiastical, and the concurrence of civil authority made it more. In short, the power and dignity of the religious society were much higher in speculation and pretension, than they were in practice and reality, even for some time after the reign of CHARLEMAGNE, as high as this emperor raised them. The prelates in general, and the bishops of Rome in particular, before his time, and in it, made a shew of the greatest meekness, and of the greatest humility and submission to the emperors; tho they were even then in pursuit of the greatest objects of ambition. The successors of that wicked saint, GREGORY, continued to take, like him, the title of servants of the servants of God, at the very time when they sacrificed all the sentiments of humanity to the pride of being called oecumenical bishops; at the very time when they meditated, nay when they attempted, to be masters of the masters of the world. By this hypocritical behavior, and by that silly distinction between spiritual and temporal power, government of the church, and government of the state, they hindered men from taking an alarm that should have been taken sooner, and their tyranny was established almost before it was perceived.

WHEN the roman bishops pulled off their mask, and began to contend openly for power with the emperors, the ecclesiastical maxims which had been assumed for evangelical truths, and the whole tendency of which had not been discerned, became of infinite service to them. These paradoxes could not be proved. But they had been admitted; and the papal pretensions might be proved, plausibly enough, to be the necessary

ry consequences of them. Thus it happens often: a few false principles, uncautiously received, establish whole systems of error, and absurdity becomes capable of demonstration. But false speculative notions were not employed alone in the cause of the papacy. False facts and false records were necessary; and therefore forgery was added to assumption *. Forgery is an hard word, but it must be used when truth exacts that it should. I say then, that as it had been employed for holy purposes in the early ages of christianity, it was employed, in those we speak of here, for purposes very unholy. No man dares deny the first: and the advocates of Rome themselves, BARONIUS and others, are obliged to confess the last. Fathers were opposed to fathers, and councils to councils, about canonical writings; traditions of the western to traditions of the eastern churches; and those that were most distant in time and place, to those that were nearest in both to the source of these very traditions. Add to all this the approved custom of speaking and writing agonistically, or with oeconomy, that is, the custom of saying one thing and meaning another; which St. JEROM, that great critic and voucher of canonical scriptures, avowed, practised, and recommended: add this consideration, I say, to the rest, and you will not be surpris'd to hear it advanced, that we know neither why the gospels, the epistles, and the apocalypse we have, were retained, or rather inserted in the canon; nor why those we have not were rejected. We are forced to be in this case absolutely implicit: and yet in

* N. B. LESLIE, who was in religion as much a bigot, as in politics, makes a member of the church of England assert in a supposed dialogue between him and a roman catholic, that there were false gospels and false epistles ascribed to several of the apostles, set up by heretics in the first age; that they were detected in that same age, whilst the originals of what the apostles wrote were still in being; but that the heretics could not produce the originals of theirs, nor did their copies agree one with another. For all this he quotes EUSEBIUS, and adds, this was not deciding the matter by authority, but by plain evidence of a fact, as of any other forgery, or supposititious writing.

this case, if in any, we ought to have proof, that councils proceeded with integrity; since there is so great reason to suspect, that the spirit of party had as much to do in determining what books should be deemed canonical, as what doctrines should be deemed orthodox.

BUT in the other case, we are not obliged to be so implicit. If all the canons of antient councils, and every other ecclesiastical monument, had remained in the hands of the popes alone, we may assure ourselves, that they would have been all corrupted and interpolated, as such writings are more than any others exposed to be, and that those which could not be made to speak the language of the roman court would have been suppressed. Happily this suppression was not practicable in a full extent, many of these antient records having been preserved in other churches; and it is by the help of them that so many forgeries have been detected since the resurrection of letters. Some had been detected near a thousand years sooner occasionally, when the popes began first and faintly to stretch their primacy into a supremacy; a flagrant instance of which is the pretension, that was set on foot by one of them early in the fifth century, to a jurisdiction over the churches of Africa. This pretension was founded on a forged canon of the nicaean council. I say forged, because when the African bishops, and among them St. AUSTIN, had procured an authentic copy of these canons from the East, no such canon appeared among them. Other instances of occasional forgery there are; but we may say, without exaggeration, that, from the seventh century at the latest downwards, Rome was a storehouse of false traditions, false records, and every kind of forgery that could be of use to establish the ecclesiastical supremacy of her bishops first; and when that was done, their superiority of dignity and jurisdiction over all the other powers of the earth. This fund increased

increased continually too, from the sixth or seventh centuries. The more, and the more important the usurpations of this church were, the more such materials as these were wanted: and accordingly we find the times of the great increase, and the great want of them, coincide. The first decretals were forged, most probably, in the seventh century: and tho' there has been much dispute, whether the apostolical constitutions were made by the apostles, or by their immediate disciples, as if it were impossible they should be of a later date, yet is it an opinion more probable than either, that they are really no older than the sixth century.

WHAT has been said in this essay may serve to shew, how little respect would be due to the canons of councils, if they were genuine. But how much reason have we to neglect and despise them, when we consider by whom they were collected, and at what aeras these collections came into repute; when we add, to the little authority of the canons themselves, the little credit that the men who collected them, and who corrected and published them, deserve! DIONYSIUS, the little scythian abbot, made the first collection of them, at least the first that came into general use, in the sixth century and at Rome. After the eighth they were mingled up with decrees of popes, and constitutions of CHARLEMAGNE, the great instrument, as well as patron, of papal usurpations. The benedictin monk, GRATIAN, made a new collection in the twelfth century, and stuffed it with texts of scripture, as well as opinions of fathers. Of the former we may say, properly enough, "non erat his locus," and of the latter, that they do not deserve even the name of "responsa prudentum." If he was, and I think he was, brother of the master of the sentences, the two brothers established the two most impertinent sciences that ever puzzled the heads of men and disturbed the peace of the world, canon

law and scholastic theology. I say nothing of the clementines, nor the extravagants. They were published when the tyranny of Rome was already confirmed, and are as little to my purpose to be mentioned as the decretals published by that madman BONIFACE the eighth.

SUCH was the origin of that system of law which is called the canon law, and by the prevalence of which the bishop of one city, and a few suburbicarian provinces, invaded and subjected to his authority the civil laws of every country, the laws of nations, and the laws of nature themselves. Many of the decrees of popes, that the monkish collectors foisted into this ecclesiastical code, had not been made, very probably, many of them had not been executed, very certainly, at the time, and on the occasions pretended; and yet they all acquired, in process of time, a supposed authenticity, and became precedents alike. Just so, by an inversion of all the rules of good criticism and of common sense, their other forgeries got into credit. The least of these were false representations of things true. By them vain ceremonies, which the popes were admitted to perform, and vain compliments, which emperors and princes paid them, came in after-ages to pass for acknowledgments of a right, and presents that were made them, nay bribes that were given them, for tribute. The greatest were those gross lies, and all those fabulous relations which they invented, and propagated, to nourish superstition, or to justify usurpation, which were not only void of all foundation, but often irreconcilable to history and chronology; and which, however, were repeated till they were believed, on the faith of fabulous legends. Thus they builded up a sovereignty, at all times the most absurd, and for a long time the most tyrannical, that had ever been felt over the western world. An uniform system of ambition steadily and artfully pursued, from one generation

neration to another, through ages of ignorance and superstition, wherein it was easy to impose on the understandings of men, and to direct their consciences, established this tyranny little by little. It grew up fastest from the time it was established in the out-skirts of the empire, in Britain, and in Spain for instance. It grew up less in France, and it was revered least of all at Rome. The Romans were pleased to see their city become the seat of chimerical, when it was so no longer of real empire. But then they used their pontiffs, as they had sometimes used their emperors. They abetted their conquests abroad, and treated their persons ignominiously at home. These pontiffs were never more respected in foreign nations, than they were at the time when they gave the greatest scandal, and received the greatest insults in Italy. By the means and by the conduct that have been mentioned, however, they were able, even in such circumstances, to assert with success the most exorbitant of their pretensions against the greatest emperors.

THIS success varied indeed on some particular occasions ; but on the whole, and in the event, it was in their favor. Thus, that I may quote two examples at least, the first OTHO deposed JOHN the thirteenth, in the tenth century, for debauchery and treason ; directed and confirmed the election of LEO the eighth ; restored this pope when he had been expelled from his seat by a rival ; chose another, and re-established the imperial right to grant investitures, and to nominate the bishops of Rome, which prerogatives had been lost by the successors of CHARLEMAGNE. Thus, on the other hand, GREGORY the seventh, in the next century, taking up the contest about these very prerogatives, which was again on foot, carried it on with so much success, that all circumstances considered, by what he effected, and by what he put it in the power of his successors to effect, he may be esteemed a worse man and a greater con-

conqueror than ALEXANDER or CAESAR. In this contest, he had the address to gain to his side the mother and the aunt of the emperor HENRY the fourth, and to debauch, in every sense of the word, perhaps, his cousin german the countess MATHILDA. At least, the manner in which she lived with this dirty monk, and which was not at all necessary to the support of a cause, she might and did affect to favor on a religious principle, justifies the accusation sufficiently. He made the Saxons revolt; he divided the empire; he excommunicated the emperor and all his adherents over and over: and when he was asked, by what right he had presumed to deprive this prince of his crown, and to absolve the subjects of the empire from the allegiance they had sworn to him? He answered, that he had done it conformably to customs and usages of his predecessors*. Such customs and such usages, before HILDEBRAND, were entirely unknown to the most learned men in former ages, as well as in ours. But HILDEBRAND had precedents ready to allege, and some such are, I believe, mentioned in letters of his writing. How, indeed, should he want them, when Rome was a store-house of acts of papal power which were never executed, nor would have been suffered at the times when they pretended to have been executed, but were laid up to be produced on future occasions? This instance may serve to prove, by the way, therefore, the truth of what is said above; for whether the pope invented these fabulous relations himself, or whether his secretary furnished him with false documents, as I learn by a note of BAYLE it has been supposed in his excuse, these lies were coined in the papal mint. To conclude, this emperor, who came, it is said, victorious out of more than sixty combats, and who had forced his enemy from Rome into an exile from which he never returned at Salerne, was deposed, dethroned, and confined to the prison where he died, by his son

* MAIM. decad. de l'empirc.

HENRY

HENRY the fifth, whom PASCHAL the second encouraged in his rebellion, and excited to this cruelty.

AFTER the death of HENRY the fourth, the popes completed their usurpations very soon. As they robbed the emperors of the right to confirm their elections, they robbed the clergy and the people of the right to elect them; for it was decreed at Mantua, that the cardinals alone should choose the popes. In a council held at Troyes, it was decreed, that investitures to benefices belonged to the sovereign pontiff alone; because religion was polluted, said these reverend fathers, when persons dedicated to the service of the heavenly and immortal King became subjects and vassals of an earthly and mortal prince. In a council held at Rheims, HENRY the fifth, who had taken up his father's quarrel with the popes, tho he had rebelled in the same quarrel against his father, was excommunicated: and these circumstances, with others discernible enough in history, determined him to a composition. He gave up the right of investitures; for he consented to hold it by a grant from the pope, and not as an imperial prerogative. He consented too, that this grant should be restrained to him personally, and that the prerogative should belong solely to the see of Rome after his decease. The popes were now arrived at that height of power and independency which had been so long the object of their ambition. They have maintained themselves in it, as they attained to it, by fomenting rebellions, assassinations, massacres, and by employing superstition to keep up, in every state, a private conscience favorable to the ecclesiastical, and dangerous to the civil authority. Such have been the consequences of an alliance between the monarchy and the hierarchy; (for those, who talk of an alliance between the religious and civil society, deserve only contempt, when they affirm, with fact and common sense both against them) and I believe, that

that from the days of CHARLES the great to the reformation, no instance can be brought of a contest between them, wherein the bishops of Rome have not prevailed in the whole, or in some very essential points, by the wise maxim of observing conjunctures, and of pushing their pretensions to the utmost with violence and insolence; or of reducing them to terms of real or seeming moderation. When conjunctures were favorable, they bullied and usurped: when these were unfavorable, they whined; composed, if they could, and if they could not, submitted. Had the civil powers of Europe seen their danger in time, and united against it, these things could not have happened, nor the christian church have become a perpetual source of the greatest evils to the christian world. But the civil powers were divided, and the popes growing of more and more consequence, as their dignity and authority increased, every side was glad to have them, and the side that bid most, or yielded most, was sure to have them. France had raised and protected them: and France afforded a terrible example, even as lately as the sixteenth century, of her own mistaken policy in the ninth and following centuries.

NOTWITHSTANDING the great success which the popes had, and the superiority they acquired over all christian princes by acquiring it over the emperors, the struggle was hard; the event had been sometimes doubtful, and it was not very certain that they would be able to maintain the rights they had already usurped, or to keep the laity in constant awe by the thunder of excommunications. To make their work sure, therefore, they judged it necessary to invent still new expedients, and to improve every old one that had served to exalt ecclesiastical power and dignity. They did more. They found means to divert the attention of mankind from Europe to Asia, and to confirm insensibly the tyranny they had usurped, by engaging the
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the princes and states of the West to undertake romantic expeditions for extending it into the East. The epidemical madness of the croisades, which ambition, superstition, and licentiousness combined to nourish, lasted two hundred years: and if these unholy wars did not extend the dominion of the church, nor establish the papal power in the countries where they were made, both the church and the popes found their account in them several ways, where they meant much more to find it. The croisades were conspiracies of the religious against the civil society of Europe. These two societies were nearly on a balance of power. The croisades turned it in favor of the former. MEZERAY thinks, that the uneasy and dangerous situation of his affairs in Italy, determined URBAN the second to come into France, when he held the council of Clermont there, and that the promoting of the first expedition against the Saracens was nothing more than a pretence he took. But he had no need of any such pretence. He was a french man: and France, as MEZERAY himself says, was the ordinary refuge of the popes. Besides, when he had resolved to put in execution this unchristian project, he could not fail to see that there was no country then in Europe wherein this scene of farce, which was to produce so many scenes of tragedy, could be acted with so much advantage as in France. Italy and Germany were divided between him and the emperor. Spain was the theatre of one perpetual war against the Moors. Britain was superstitious enough, but Britain lay in a remote corner of the world: the norman invasion was just over, and the new government scarce settled. France was liable to none of these objections: and the success which his holiness had there might surpass his expectations, as it surpasses almost the belief of posterity. The enthusiastical fury, for such it was, infused at Clermont by the pope, and fomented by his emissaries every where else, became at once an epidemical distemper, and all Europe grew delirious. Princes abandoned

doned their dominions, and private men their patrimonies, to the care and protection of the church. Besides innumerable frauds that the clergy committed, the regulars especially, to invade the possessions of the laity; the laity was obliged to sell them on these occasions, and the clergy was ready and able to buy. No wonder, therefore, since power always follows property, if the religious society was strengthened by being enriched; if the civil was weakened by being impoverished, and if, upon the whole, the church gave the law to the state.

MANY other expedients were employed, like so many underprops to support the same system. They were less observed as such, because they carried an appearance of religious austerity and self-denial, of edification not of acquisition. Some of the men who furnished these expedients, and who made them effectual to the purposes of ecclesiastical ambition, were the bubbles and the victims of their own superstitious zeal. But fools have been always led, in matters of religion especially, by designing knaves. Hermits had been summoned from their solitudes, on some occasions, to support a turbulent seditious bishop; one example of which has been referred to above. How much more easy was it for that universal bishop, the pope, when religious orders multiplied, as they did prodigiously in the ages we speak of here, and when, whoever instituted, he confirmed them, to employ these standing armies of monks more silently, but more effectually too, in his service? The croisades gave much occasion to these institutions; and the extravagance was carried so far that military orders were instituted among the rest, that is, orders of men whose particular profession obliged them to defend and propagate christianity, as long as they lived, by cutting of throats. This indeed was the general profession of all those who took the badge of the cross, whenever a pope thought fit, for the time at least for which they engaged. I say,

say, whenever a pope thought fit; because this cruel expedient, which had been employed originally against the Mahometans, was employed afterwards against Christians, against all such as were called heretics, when every man was called by that name who did not, because he could not, think as the church of Rome ordered him to think, or who exclaimed against the abominable corruptions of that court.

AMONG the expedients by which the religious society was attached to the pope independently of their lawful sovereigns, and to the church independently of the state, that of a forced celibacy was one. They were a distinct order of men, and had a separate interest from the other society before. But by this institution, every band that might have united, some of them at least to it, was cut off, under the specious pretence of a greater degree of christian purity and perfection. Monks and nuns took a vow of chastity, wherein celibacy was included, according to the logic employed for this political purpose: and it was manifestly necessary to the same purpose, that the secular clergy should be put under the same restraint. They were intended to mingle, more than the others, with civil society. Their habits were much the same, and their interest not so separate. There was, therefore, the more danger that they might contract a love for the civil constitution of their country, prefer their king to the pope, and reverence a parliament or assembly of the states more than a council. All that could be done to prevent so great a mischief was to hinder this attachment to their country from increasing, by that natural attachment which fathers of families have to their children. This was seen early, and the bishops of Rome had taken upon them, as far back as the seventh century, to forbid the marriages of priests. Their orders had been rejected by some, by the Spaniards particularly, and had been ill obeyed in general. But celibacy was now in-

joined more strictly, and enforced more powerfully. Decrees of popes, canons of councils, all kinds of authority, were employed: and it must be confessed, to the honor of ecclesiastical policy, that the yoke imposed was rendered as light as possible by connivance, and even by indulgence. The concubinage of priests was tolerated, nunneries became brothels, and if among the standing expences of convents, a reasonable allowance was not made to the monks for the necessary expences of fornication, "ad purgandos renes," and on a principle of health, which has been said but may be denied; this at least is notorious, that the fathers were left to provide for their health, in the best manner that they could, by simple fornication, or by adultery.

As this expedient attached the whole clergy, more intimately, to the general interest of the church, and to the particular interest of the pope, auricular confession and private penance were designed to attach the people more intimately to the clergy*. Public confessions and public penance, as they had been practised in the primitive church, might impose more, and be a greater restraint on vice and immorality. But when it was thought sufficient that all this passed privately between the confessors and the penitents, many advantages, which were deemed preferable to such a restraint, resulted from the modern practice. Penitents were exempted from public shame; if they blushed, they blushed in a corner: and confessors had the most secret transactions, nay the thoughts and designs, of mankind in their keeping. They had more: they had not only a general influence over private conscience, but the means of exercising this influence in private; the means of teaching pri-

* N. B. Whatever private confessions, as well as others, might have been practised antiently, the law by which every person is obliged once in a year, I think, to confess all his sins to his proper priest, was not made till INNOCENT the third got it enacted, among several that were calculated merely to advance the power and authority of the priesthood, in the lateran council.

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vately what they dared not preach publicly, and of instilling into the minds of men every principle and passion they pleased. This expedient advanced the papal empire more than any: it made the bishop of Rome, in some circumstances, as terrible as the old man of the mountain, and enabled ecclesiastical ambition to do, more directly, more regularly, and more constantly than before, all the mischief that has been imputed to religion. A very moderate knowledge of history, ecclesiastical and civil, antient and modern, will furnish examples enow to confirm this truth. It is impossible to read without horror, for instance, the accounts we have of the ambition, insolence, and perfidy of HADRIAN and ALEXANDER, in their disputes with FREDERIC the first, whom HADRIAN, like the king of the assassins, endeavored to have drowned, stabbed, or destroyed by magic; and whom ALEXANDER, they say, insulted, in the words of the psalmist, "super aspidem et basiliscum ambulabis." As little can we read, without the same sentiment, the proceedings of GREGORY the ninth, a worthy successor of the seventh, in the next century, that is the thirteenth, against the second FREDERIC. But if all these histories, and others of the same kind were wanting, and we had no other than that of THUANUS, that of THUANUS alone would serve the purpose, and the better for being nearer our own time. That wise and honest historian acknowledges, that all the iniquities of the league were hatched and nursed up to maturity in the confessionals; after which, the effects of this private influence were publicly avowed, the sovereignty of the popes over all other sovereigns, in matters of religion, and in matters appertaining to religion, the infallibility of their judgments, their dispensing and deposing power, the duty of rebellion in some cases, and the merit of assassination in others, were propagated from the pulpits: and what their pastors preached, the people executed.

It

It might be expected, perhaps, that the quarrels which arose after the reign of CHARLES the great, from a conflict of spiritual and temporal prerogatives and jurisdiction, as well as those disturbances which arose from dissenting opinions about articles of faith, and points of doctrine, long before his time, would be appeased, and prevented for the future, by the establishment of this papal monarchy. But, if such an expectation was entertained, it was wholly disappointed. The successors of GREGORY the seventh took every opportunity of asserting their right to all the powers, temporal and spiritual, that he had claimed, and of exercising them as vicars of CHRIST. There is a decree of BONIFACE the eighth, who was less able, less successful, and more mad, if possible, than HILDEBRAND, that holds it's place in the canon law, and that declares subjection to the roman pontiff necessary to the salvation of every human creature *. This subjection too is not confined to spirituals; for, in the extravagants, he claims a right to the two swords, and asserts a jurisdiction over all temporal, as well as spiritual authority †. This jurisdiction was confirmed by the council of Lateran, and was founded in the theology of those doctors, who made a christianity of their own, with little regard to that of CHRIST whose name it bore, and often in plain contradiction to his gospel. Thus St. THOMAS, the evangelical doctor, as he has been called very improperly and very impertinently, pretended to prove, by shameful prevarications, that such a submission as the popes required was an essential condition of salvation: and he, like the rest of his tribe, and their masters the popes, inflamed the dissensions about articles of faith and doctrines, as much as about prerogatives and jurisdictions.

* Subesse romano pontifici.

† Regem se regum, mundi monarcham, unicum in spiritualibus et temporalibus dominum promulgavit.

To

To what purpose should I quote any more instances, to shew that this has been the proceeding of the church of Rome, as I have asserted before, and as I assert now over again, from the eleventh and twelfth centuries! The fact is notorious. But yet this doctrine had never been acquiesced in universally. Sometimes kings, nay sometimes councils, had opposed it: and the reformers, in the sixteenth century, were so far from advancing any thing new on this head, that numbers of Christians in the West, as well as all the churches in the East, had constantly disowned it during every intervening age, and that the former had suffered, rather than to own it, the most cruel persecutions. Thus the same conflicts of jurisdiction were frequently renewed, and the same calamities continued by the same pertinacious spirit of ambition; till princes being tired with these struggles, they came little by little, at different times and in different places, to certain terms of accommodation. Princes renewed with the popes their former alliances with the hierarchy, and compounded the best they could with the tyrant they had acknowledged. But notwithstanding these compositions, and tho the popes dare not exercise their pretended rights as they did formerly, they keep up their pretensions, in hopes that an happy revival of ignorance and barbarity may do them, sooner or later, as much good as the unhappy resurrection of letters did them hurt.

SECTION XXXVIII.

SUCH as I have sketched them rudely, but truly, were the ecclesiastical and papal usurpations on civil sovereignty, complete almost before avowed, and opposed as soon as avowed. But the other usurpations of Rome were different in their direction,

rection, and in their course. The intention of these being to vest in the bishop of that see the sole right of deciding in matters of faith and doctrine, either immediately without, or ultimately with the concurrence of a council, and by way of confirmation, they were plainly directed against all the inferior ranks in the hierarchy: and thus, whilst princes and states defended their own rights by constant, tho' unconcerted efforts, they left the pope at liberty to deal with his subjects, for such the clergy, even the prelates had made themselves, as he thought fit, and to proceed in his judgments with their advice, or without it. The consequence soon followed; the laity believed as the church taught, and the church taught as the pope pronounced. But we must not imagine, that this usurpation on a prerogative the church had always exercised by her representative assemblies, convened without the papal authority, and acting independently on it, was admitted, because either the religious or the civil society thought it belonged to the pope by divine right; or because the former being unable to resist it without the abatement and aid of the latter, the latter neglected it as unconcerned in it. Neither of these societies could believe, that this prerogative belonged to the pope by divine right, which the greatest authorities and the recent practice of the whole ecclesiastical order contradicted: and if we consider the passages of preceding ages, we shall find reason to believe, that princes and civil magistrates did not suffer this usurpation to take place, because they neglected it, or thought themselves unconcerned in it, but because they desired, that it might take place. What is here said deserves to be explained: and when it is so, tho' it be simply my conjecture, I think it will justify itself.

FROM the time there had been such a thing as christianity in the world, Christians had been divided not only about compliments,

ments, rites and ceremonies, "such silly things," says HOOKER, "that very easiness doth make them hard to be disputed about in serious manner *," but about every important article of their religion; and as soon as they had power in their hands, they persecuted one another, and disturbed the peace of the empire. To remedy this evil, councils were employed: but councils defined and decreed to little purpose. To support their decisions, the authority of the emperors was employed. Some of these, like THEODOSIUS, made the most sanguinary laws, and exercised the most cruel tyranny, in the cause of orthodoxy. Others of them seemed to have so much concern for the church, that they had none for the empire; like HONORIUS, who was extremely busy at Ravenna in punishing manicheans, donatists, priscillianists, and heretics of every denomination, whilst the Goths marched without opposition to Rome. All this, however, proved ineffectual, and new heads sprouted out from the hydra of theology, as fast as the spiritual and temporal swords lopped them off. It could not be otherwise. The scriptures are a sure criterion of orthodoxy, when they are applied no farther than they were designed to be such: and they could be designed to be such no farther than they are intelligible and plain. He who pretends to employ this rule any farther, profanes the scriptures, and abuses himself or others. This criterion, considered under the image of a rule, may be said to mark out to us the great points, the inches, and the feet, for instance. But the less dimensions, the lines, for instance, are not marked, or they are not discernible. The master builder, who put this rule into our hands, that we might work out our salvation by it, proportioned the rule to the work. How came we then, paultry builders that we are! to mark new and more minute divisions on this rule; to alter it, under pretence of making it more complete, and to measure

* Ep. dedicat.

and to build by guess? The gospel is the rule: theology is the rule, thus altered. He who adheres to one, founds his religion on divine, he who adheres to the other, on human authority; the first infallible and fixed, the second precarious and variable.

METAPHYSICS and tradition, their own whimsies and those of their predecessors, guided the clergy, and constituted their theology. They never considered the word of God naked, if I may say so, nor ever looked at it, except through a theological medium, through which every man might see whatever he had a mind to see in it. Many of the questions that arose, were, in no degree, objects of reason: and no men living were less fit than the fathers of the church, the greatest of them, St. CHRYSOSTOM or St. JEROM, and St. AMBROSE or St. AUSTIN, to speak or write on any subject, that required a clear determination of ideas, a closeness of reasoning, an evangelical candor, or even common ingenuoufness. Besides, that it was difficult very often to know whether these men spoke sincerely, or with oeconomy, they declaimed much: and those of them, who pretended to reason, reasoned ill. They perverted the sense, and defamed the characters of their adversaries: they quibbled and cavilled, and then decided dogmatically on subjects they did not understand; as St. AUSTIN did, I presume, in the case of pelagianism, and in the doctrine of absolute predestination, which he, after St. PAUL, and CALVIN after him, endeavored to establish. Their personal partialities, the spirit of party and faction were manifest; as in the case of ORIGEN, who did great honor and service to the christian church, and yet was condemned by the same prelate that ordained SYNESIUS bishop of Ptolemais, tho the honest philosopher declined this honor, and declared he would neither abandon his wife, nor several of those platonic opinions, that were repugnant to the christian doctrine. There are so many examples to justify this charge,

in every part of it, that if any cholerick divine should presume to deny it, the same fate might attend him and the fathers he took under his protection, as attended them and the monk who defended them against BARBEYRAC. The charge might be proved out of their own works, and their theology shewn to be no better than their ethics.

I HAVE touched over again, among others, some things that have been mentioned already, in order to introduce my conjecture about the reason that might determine the civil powers to make no opposition to the popes when they assumed first an absolute authority, even superior to that of councils, in matters of faith, and in all matters of doctrine and discipline. Their reason must have been political. It could not be religious. The manner of holding the first council at Jerusalem, and the manner of decreeing in it, as they are represented in the fifteenth of the Acts, made strongly for the councils, and not at all for the popes. This was certainly the first council, a precedent for all others, and the foundation of their authority over the whole church. No man, I believe, before BARONIUS, had discovered, that CHRIST himself held a council, and that he presided in it when he called his disciples to him and asked them first, as one who enquired about news, whom men said that he was; and next as a president who took their opinions whom they said that he was*. But this little sophistry was meant to insinuate, that as CHRIST gave the keys on this occasion to PETER and his successors, so he gave them particularly a superiority over councils, nay, that he rendered these the least useful assemblies in the world. PETER alone pronounced the decree of this type of a council †; and tho the others assented, no doubt, yet does it not appear that the form of consulting them was observed.

* Matt. xvi. Mark viii. Luke ix.

† Actio Christi typum quendam exprimit celebrandi concilium.

The practice of the church afforded no more reason, than the terms of the gospel, for this superiority of the popes over councils; but the woeful experience of many ages shewed how inadequate the institution of councils themselves was to the purpose of preserving uniformity in christian churches, and peace in christian states: and this political consideration became a sufficient reason to the civil powers for favoring, or at least for not opposing the usurpation of the popes, in the instance we speak of here.

It had been found necessary, even in the apostolical age, to elect a presbyter in every church, who might preserve the unity of it by his authority, and prevent the schisms which arose perpetually. This was the institution of bishops. As christianity spread, as bishops multiplied, as they grew more powerful, and as theology grew more and more contentious, the same expedient, that had been found useful, if not wholly effectual, to preserve the uniformity of particular churches, might seem the most proper to be employed for the same purposes in the universal church: and in this case who so fit to be the universal bishop as the bishop of Rome? Rome had been the seat of empire, when the empire had been in it's glory. If the dignity of cities was to determine, as it had always done, the dignity of sees, there was none that could vie with that of Rome. If a right derived from St. PETER, the supposed prince of the apostles, was to determine, there was none neither, in this case, to vie with that of Rome. Antioch, the first bishopric of PETER, had yielded to the second imperial city, Constantinople. Who could vie then with the bishop of the first imperial city, that pretended, and was believed to have been the second bishopric of PETER, as well as the scene of his martyrdom?

It

It is true, that some bishops of Rome had erred most grievously in their judgments, and been scandalous in their manners. But others had retrieved, in some degree, the honor of the see: and if the heresies and vices of popes were made objections against them, in this case, what church was there that could boast an uninterrupted succession of orthodox and pious prelates? In short, all the churches of the West had contracted, in process of time, such an habitual reverence for that of Rome, that her opinions in matters of religion and conscience had been frequently asked, and that the judgments of her bishops had been received with an apparent submission, even by those who did not acknowledge, till long afterwards, a power to impose them. The churches of Spain and of Gaul afford a most remarkable instance to our present purpose, in the famous case of the procession of the holy ghost. Both of them paid a great regard to the papal authority in matters of this kind: the latter, I think, most and soonest; tho the former has outstripped her since in a bigot attachment to it: and yet both these churches had added the words "filioque," in order to declare their belief, that the holy ghost proceeded from the son as well as the father, to the constantinopolitan creed, not only without, but against the consent of the popes. This addition too was not only maintained three hundred years together, but imposed, at last, on the church of Rome; one of her infallible bishops having admitted it into his creed very wisely, and chosen to authorise, what he could not alter, rather than suffer so great a part of the western church to stand in opposition to his infallibility, at the very time when the establishment of it was attempted.

AFTER this time the clergy grew more obsequious to the popes, and more insolent to their princes; for as the power
of

of the former increased, their independency on the latter increased with it. If it had not been so, we should have heard of more oppositions to the doctrines of Rome, and those we do hear of would have prevailed sooner. But as the civil power desired nothing more than an uniformity of belief for the sake of peace, and thought that this uniformity could be preserved no way so well as by giving to one bishop a superintendency over the faith of the whole church, two things followed of course. One we know. The other we may conjecture from what we know. We know, that civil and ecclesiastical power united their efforts to exterminate, by inquisitions, by croisades, and all the cruelties they were able to exercise, every sect that arose in direct and open opposition to the doctrines and decisions of the church of Rome. We conjecture, that in cases where the opposition was more confined, and more disguised, where it seemed directed to diminish, rather than to abolish the authority of the popes, the same thing happened formerly in many places, which we see happen in France at this day. A great number of the inferior clergy, few of the prelates, refused to accept the constitution *unigenitus*. The former have been discountenanced and oppressed without much noise; and those of them that persist, persist in silence and obscurity. The others die off, and are replaced by men more complaisant and more politic. Thus the opposition to this bull will make no figure in history, and the doctrine of it will pass for that of the whole gallican church conforming implicitly to a papal constitution. The pretended explanations, restrictions, and other prevarications, that were employed to trim between God and the pope, will remain in the pamphlets of the time alone, and in the closets of antiquaries. Thus an appearance of uniformity in matters of faith has been, and may be imposed on posterity, by stifling the proofs of the contrary: and if this failed, the church would have nothing more to do to preserve

serve the illusion of uniformity, than what she has done so often and so long; to quote those alone who have spoken the same language as she speaks, and to take no notice of others, or to pass them by as heretics whose suffrage ought not to be brought to account.

THE pope is a general; the clergy a standing army, which has fought his battles, like other armies, without any regard to the justice or injustice of the cause: and the common soldiers of which, as of other armies, have sometimes mutinied in particular quarters, the general officers seldom, the whole or the greatest part never. That even the common soldiers of this army should mutiny, at any time, may appear the more extraordinary, because no general ever recompensed the zeal of private men in his cause more signally than the pope has done. He procured them free quarters and very lucrative exemptions in every christian country. He abetted their insolence, and employed every artifice, as well as his whole power, to impose on the superstition of mankind an high conceit of the dignity of this spiritual militia. One artifice of this sort, the most extravagant that was ever invented, and the most effectual at the same time, shall be produced. You may be surprised, perhaps, when I say it was the doctrine of transubstantiation.

SECTION XXXIX.

NOTHING could be more intelligible, nor even to human judgment more reasonable, than the institution of the Lord's supper; since the sole design of it was that Christians should commemorate in common the death of CHRIST and the redemption of mankind, as well as signify, by participating of the same bread and the same wine, that they were of the same religion,

religion, if, as ERASMUS says in paraphrasing St. PAUL, “ vide-
 “ tur agnoscere communem religionem qui communibus cibis
 “ vescitur *. But refinements, and figurative expressions employ-
 ed about it, made the plainest thing in the world mystical and
 unintelligible. The effects of the eucharist were made so first,
 and the very elements, the bread and the wine, became so af-
 terwards. This sacrament was no longer a simple act of com-
 memoration and of profession. It was made a great and dread-
 ful mystery, of which Christians may partake to their damna-
 tion, as well as to their salvation. The person, by whom it
 was instituted, is represented sometimes under images that ren-
 der it impossible to frame any of the efficacy, or even of the
 institution of this sacrament. CHRIST is a vine, he is a rock,
 nay he is a coat, according to St. PAUL; and we clothe our-
 selves with him in our baptism, according to St. CHRYSOSTOM.
 According to the same eloquent father too, he stands to us in
 the relation of an head, of an house, of a table, and of a
 root †. Now one of these images alone can give us any im-
 perfect idea of the efficacy of this sacrament. CHRIST is the
 head of a body, and the faithful are the members. The same
 loaf is made up of many crumbs, the same body of many
 members §: and therefore, according to St. PAUL’s reasoning,
 all those who eat of one loaf compose one body ||. Thus
 CHRIST is, in this community, at once the son of God and the
 brother of man. The brother, but the elder brother, of the
 elect **: and in the epistle to the Ephesians we are said to be
 flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bone, “ ex carne ejus et of-

* Paraph. in ep. ad Cor. ep. i. c. x. v. 15.

† — CHRISTUM suis esse non solum caput, domum, mensam, radicem, sed
 etiam vestem quando in baptismo CHRISTUS induatur. vid. CASAUB. in exercit.

§ Panis ex innumeris granis sic conflatus est — corpus sic ex diversis membris
 constat — Paraph. ERAS.

|| Quoniam unus panis, unum corpus multi sumus, omnes qui de uno pane par-
 ticipamus. Ep. ad Corin. i. c. x.

** Primogenitus in multis fratribus, ep. ad Rom. viii. 29.

“ fibus

“ fibus ejus.” These immense and inexplicable advantages are to be ascribed, principally, to the efficacy of this mysterious sacrament. By baptism, we are made partakers of the holy ghost. By this sacrament, we are made such of the body and blood of CHRIST. But I will conclude, instead of citing any more particular instances, by borrowing from CASAUBON some general words, that may serve to shew how high mens notions have been raised about this theological mystery, by the theological abuse of figures. “ The eucharisty, rightly taken, “ is the instrument of that conjunction by which we grow into “ one body with the son of God, and with all the faithful ---- “ What can be more admirable, what more stupendous, than “ that man should be thus joined and coalited with God, the “ creature with the Creator, the mortal with the immortal, “ the finite with the infinite, and earth with heaven? This “ miracle is greater than that of creating a world out of no- “ thing*.” I think it is; but I think too, that it would be as easy to distinguish the most extravagant language that platonic or pythagorean enthusiasts ever held out of blasphemy, as these orthodox expressions.

THE yoke of christianity is easy, and the burden light. But if theology has shortened the decalogue, it has lengthened the creed, and has maintained hitherto in the inlightened ages such a tyranny over the minds of men, in opposition to reason and revelation too, as could not be established in the darkest without much difficulty. In the case just mentioned, concerning the mystical effects of the eucharisty, we are required by hu-

* —Eucharistiam legitimo modo sumptam instrumentum esse ejus conjunctionis, perquam in corpus unum cum filio Dei—coalescimus, et cum caeteris etiam omnibus fidelibus—quid magis admirabile aut magis stupendum, quam jungi, atque adeo coalescere in corpus unum, hominem cum Deo, creaturam cum Creatore, mortalem cum immortali, finitum cum infinito, coenum cum coelo? Hoc majus est miraculum, quam de nihilo mundum creasse.

man authority to believe, that the most divine and important truths are concealed under a variety of figurative expressions, which have no conceivable applications, at least none that are conceivable to us uninspired persons, or else such as cannot be made by us, without a profanation that shocks the ear of every man who keeps up in his mind an awful sense of the majesty of the Supreme Being; nor dares to think, like those whom we call divines, as familiarly and as lowly of God as of man. In the case that is to be mentioned concerning the elements, as they are called, of the eucharist, your church requires, and the whole christian church did require before the reformation, that we should believe substances which give us the ideas of bread and wine, both before and after consecration, to be, after it, such substances as give us the ideas of flesh and blood. If we should say, that in fact they give us these ideas, we should lie most impudently: and if we should say, as you pretended catholics do say, that, tho they give us still the ideas of bread and wine, yet they are miraculously flesh and blood, we should talk a language that passes on millions, and yet can pass on no one man who consults his reason impartially, or who considers the proofs of christian revelation by miracles, which are, in truth, appeals to the senses.

WE are all conscious, or very little experiment and reflection will suffice to make us so, that we know nothing more of substances than their effects. God has given us no other way of distinguishing them: and if we abandon that, nothing can be affirmed or denied concerning them. A miracle may change one substance into another, as water was changed into wine at the feast in Galilee. But the accidents cannot remain, and the substance be changed; or to speak more plainly, a different substance must produce different ideas in us. A supernatural operation must be sensible, or it is no more a miracle than if no-
thing

thing was operated. The gueſts at Cana would not have believed that the water was turned into wine, if they had not been convinced of the change by their taſte: and if the diſciples were convinced, after his reſurrection, that JESUS was the ſame CHRIST who had been crucified, it was becauſe they ſaid that they ſaw him to be the ſame, and that one of them probed the wounds he had received on the croſs. According to the firſt example then, the communicants in your church ſhould eat raw fleſh, and the prieſt by his peculiar privilege ſhould drink warm blood; for the tranſubſtantiation is inſtantaneous: and, according to the laſt example, if the elements in the eucharifty continue to the ſight and taſte the ſame, they are the ſame bread and the ſame wine, after conſecration, that they were before.

HE who ſhould think to evade the abſurdity, by inſiſting that God works two miracles at once, that he changes the bread and wine into fleſh and blood, and that to exerciſe our faith he alters the phyſical conſtitution of the elect in ſuch a manner, on this occaſion, that fleſh and blood produce in them the ideas of bread and wine; he, I ſay, who ſhould think ſo, would only increaſe the abſurdity by endeavoring to evade it, as they who are in the dirt, dirty themſelves more by endeavoring to get out of it. He would aſſume a miracle and no miracle, or rather a miracle contrived to diſguiſe a miracle, and a fraudulent impoſition on our ſenſes for the excellent purpoſe of exerciſing faith againſt knowledge, and in direct contradiction to all the proofs that CHRIST gave of the divinity of his miſſion by appealing to the ſenſes of mankind: ſo that if tranſubſtantiation be true, the whole chriſtian revelation may be falſe. No one would impute ſuch a kind of proceeding to any man who was not a profeſſed juggler: and yet ſuch a proceeding is imputed to God, by popes, councils, and the whole tribe of your divines. But it is time I ſhould leave a ſubject that gives me horror, even

when I write against it; and that has been exhausted by abler pens, by that of TILLOTSON particularly, in a short tract preferable to immense volumes. It is time I should remember that my business here is not to refute the doctrine of transubstantiation, but to shew how it came to be established, and the political view of the popes in the establishment of it.

SECTION XL.

To this purpose then, I say, that a supposed mystery in the elements arose first, like a supposed mystery in the effects of the eucharist, from figurative expression. There is no one, perhaps, in the whole gospel, less liable to an equivocal sense than that which CHRIST employed, when he said, "this is my body, and this is my blood," in the very act of giving bread and wine to his disciples who were at supper with him, just before his death, for a remembrance of which this ceremony of a supper was then instituted by him. The figure was easy, the application natural, and they could not understand the expression literally. It is impossible to suppose that they did, unless we suppose them mad: and yet it is this very expression that has been made the foundation of a doctrine, which Hurons and Iroquois, Samojedes and Hottentots, would blush to own, and which has brought disgrace on christianity, if any ever did, as well as innumerable calamities on the christian world. The fathers of the church loved figurative style, and their whole theology is nothing else, but they employed it more to perplex than to explain: and it is not wonderful, therefore, if they seemed to confound the typical, or symbolical, with the real body of CHRIST. They seemed to do it, or they did it, if you will, sometimes. But when their matter led them to speak with more caution and precision, so many of them, and of the greatest of them, contradistinguished the first from the last, in
such

such plain and strong terms, that it is evident a real corporeal presence in the eucharist was neither their opinion, nor the general belief of the church in the first ages. Give me leave to add, tho I cite no other particular passages here, because they have been cited by many on the same occasion, that the inconsistency of your church never appears to me more barefaced than it does, when I consider that she has made the writings of St. AUSTIN almost a rule of faith; and yet that this father not only declares, in many places, against her favorite doctrine, which was not at that time a doctrine*, but guards against it, for fear it should become such by a wrong interpretation of the scripture. He brings an example of wrong interpretations that may be made, by quoting these words, "except ye eat the flesh of the son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you." These words interpreted literally contain, according to him, a great impiety. They are to be interpreted, therefore, figuratively. The doctrine of transubstantiation is, therefore, an impious doctrine, according to this father.

BUT how carefully soever the typical and symbolical body of CHRIST in the eucharist was distinguished, on some occasions, from his real body, from the body born of the virgin MARY, which was crucified, which rose from the dead, and which ascended into heaven, they grew to be easily confounded in the minds of men, by the continual use of the same figure without the same explanation of it, and the sign passed for the thing signified among many. This has often happened; and it happened the more naturally in this case, because the imaginations of men being heated with mystery, the doctrine that was the most mysterious was the most likely to prevail. The doctrine, however, of CHRIST's corporeal presence in the sacrament would not have prevailed, even in the eighth century, very probably,

* De doct. christiana l. 3.

so far as to be established by the authority of a council, if it had not been found necessary to evade an argument, that the breakers of images urged, and to support the stupid worship of them, as TILLOTSON observes. One synod, that of Constantinople, determined, that CHRIST had left an image of his body, the bread in the eucharisty, and therefore no other image of him ought to be made. Another synod, the second nicaean, determined, about thirty years afterwards, that the bread and wine after consecration were the body and blood, not the images of the body and blood of CHRIST; that he had, therefore, left no image of himself, and that other images of him might be worshipped. Zeal for idolatry of one kind propagated idolatry of another: and to the worship of images, which the Christians practised as well as the heathens, and which the heathens excused as well as the Christians, the latter added something too absurd, and too abominable, to make a part of the religious rites of the former. They conjured their God into a wafer; they adored him in that wafer; they offered him up in a true sacrifice to himself, and they eat him up, to conclude the ceremony. "Sit anima mea cum philosophis, non cum Christianis, gente stolidissima, qui Deum faciunt et comedunt," a saying of AVERROËS, which no man needs to disown.

ALL this was not established, without great contest, nor soon. In the ninth and following centuries, it was much opposed. One of those who opposed it, BERENGER, dean of Angers, and a man famous for learning and piety when there was little of either among the religious society, had been frightened into a recantation, which he recanted as soon as he got out of the papal hands. It is the less wonderful that he should do so; since the pope and his council appeared to have no very clear notion of their own doctrine, but blundered miserably when they

they defined it, in contradiction to that which he had taught; and since GREGORY the seventh found it necessary, a few years afterwards, to define over again the pretended orthodox doctrine of the real corporeal presence. He left out of his definition the circumstances of handling and breaking, of grinding and bruising, this body between the teeth of the faithful, as I believe, because they were too shocking to stand in it, and might be insinuated with more advantage when the general doctrine had got prejudice on it's side. They have been so, they are avowed parts of it, and this is the doctrine which was declared orthodox eleven hundred years after CHRIST in the latin church, under the ridiculous name of transubstantiation, a ridiculous name indeed, and that bears more analogy to chemistry than to theology. What HILDEBRAND defined, his successors maintained: and INNOCENT the third, who was a pope of the same spirit, procured a most solemn confirmation of it in the numerous council of Lateran, which he held at the beginning of the thirteenth century, and in which so many other things were done to advance his own tyranny, and the superiority of the religious over the civil society. The folly of the holy war was renewed, books of decretals were published and authorised, auricular confession was introduced, the cup was taken from the laity: in short, ecclesiastical pride and policy being now come to their height, the whole system of religion became more than ever a system of usurpation; and ambition improved, to her purposes, all that superstition and ignorance could be made to adopt. It will be no breach of charity, therefore, to affirm, that tho the doctrine of CHRIST's real and corporeal presence in the sacrament owed it's first rise to the abuse of figurative style, and to the disputes of divines on another subject, yet the solemn definition of transubstantiation was one of those artifices, that the popes employed to raise an high opinion of the dignity and power of the priesthood. No popes had ever more rea-

son

son to raise such an opinion than GREGORY the seventh and INNOCENT the third; for none ever achieved nor undertook such conquests as these two made at the head of the church over the civil power, both of them in Germany, and the last of them in our island likewise.

WE may say the better, that this artifice was contrived for the purpose I suppose, since the prerogative and power of making God himself is not only ascribed, by the writers of your church, to every priest, but an argument is drawn from thence to shew how much reverence ought to be paid to an order of men, the least of whom has a prerogative and power of which the greatest earthly potentates cannot boast. But however this artifice was contrived and conducted, how impudently soever popes and councils imposed, for an article of faith, what it is more impious to believe, than it would be to disbelieve the whole creed, and however civil and ecclesiastical power united to enforce it, with all the fury of inquisitions, it never could gain from the eleventh, to the sixteenth century, in which it was rejected with a just abhorrence by whole nations, a full and quiet possession of the minds of men in any country; no not in Italy; no not at Rome. They who had not the front to defend this monstrous doctrine, and yet would not separate from the church of Rome, had recourse to the sole expedient that remained. Far from defending it, far from maintaining it as an original article of christian faith, they chose to put the decision on another point. Many of the most learned and orthodox, long before LUTHER and CALVIN arose, had declared, that men were at liberty to believe, or not to believe, the manner of CHRIST's presence in the sacrament to be corporeal and by transubstantiation; but the popish doctors insisted, that this liberty subsisted no longer, since the church had defined the particular manner of this presence, in the council of
Lateran.

Lateran. Thus they tried to change the state of the question, to deliver themselves from the cruel necessity of justifying blasphemy, and demonstrating contradictions, and to decide the merits of a cause, that could not be maintained by those of another that they thought might be so. In this, however, they were deceived, and instead of supporting transubstantiation by the authority of the church, they shook the authority of the church by employing it to this purpose, more than by all the other unworthy purposes to which it had been often prostituted. It was impossible to persuade men, that the church had any right to make new articles of faith, and of such a nature as this was especially, under the pretence of declaring those which the scriptures had imposed on Christians: and since it was impossible to persuade, the same violence was used to force this article into general profession, that was employed in the case of arianism. Nay more blood has been shed, and the calamities brought on the world by these contests have been of longer duration than the others. They are not yet at an end.

SECTION XLI.

WHAT has been said in this essay, and nothing has been said which may not be easily justified, is sufficient to shew, that none of the institutions contrived to preserve or restore peace among Christians have had this effect even from the first. Those that the apostles made, concerning which, tho men talk much they know little, had it not. If the dissensions of christian congregations were such as did not break out to the eyes of the heathens, all was strife and contention within: and the state of christianity continued the same during those ages, when the government of the church had first a great mixture of democracy in it, and when it grew up afterwards into a more aristocratical

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stocratical form. The evils strengthened under these forms, and grew quite intolerable under the monarchical. Under that government it became tyranny, and the whole system of christianity, which has been always making, and is not yet made uniform, became such a system of avarice and ambition carried on by fraud and violence in their turns, that new abuses being still accumulated on old, it might have been disputed, whether christian flocks would not have fed themselves better without any pastors at all, and whether the peace of the world would not have been provided for better without any religion at all. It may be asked now, and I expect you should ask, in what particulars the state of christianity has been mended to the honor of religion and to the good of mankind, since the last expedient designed for these purposes was laid aside by multitudes, and the pope was no longer the spiritual monarch of Christians, nor the center of their union? The question is reasonable: and I will answer it very sincerely.

I THINK then, that the state of christianity has been mended to the honor of religion and to the good of mankind, in some particulars, not in all: and that even they who remain in the papal communion have, in this respect, some obligation to those who have separated themselves from it. That so many nations withdrew in the sixteenth century from their subjection to the mock sovereignty and real tyranny of the pope has been to the honor of religion surely; since the whole body of Christians is no longer obliged to acknowledge for vicar of CHRIST every man, however unworthy his character may be, whom the most corrupt college on earth elects to that imaginary dignity, by a supposed inspiration of the holy ghost. It has been to the good of mankind surely, that the independency of the church on the state is taken away, in those countries that have renounced all allegiance to the powerful abettor
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of it, the pope; and that it is extremely reduced in those that profess to hold the same allegiance still. It has been surely for the good of mankind, and for the honor of christianity, to shew the world, that the law of God is immutable, like the author of it, and that orders, disciplines, rites, ceremonies, and acts of external devotion, means invented by men to maintain and propagate this law, are not only mutable in their nature, but necessary to be altered, on some occasions, in the course of human affairs. It was the more fit surely to convince men of these truths, since they had been led hoodwinked so long by the knavery of the religious society, that they began to think there was nothing immutable in religion so much as the means employed to support it, nor so little as the end. The wealth and grandeur of the clergy, and the superstition of the laity had been for more than fourteen hundred years the principal of these immutable means; and the experience of so long time had shewn, that the means destroyed the end. They gave occasion to all that mischief which atheistical persons are so ready to impute to religion itself. Without these, disputes concerning doctrines of mere speculation would have made less noise and disturbance in the world, and enterprises of ambition could not have been supported as they have been. To diminish all these, therefore, and to remove an authority which often has, and always may stand in competition with the supreme authority of every society, are the first steps necessary to establish true religion, good government, and public tranquillity.

As these steps were necessary, so they were just; for the wealth and grandeur of the church had been the free gift of the state originally, and they might be resumed, therefore, whenever they became hurtful, or even unnecessary, with as much justice and better policy than they were given. As to

the other means, ignorance and superstition, tho every thing necessary to constitute them was promoted, they were not directly avowed like the others. To pretend that the church has a right to the former by compact, or by virtue of any alliance with the state, would be to say whatever comes uppermost in a whimsical head. To pretend that the right to them is divine, may be ranked among a great number of absurd propositions, that are affirmed without proof: and bold affirmation had succeeded so well in this case, that he, who had asked for any other proof, than the authority of those who affirmed it, would have passed for absurd himself.

AGAIN. Nothing can contribute more to the honor and advancement of christianity, than to reduce the preachers of it, as near as possible, to the terms of their original institution. CHRIST gave his apostles a commission to preach and to baptize, to convert men by the miracles they wrought, and to edify and build up in the faith such as they converted. It does not appear that they, or their immediate successors, exceeded the bounds of this commission. This was their sole employment. The sole wealth they enjoyed, or claimed, was a voluntary contribution for their maintenance, in the churches which they visited, or wherein they resided: and how moderate this stipend was, may be collected from the practice of St. PAUL, who took nothing from the Corinthians, but lived on what he earned by his trade. The sole power they enjoyed, or claimed, was that of reproving, and of delivering over to Satan, with the concurrence of the faithful, and not otherwise, such Christians as held false doctrines, or were guilty of enormous crimes. If any pious soul had foreseen, whilst christianity was the religion of a despised and persecuted sect, that it would be the religion of the empire, that emperors and empresses, kings and queens, would be raised up by God to be the nursing fathers

thers and mothers of his church, we may assure ourselves that great expectations of preserving the faith pure and undefiled under such patronages, and of infusing universally the true spirit of christianity after such examples, would have been raised. But all the expectations of this pious soul would have been disappointed, as soon as the event happened; for then, on the contrary, the church got, but religion lost; the church was decorated, but religion was disgraced; the cause of one, and the cause of the other, was never more united in opinion, nor so distinct in reality. The nature of that revolution which CONSTANTINE made in the religion of the empire, and the place which this body of men had held in the christian church whilst christianity was the profession of a sect, inabled them to take the lead, and to be the principal agents in it. Thus they fixed themselves at the head of the new establishment. Religion was made subservient to all their purposes, and the wealth and grandeur of the hierarchy were the principal objects of it. They were principal objects always, they were the sole objects at last: and during several ages that preceded immediately the reformation, the whole system of christianity, in our western world, was nothing better than a system of ecclesiastical fraud, working by superstition and on it, under the direction of the bishops of Rome. Many saw this: all who saw it, and were not gainers by the iniquity, lamented it. Was it not time to make use of the first opportunity, which a favorable conjuncture offered, to assert the rights of the civil against the usurpations of the religious society? This was done in the sixteenth century. It had been attempted before: but the attempts had been vain, and even now they were various; for as ecclesiastics had taken the lead in establishing, they took it in reforming christianity. They preserved much of their dignity, wealth, and authority in our church; less in that of LUTHER: less of the latter, in pretension and appearance at least,

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and none of the two former, in that of CALVIN. The constitution of our church seems adapted to that of a great monarchy. The constitution of the lutheran to those of the little princes and states of Germany. The constitution of CALVIN's to the government of a little and poor republic. But popery was renounced in all, the superstitions of it were abolished, and that spiritual tyrant was suffered no longer to encroach on civil sovereignty, nor to drain the wealth of these reformed nations into his coffers.

ANOTHER instance wherein the reformation has mended the state of christianity, to the honor of religion, and to the good of mankind, is this. Christianity retained it's name, as factions often do when they have abandoned the principles that gained them reputation, or have perverted the best to the worst purposes, because the church of Rome professed to believe CHRIST to have been the son of God, the Messiah, the redeemer: but then, human authority had so controuled divine in the course of many ages, and had been blended with it so indiscriminately to the observation of men who were forbid to consult one, and were taught the duty of being implicit to the other, that this religion was no longer to be found in the gospel, but in the canons of councils, the opinions of fathers, and the decrees of popes; authorities that must be contemptible in the eyes of every one who knows what councils, fathers, and popes have been, and who knows besides, that many of these canons, opinions, and decrees are either fictitious or corrupted. The first preachers of christianity could not have known it again. Many articles of faith must have appeared to them new; they would not have acknowledged many precepts to be evangelical, nor many institutions and ceremonies to be apostolical. They would have occasion often to say, much what SOCRATES said when he heard the lyfis of PLATO read. In a word, and to
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finish up the picture, neither PETER nor PAUL would have known how to administer even the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper, unless they had gone first to some seminary of priests for instruction. Now this new-fangled religion the reformation purged; tried it chiefly by the only true criterion of orthodoxy, the gospel, and brought it much nearer to the plainness and simplicity of that which CHRIST instituted*.

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* I say in the text, much nearer to the plainness and simplicity of the gospel of CHRIST; because it would not be true to say, entirely. All the reformed churches renounced their subjection to that of Rome, and asserted their independency. But some of them retained enough of her institutions, customs, and policy, to shew that they had been once members of that body. The churches who valued themselves for going the farthest, and who thought that they could never go too far, in opposition to that of Rome, calvinists abroad, and their disciples our puritans at home, threw off at once, with the outward pomp of the ecclesiastical order, even the decency of forms in the public worship. But then they assumed as great a licence in the interpretation of scripture, as ever had been taken, and exercised as real an ecclesiastical tyranny, under another discipline, as the roman clergy had ever exercised. By affecting to deduce their reformation from the most early times, when gifts of the spirit were supposed to be common, they ran into enthusiasm; and genuine christianity took as many forms as whimsical teachers could invent. Our english reformers pursued a middle course. They retained much more of the hierarchical order; and when they had rejected many of those superstitious rites and ceremonies, which VIGILANTIUS, a pious and learned Spaniard, had censured, and which JEROM, an impudent and scurrilous* Hungarian, had defended a thousand years before, with all the ferocity of a modern Hussar, they thought it proper to go no farther, or very little farther, in this part of reformation, and fell, I think, into a great absurdity in another. In that, I mean, which concerns the doctrines of artificial theology grafted on christianity by this very JEROM, and by the other fathers who went before him, as well as by those who followed after him, some in the third, others in the fourth and fifth centuries; when that art of enslaving mankind with words, to use an expression of my lord BACON, was established: and when that, which this great man applies to philosophical knowledge, might be said truly of theological, that it became "an undigested heap; and collection of much faith and accident," mixed with an abundance of childish notions imbibed in youth.

If we consider what motives our reformers, who boasted of restoring the purity of christianity, could have to keep open those springs from which so much of the im-

* N. B. ERASMUS would make JEROM almost an Italian, because Stridon, the place of his birth, was not far from Italy. But he may be reckoned more properly an Hungarian; since this place was on the very confines of Hungary and Dalmatia.

purity

THE honor of his religion, so altered, so abused, and so defaced, required certainly that it should be stripped of many rites, ceremonies, and customs which favored too strongly of heathenism and judaism, or which had been invented manifestly with no other intention than that of multiplying superstitions, which helped to impose on the people, and were lucrative to the priests. The worship of images was of this number. A worship evidently derived from the heathens, as idolatrous among the vulgar, and not more easily distinguished out of idolatry by the learned men of new, than of old Rome. Such again was the use of holy water, which your divines choose to derive from the water of purification in use among the Jews, and which might be derived as truly, perhaps, from the lustral water in use among the heathens. Such again were the consecration of altars, the celebration of jubilees, and other external observances, which had been so avowedly taken from the ceremonial law of the Jews, that your writers do not scruple to justi-

purity of that church, whose communion they renounced, had been derived; we shall find, I think, that they were two; antient prejudices, and future hopes. They were averse to unlearn what they had been learning all their lives; and they were desirous to retain that pre-eminence, authority, and wealth, which they had enjoyed under the pope, and hoped to enjoy under the king. The church of Rome acts consistently, when she maintains a veneration for the primitive fathers, who maintained the divine institution of an ecclesiastical order, and who invented so much superstitious worship, and so many sham miracles, to establish a sham christianity. But what could protestants mean to maintain the authority of these antient fathers, if they had not all the same purposes to serve? Let us acknowledge the truth. They had them not in the whole, but they had them in part: and for this reason they found it necessary to preserve the credit of fathers and councils, in part at least, and as far, as they wanted their authority. When they wanted it no longer, or when it turned against them, they laid it aside most prudently. They builded up a new church, or modelled an old one, on principles, however inconsistent, that reconciled, in good measure, the ecclesiastical to the civil policy of their age and country: and they, who thought that an hierarchy and a monarchy were necessary to support one another, which was the prevalent opinion of those times, could not have desired a more reasonable institution, than that which our english reformers made, under the direction, and by the authority of the civil power.

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fy them by passages of the pentateuch. In fine, and to quote an instance or two of the second sort; such was the invention of purgatory, and of all the costly means to be delivered from it. Such was the abuse they made even of transubstantiation, which is so great an abuse in itself that one would hardly think it could be abused by any additional circumstances, when it was established not only that priests could make God at any time, but that they might carry him about in a little box, wherever his presence was deemed necessary for public shew, or private devotion.

As the reformation exploded the doctrines relative to these and other superstitious practices, so would it have been much to the good of mankind, as well as to the honor of christianity, if silence on several others, which cause great dissension, had been imposed at the same time. But the contrary happened. The reformed fell out among themselves, and pursued one another with so much bitterness, that they gave no small color to the pretended catholics, to object to them that they multiplied schisms, broke the bands of christian charity, and disturbed the peace of the christian world, which was better preserved in the communion of Rome. I do not mean to speak here of the disputes that arose among the reformed about religious ceremonies and church-government, which were easy enough to be determined, or indifferent enough to be compounded, in their nature; how hard soever, or how important soever ecclesiastical obstinacy and the spirit of party made them appear. I mean to speak of those disputes that are in their nature not determinable; because there neither is, nor can be, any real determination of ideas about them: disputes that would be little thought of, or could do little hurt, if they remained undecided, and have done so much by dogmatical and contrary decisions. I might instance in several, in that of justification parti-

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cularly, and of the doctrines dependent on it, concerning all which so much unintelligible jargon has been vainly employed by popish and protestant divines, and to as little purpose by the council of Trent. But I choose rather to instance in the case of the Lord's supper. Of this we have spoken already, and it will serve better than any case less known, to shew in what manner the reformers raised new disputes, left their followers exposed to all the mischief which theological questions have brought on the world, and the atheistical objection as much in force as it was before the reformation they made.

THEY were not content, then, to have rendered transubstantiation as ridiculous and odious as it deserves to be esteemed: they went about to explain, each in his own way, this supposed or real mystery. They who believed there was no mystery in the eucharist itself, how mysterious soever the occasion of this institution and the spiritual effects of it might be, should have talked, I think, of the bread as bread, and of the wine as wine, which Christians ate and drank in their communion to commemorate, by this ceremony, the death of CHRIST, and the redemption of mankind. They who believed there was a mystery in the eucharist itself, and that the bread and wine were, after thanksgiving or consecration, something more than bread and wine, nor barely signs or symbols of the body and blood of CHRIST, should have avoided all definitions, instead of opposing definition to definition, and making that a mystery which CHRIST had not made so. But they proceeded in a manner very different. They all acknowledged, if ZWINGLIUS did, that the body and blood of CHRIST were truly received in this sacrament, as the landgrave of Hesse declared to GRANVELLE and others in a solemn conference at Spire*: and

* Vid. SLEIDAN l. 17.

by

by this acknowledgment they put themselves under inextricable difficulties. LUTHER taught that the body and blood of CHRIST were really in the elements of bread and wine, by a consubstantiation, which was said to last, if I mistake not, during the manducation only. Did the calvinists talk a whit more intelligibly when they professed at the famous conference at Poissy, "that in the sacrament of the Lord's supper, CHRIST gives, presents, and exhibits to us really the substance of his body and blood: that by faith we receive, really and in fact, the true and natural body and blood of CHRIST, by virtue of the holy ghost*?" What did BEZA mean when he talked of eating with the mouth of faith? He must mean that he believed that he ate, or he must mean nothing? Now what did he believe, that he ate in the same sacrament? Not the symbolical body of CHRIST; for he affirmed that he ate the true and natural body: not the true and natural body of CHRIST; for he affirmed that to be in heaven and no where else. What then did he believe that he ate, or what other sense can be put on those words, "eating with the mouth of faith," and those "receiving by faith," than that of believing he ate, and believing he received? His adversaries held a great impiety, but they held it consistently. According to them, the body of CHRIST was in the sacrament by the charm of consecration, and they ate it when they ate the sacramental bread. According to BEZA and his colleagues, the body of CHRIST was not there but in heaven, and yet they ate it too, really and in fact. This conference broke up abruptly. The fools on one side accused the protestants of blaspheming when they deny transubstantiation, just as the heathen reputed those philosophers atheists who were not polytheists. The fools on the other remained convinced that they ate, spiritually and with the mouth of faith, in this sacrament, a bodily substance that was not there; whilst they ate most corporeally a bodily

* AUBIGNY hist. univers. l. 2.

substance, the bread, that was there. Both went away resolved to cut the throats of one another: and such are the effects of theology, that is, of human authority in matters of religion.

THIS authority has imposed chiefly, when it has imposed, on the minds of men, by the abuse of words. This abuse of words makes the sum of metaphysics and theology, imaginary sciences, removed from the controul, as from the assistance, of sense, conversant about hypothetical natures, and about ideas vastly complicated and perplexed. Such theology tinctured all the philosophy of PLATO. Logic all that of ARISTOTLE. These two schools were the great mints of insignificant terms; and tho ZENO, who did little else than invent new words, and change the application of old, opened another mint of the same kind, yet the coin of the two former has been alone current. The immaterial forms, the eternal ideas, and all the incorporeal essences of PLATO, for instance, were given and received in every philosophical payment, like the substantial forms, the intentional species, or the entelechy of ARISTOTLE, till very lately.

I HAVE often thought that nothing could have happened more fortunately for the propagation of learned ignorance, than the succession of the peripatetic to the platonic philosophy; for tho ARISTOTLE opposed many opinions of his master, yet the subtilty of his logic has served to cover both his master's errors and his own, on more occasions, and at more periods, than one. No writings, certainly, were ever so mad as those of the latter platonists, which contain the very quintessence of enthusiasm, and which are almost one perpetual abuse of reason and language. Many of the christian fathers came out of the same schools; and all of them using the same delirious style, it became that of christian theology. We must not imagine, however,

ever, that the philosophy of ARISTOTLE had no share in framing the system of this theology, tho that of PLATO had the greatest and the earliest. It is true, that the original works of the former were unknown in the western church, till the fifteenth century, when greek learning was brought into Italy by those who fled thither after the taking of Constantinople. But still ARISTOTLE was at that time rather ill known than unknown; for in the very beginning of the thirteenth a latin translation had been made, by the direction of the emperor FREDERIC the second, of some parts of his writings from the arabic version of them: and other fragments had appeared in the same language, such as might be expected, in those ages of ignorance, from men, among whom the latin and greek were become very barbarous languages; who understood ill the purity of one, and were little able to explain themselves properly and clearly in the other. If we go higher up, we find ARISTOTLE much better known. He must have been so even by the first of the greek fathers, and his reputation must have been great during all those ages wherein so many of the corner-stones of christian theology were laid; since he had commentators, themselves philosophers of great fame, among the Greeks, in the second, the third, the fourth, and the fifth centuries, ALEXANDER APHRODISAEUS, THEMISTIUS, and others. No doubt can be made of this; and if any doubt could be made, those nice distinctions, and that perpetual torture of words, for which fathers and councils were so famous, would be sufficient to prove it. They learned of PLATO to talk without any meaning: and they learned, I think, of ARISTOTLE, to seem sometimes to have one.

THE logical empire of ARISTOTLE, and the abuse of words grew up with christian theology; but they were never absolutely confirmed till ignorance prevailed alike in the East and the

the West, from the ninth to the fifteenth century, when the first dawns of knowledge began to appear, and men began to see their way in the farther acquisition of it. It may seem strange, but it is true, that the schools which were erected, and the encouragement which was given to learning from the days of CHARLES the great, served only to keep men out of the way of true knowledge, and to impose a false appearance of it. The popes had procured chiefly the foundations of these schools: and the encouragement to the scholars had been derived from them, or through their means. I might have reckoned this among the artifices they employed to carry on their usurpations. Bare ignorance alone was not sufficient to their purpose. It was necessary to promote learned ignorance, and to establish error, with all the circumstances of authority and reverence; lest even the ignorant should stumble upon truth. To keep men from the search of it, they were told, that truth, and divine truths especially, were hard to find; that persons, on whose ability they might depend, were set apart, therefore, to save others the trouble of this search, and that their holy mother, the church, watched over all. Thus revelation and reason both were made the monopoly of the clergy. They doled out the former in such scraps, and under such interpretations, as they thought fit. They employed the latter, not to analyse, not to verify ideas, in order to compare them, but to take such as have been mentioned above, as it were on trust, like the vile instruments of error: the instruments of error indeed, since, how well soever these comparisons were made, nothing that was true, or complete and adequate, or distinct and clear, could result from them, and nothing, consequently, that deserved the name of knowledge. In short, they profaned and abused the two noblest gifts of God to man, natural reason and supernatural revelation.

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NATURAL philosophy and mathematics made little progress in these schools, experimental philosophy none at all. To turn and to wind the few notions they had a thousand ways, to distinguish imperceptible differences, to refine and subtilise a little real knowledge till it evaporated entirely, and nothing remained but a caput mortuum of words, was their whole business. JOHN of Damascus had brought logic into fashion among the greek divines, and BOËTIUS among the latines, long before the institution of these schools, and longer still before their doctors became famous under the name of scholastics: so that whenever this happened, the same manner of philosophising on logical and metaphysical notions, on technical and insignificant terms, had prevailed in them from their foundation, and had been applied to theology. The men, who applied themselves to it, had some broken and superficial acquaintance with ARISTOTLE at second hand, as we have observed that they might, and even at third hand; for much of it came to them through his arabian interpreters and commentators: and as in every other science, so in theology, they were servilely attached to his principles and to his method. Some have placed LANFRANC, archbishop of Canterbury, at the head of the scholastic tribe, in the order of time: and if he wrote against BERENGER, in the middle of the eleventh century, we may assure ourselves, that ARISTOTLE's philosophy was employed then as it has been since, to account for CHRIST's corporeal presence in the sacrament. It has been said, I know, that PETER the Lombard, a famous scholastic in the next century to LANFRANC, imitated and followed JOHN of Damascus; tho ERASMUS and others have made a doubt whether he was the author of that work, which procured him the name of master of the sentences. But such criticisms are trifling as well as uncertain: for whether this writer, or his predecessor LANFRANC,

FRANC, imitated JOHN of Damascus or no; and whether PETER the Lombard, or ABELARD, compiled the sentences, their theology was that of their age and of these schools, and their method was derived ultimately from ARISTOTLE.

THESE schools continued in great fame, and produced in every age, during the course of many, a multitude of writers, some of whom were men of such extraordinary genius, that they might have enlightened, like so many suns, the orb of learning, and have carried human knowledge to the utmost bounds of human capacity. But instead of this, they served, like so many ignes fatui, to lead men backwards and forwards through the briars and thorns of vain speculations, within the narrow bounds that ARISTOTLE set, as if truth was not to be found out of these. They checked the growth of true philosophy, by bringing into it no new materials from nature, and they corrupted true religion, by blending their philosophical speculations, and the vain subtilties of their logic, with divine truths. They thought that ARISTOTLE had left a most complete and perfect system of philosophy. But they seemed to think, that CHRIST had left an incomplete and imperfect system of religion. To supply these defects, they made summaries of christian theology, to say nothing of sentences of the fathers and * tedious commentaries on them, of commentaries on the bible, of theological questions and cases of conscience, that are much larger than all the scriptures canonical and apocryphal, and in comparison of which the gospels, nay the whole new Testament is but a pocket-book: tho the pocket-book ought to contain every one of these folios, and none of them are excusable for containing more than the pocket-book. I have touched so often already the absurdity, and, as

* N. B. The exposition of St. MATTHEW's gospel takes up, I think, ninety homilies, and that of St. JOHN eighty seven, in the works of CHRYSOSTOM.

I think,

I think, the iniquity of seeking christianity out of the gospel, of making any criterion of natural religion but the works, or any criterion of revealed religion but the word of God, that I should say nothing here concerning the last, if I had not often found an answer to it insisted on with a silly air of triumph, by dogmatical persons in their conversation, and in writing. What do you complain of, say these persons? Is not the system of christianity in the same case with every other system of laws particularly? Yes; and that is the very thing I complain of. A system of human law and human policy is the product of human understanding, and therefore incomplete and imperfect, liable to different constructions at all times, and fit to be altered at some. But this cannot be said, without blasphemy, of the christian dispensation; tho it has been muttered by some divines, and has been strongly implied by the whole conduct of the christian church. What is made by man may be explained, supplied, altered, and improved by man. But has the word of God, spoken to all mankind, need to be explained by any man, or by any order of men, who have as little pretence to be thought inspired, as those who are not of their order? Can any human authority supply, or alter, and much less improve, what the son of God, God himself, came on earth to reveal? Again: is there no difference between my being led into error by human authority, which I know to be human, and by human authority, which I take to be divine? To take the laws of God for the laws of man, is impious. But is it less so, to impose the laws of man for the laws of God? Surely it is much more so: as one may be impiety without design, and the other must be premeditated.

It is notorious, that many great points of christian faith and doctrine were first taught, or first determined, several ages after the immediate disciples of CHRIST were dead, on the au-

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thority of tradition alone, till there was a canon of scriptures; and on tradition and them, when there was one. The trinity, the coeternity, the coequality, in a word the sameness of the son with the father, the procession of the holy ghost from the father and the son, the fires of purgatory, and the real corporal presence of CHRIST in the eucharist, to mention no more, were of this number. It was lawful to dispute about them all, till the church had decided. Nay ERASMUS * is so indulgent as to doubt if it was heretical in ORIGEN, to make a question whether "the son and the holy ghost are of the same divine essence with the father, or whether they are only creatures more excellent than all other creatures." After the church, that is, certain assemblies of ecclesiastics had decided and decreed, "*post evulgatam ecclesiae sententiam*," it was lawful to doubt no longer, nor to dispute about any of these points, "*ambigere fas non est*." They were become articles of faith. They were made such then, by these decisions and decrees. They were made such then, by human authority. Not at all, says ERASMUS, or any other divine. They were made such by the scriptures. Whatever is not agreeable to them, is not of CHRIST †; and therefore false interpretations of the scriptures are to be rectified by such as are true §. Now those which the church makes are true: and it is enough for you, and such as you are, to believe firmly all that the church has declared to be necessary ||. Roundly asserted indeed, but very fallaciously argued; for whether the interpretations of the church are true, which is assumed, or whether they are false, which is possible, the doctrines established on them are established on human, not on divine authority.

* Symb. catech. 4ta.

† Quod aberrat a sacris voluminibus, non est CHRISTI. *ibid.*

§ Falsa scripturarum interpretatio verâ interpretatione refutanda est. *ibid.*

|| Tibi tuique similibus satis est ea constanti tenere fide, quae pro necessariis exfert et expresse tradidit ecclesia. *ibid.*

The

The scripture is the word of God. The interpretation is the word of man. But besides, I learn from that judicious and orthodox divine Mr. HOOKER *, and ERASMUS and others of the same tribe speak to the same effect, that all the things necessary to salvation are not necessary to be contained, and set down in plain terms, in the scriptures. It is sufficient that they be comprehended in such sort, that by reason we may conclude from the scriptures all things which are necessary; from whence I conclude just as I did before, that the great points spoken of have been established on human, not on divine authority; deduced, collected by reason, or what has been called reason; not expressly taught by revelation.

THAT these great points of christian faith and doctrine were not very evidently deduced, nor very accurately collected from the scriptures, may be presumed from the disputes that have been always, and that still subsist about them. It might be proved too, that scripture is not so favorable in many cases, nor more so in any one, to these opinions than to those that stand in opposition to them; and that the only advantage which the athanasians or the augustinians, for instance, have over the arians or the semi-pelagians is not an advantage which the scripture gives them. They derive it from the suffrages of particular men, whose motives were often not entirely christian, and from the arbitrary dogmas of fathers and decrees of councils. These opinions, therefore, that are become articles of faith, and that pass for some of the doctrines which CHRIST taught, tho' they are nothing more than inventions of fathers improved by schoolmen, may be quoted as so many particular instances of theological presumption, and, I think, impiety †.

But

* Ec. Pol. lib 1.

† THERE have been some divines a little more modest than others, since there are some, I think, who have seemed ashamed of their artificial theology, and have endeavored to excuse, rather than defend the fathers of their church. The fathers,

But call it which you please, or what you please, the proceeding grew more general and more systematical in the schools that have been mentioned. They did not take this licence with particular points of doctrine alone, but with the whole system of christianity. They melted down the whole mass with all the alloy that had been already added to it by others, and they cast it anew with an immense deal of their own. They made it so voluminous, that it was no longer useful: and ERASMUS might well say, “*quis possit AQUINATIS secundae secundam circumferre **?” They perplexed it with so many bold and indeterminable questions about the divine nature and operations, with so many serious trifles, with so many minute questions about formalities, quidities, and other fantastical notions, that it grew contentious, and more than ever hurtful. In short, they multiplied distinctions and definitions till their manner became

it has been said, taught the doctrines of christianity in their genuine purity, and affected to teach them no otherwise. The heretics forced them to abandon this pious reserve, in order to defeat the designs of these men who attempted daily to introduce errors in opinion and practice. Now if this was their case in general, it may have been such even of St. PAUL, who was the father of the fathers; and his gospel may have been writ in the same spirit of contradiction and of dispute. But it is impossible to discover, with certainty, on what points, and in what degrees artificial theology gave occasion to heresy, or heresy to artificial theology; tho we know, in some measure, what the disputes were, that arose in the christian church. The doctrines that were termed afterwards orthodox, or heretical, were in their origin, no doubt, coeval, and both grew up together, till one outgrew the other. In general the orthodox fathers had no advantage over the others. If the former had recourse to tradition, so had the latter: and the former were not, certainly, superior to the latter either in learning, or in means of knowledge, or in sanctity of life, great foundations of credibility in such cases as these. ARIUS, for instance, or NESTORIUS, to mention no more, were in all these respects at least equal to ATHANASIUS or CYRIL: and whoever examines the partial accounts of one side alone, for we have none of the other, of all that passed in the disputes that arose whether the son was consubstantial with the father, and whether the virgin MARY was properly the mother of God, will find great reason to believe, that the two heretics were not the least respectable doctors of the four. Thus we shall be apt to think, if we consult not only ancient memorials, but the writings of modern divines, and suffer ourselves neither to be amused by arbitrary epithets, and vague declamations, in which the modern imitate the ancient fathers, nor to be perplexed by sophistical arguments, in which they sometimes imitate the schoolmen.

* Ep. 329.

as unintelligible as their matter: and my lord BACON might have added scholastic theology to the sciences that sway the imagination more than the reason, such as astrology, natural magic, and alchemy. If the first pretends to discover the influence of superior on inferior bodies, this theology pretended to discover the influence of superior on inferior spirits, by illuminations, inspirations, and the internal action of grace. If the second pretends to reduce natural philosophy from speculation to works, this theology pretended to deduce the duties of man from speculations concerning the moral attributes of God, and to instruct him in the imitation of God. If the third pretends to separate dissimilar, and to throw out heterogeneous parts of bodies, to cleanse such as are impure, and to perfect such as are immature, this theology pretended to perform much the same operations on ideas, notions, terms. These the professors of it confounded, and distinguished, at their pleasure, and like chemists or apothecaries made new out of old, old out of new, one out of many, and many out of one *. Nay this comparison may be carried farther. The scholastic divines rendered their art, for such it was, rather than a science, as incomprehensible as they could, that they might make a greater profit, and acquire a greater reputation by it, among the ignorant.

IN this manner, and by the help of these schools, a theological system, which had no intention to promote the true and holy purposes of christianity, was imposed on an ignorant and superstitious world for the very religion which CHRIST had instituted, and his disciples had propagated. The sole intention, and the sole effect of it was to establish an ecclesiastical empire, under that spiritual monarch the pope, and his spiritual ministers the clergy. This was the effect of that supposed al-

* ———Pharmacopolarum ritu, ex novis vetera, ex veteribus nova, è pluribus unum, ex uno plura subinde fingentium et refingentium. ERAS. ibid.

liance

liance between the church and the state. An effect so natural, that he who pleads for any right in a church, or ecclesiastical order, independent on the state, may be justly supposed to mean this effect in some degree, and under some form or other. The first foundations of this empire were laid in private, the second only in public conscience. To secure this empire, therefore, it was necessary to keep the first entirely and exclusively in the hands of the pope and the clergy, and whatever influence the civil power might, on some occasions, gain over the latter, to take effectual care that it should never be able to gain any over the former. Now nothing either did or could contribute more to this great principle of policy than the conduct of these schools. By wrapping up both natural and revealed religion, in the obscurity of metaphysics and of logic, they made themselves the sole judges of both. By sending abroad their disciples, under the characters of confessors, directors, casuists, inquisitors, preachers, they had sure means of exercising their judgments, instilling what opinions, and raising what passions, the permanent and occasional, the immediate or remote, interests of the church required. The first duty of the religion these doctors propagated was to believe what the church believed: and what the church believed, they alone had a right to declare. The second duty of this religion was to observe all the ceremonies, and to perform all the external acts of devotion and worship, that the church had instituted, or should institute. The third and least was the practice of morality. On the first there was no mitigation nor indulgence. Men were to believe implicitly, or to be treated as enemies to God and to his church in this world, and to be damned eternally in the other. On the second and the third much indulgence was shewn. It was even profuse on the third. Compositions with the church might be made on both, on the breach of her own laws, and on the breach of those of God and nature :

nature: and these compositions were so often pecuniary, especially on the breach of the last, that whilst the church was enriched, no layman, who had money enough to save his soul, could be damned. But there was something still more favorable to vice in the last case. The duties which the church exacted were so particular, that they could not, and they cost so little to perform, that they did not, deserve to be explained away. But the duties of morality were more general, and more liable, by variety of circumstances, to different modifications, in the application of them, as they were much harder to be observed strictly amidst the infirmities of human nature. Casuists therefore interposed. They lightened the burden in favor of these infirmities, by all the definitions, distinctions, and exceptions that logic could furnish. They did more. In all cases where the church was concerned, they gave full range to the passions of mankind. Justice was no longer a moral virtue. Faith was not to be kept with heretics. Benevolence or charity were no longer principles of natural or revealed religion. Heretics or excommunicated persons were to be persecuted and exterminated with the most unrelenting fury: and I may defy any man to shew instances of greater inhumanity, and more profligate wickedness, committed by the ferocity of lawless savages, or barbarous nations, than I am able to shew of those which have been committed, not only under the veil of this spurious christianity, but on motives taken from it, and at the instigation of those who taught it. By such means, and with such effects as these, was an ecclesiastical empire maintained during several ages, whilst churchmen governed conscience of every kind, and by governing conscience governed the world.

THE scholastics had indeed many contests among themselves, that were carried on with great animosity, and broke out sometimes into open violence. Such, for instance, was the dispute
between

between the Thomists and the Scotists about the immaculate conception of the virgin, and that between the nominalists and the realists about the nature of universals. How could these disputes, or any other, be determined among men, whose pleasure and whose pride it was to dispute perpetually, and who cultivated an art that was of use to no man in the discernment of truth, but might help the subtil dialectician to pose even the man he could not refute? These disputes, however, were kept among themselves, by the policy, not by the moderation of scholastics certainly: and as long as they neither rent the theological system, nor shook the ecclesiastical empire, the court of Rome tempered, managed, and suffered them, notwithstanding all the scandals they occasioned, in the universities of Oxford and of Paris particularly. But as soon as our OCKHAM, the invincible doctor, began to maintain that the ecclesiastical jurisdiction ought to be subject to the civil, the nominalists were reputed heretics, and the realists alone passed for orthodox. There was as little union among these as among the others, and religion might seem to be more nearly concerned in their disputes. But the great purpose, for which all these schools were erected, being the support of the ecclesiastical empire, any doctrines that reduced, or weakened it, were the greatest of heresies. This happened in the fourteenth century, when WICKLEF went much farther than OCKHAM, and laid the ax to the root of a tree, which the popes had watered with so much care and expence, and which bore so much bitter fruit; so that if the impertinent philosophy and profane theology of the schools took their rise in our country from LANFRANC, RUCCLINE, SWINESHEAD, and OCKHAM, we may boast that some of the first and greatest advances towards a reformation of both were made by men of our country likewise,

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FROM the time that OCKHAM had signalised himself, in a public dispute at Avignon, in favor of the emperors and the civil power against the popes and the ecclesiastical jurisdiction, the nominalists were not only more than ever opposed by the other scholastics, the scotists especially, but so persecuted by the court of Rome, and all the fautors of her usurpations, that their whole doctrine was condemned by LEWIS the eleventh in a public edict before the end of the fifteenth century*. The doctors and masters of the university of Paris, for the scholastics too, as well as the rabbins, had the title of masters, were obliged to renounce the name with the doctrine of that sect, and all their books were burned, according to the laudable precaution of the orthodox. The realists, on the other side, were recommended, and nothing was neglected on this and every other occasion that might keep these schools firmly attached to a cause, which they had been principal instruments of imposing on the world, for the cause of christian religion. These efforts, however, proved insufficient. The papal throne was shook, and ecclesiastical empire was in a visible decline. Scholastic divines had supported it in the opinion of mankind, as long as they were favored by general ignorance, even greater than their own. But as soon as learning began to dawn, towards the beginning of the sixteenth century, these birds of night were forced to fly from day, tho they screeched and clapped their wings for a while. It was in vain that modern scholastics prostituted learning, as their predecessors had prostituted genius, to maintain the credit of this theology, and the papal authority connected with it. The task was too hard even for the council of Trent, and for all the great men who have undertaken it since. Nothing supports the system now, except general ignorance in some countries, and the force of civil, abetting ecclesiastical, power, on principles of political consideration among those who are not ignorant. Many a man thinks, many such I have

* MORHOF polyhif.

known, that the theology of the schools is absurd, that the monarchy of the pope, tho reduced, is still impertinent and hurtful, and that the abuses of wealth and power in the church are intolerable. But yet, the same man will contend, that it is better to bear, than to attempt a reformation of evils that are grown inveterate, and will think that he is strong when he quotes not only the disorders, the wars, and the massacres, which attended and followed the reformation in the sixteenth century, but the several ridiculous and mad sects, to the rise of which this reformation gave occasion, tho the reformers condemned them.

I HAVE heard men of good parts and good intentions reason in this manner; I have heard it said by a very respectable man in the gallican church, when he excused, rather than defended, submission to the papal power, that this power is the key-stone of that arch whereon the whole christian system rests, and that the whole building must fall if the key-stone be taken away. I have heard another of the same church, and of the same character, advance, that many things absurd in belief, and ridiculous in practice, were necessary to attach the greatest number of men and women, and especially of the vulgar, to christianity; that men of sense and knowledge ascribed to these doctrines and institutions as little as they deserved, but that men of sense and knowledge ought to consider and distinguish what is for them, and what for the vulgar; that this cannot be done in outward profession, but that every man of sense and knowledge may do it for himself, and should therefore bear with an useful deception. Much may be said in favor of this political reasoning, and much may be said against it. It might have been better, perhaps, if it had been practicable, to reform, as ERASMUS would have done, than as LUTHER did. I shall not enter into the controversy. But this I say. Such instances as have been given confirm the whole drift of this essay, because they shew the mischievous consequences of theology,

gy, by which an order of men have been able to usurp on God, if I may use the expression, as well as on man, to propagate their own inventions for his revelations, and to assume an authority, to which they have no right, over all the other orders of society; till the fraud and the usurpation were so established, that it was not possible to reject them without falling into some of these calamities which the establishment of them had cost mankind. A melancholy alternative surely, and yet such an one, that the love of truth, the spirit of liberty, and an awful respect for the Supreme Being, ought to determine men to take their resolution in it. When LUTHER and CALVIN, and the other reformers, took this resolution, it must not be denied that affections and passions, and private interests, had their share, as well as the other motives, in determining them to it. Such will be the case in all human enterprises, even in the best, and therefore the issues even of the best are always imperfect. Our reformers shook off entirely the papal yoke, they laid aside and exposed many false traditions and unchristian doctrines. But our reformers had some of the prejudices, and much of the spirit of the schools, about them: and he * was not in the wrong, perhaps, who made the scholastic chronology begin at LANFRANC and end at LUTHER; tho many of your divines and of ours have talked the same gibberish since, and talk it still.

MAY we not compare the great revolution which happened in the roman church, to that which happened in the roman empire? The empire broke to pieces, some of the provinces became distinct states, asserted their independency, and acknowledged no longer the imperial authority, nor the laws of the empire. But in all these new constitutions, there was some tincture of the old, some principles of law, and some of policy, which bore a near resemblance to it. Thus, in the constitutions of our reformed churches, tho they were independent on that of Rome, something remained to shew that they had

* MORHOF Polyhif.

been once members of that body, as much as they differed now in doctrine and discipline. The church of Rome shut up the bible from the laity. The reformed churches opened it, and declared that the pure word of God was the sole test of true religion, and the sole foundation of theirs. That it is the true, the sole, and the sufficient test of christian religion must be owned; for if it was not, it could not be the word of God, nor christianity the religion of God. But is it certain, that this word has been made the sole foundation of our reformed religions? I apprehend it is not. Nay since, to speak properly, I must say religions, it cannot have been made such. The word of God is one, and one religion alone can be taught by it. If there are different religions raised, there must have been different foundations laid. How are we to account for this? We must acknowledge the truth. Human authority has passed for divine, tho not so co-ercively in our churches as in yours, and the uncertain, variable word of man for the infallible, invariable word of God. We freed ourselves from spiritual tyranny, and we fell into spiritual anarchy. The change, however, was advantageous; since there is, in the nature of things, and has been in this case, a transiſion, through confuſion, into order; whereas there is no immediate transiſion from eſtabliſhed tyranny into a ſettled ſtate of liberty.

BEFORE the reformation, Chriſtians knew nothing of the bible more than the church told them. It might, and it might not be a rule to the paſtors, but it was none to the flocks. After the reformation, it was put into the hands of every one. The paſtors appealed to it, and the flocks were ſuppoſed to judge for themſelves by it. What happened? The very ſame thing that happened in the primitive church, before any canon of ſcripture was made by public authority, and received by common conſent. Various traditions and various doctrines of men, who pretended alike to the gifts of the ſpirit, divided the faithful,

ful, and every teacher had his followers. Just so at the reformation, various interpretations of authentic scriptures, and various comments upon them, divided the reformers and the reformed. Every teacher had his followers, and some of these affected to preach as well as pray by the spirit. Ambiguous and obscure expressions in the text had the same effect as no text at all, and modern theology broke the uniformity of religion as much as antient, caused as much desolation, and spilled as much blood. The reformed churches persecuted one another, and your church persecuted them all. Atheistical persons, therefore, continue to take the pretence, which every religion gives them, to confound religion and theology, and to ascribe to the former all the evils that are due to the latter.

It is natural to ask, can nothing be done to remove this scandal by putting an end to these evils? I will presume to answer nothing; unless men can be prevailed upon to assume the spirit of christianity as well as the name of Christians, and this will be found, I suppose, impracticable as long as the sole care of religion and the sole direction of conscience is confined every where to a distinct order of men, whose distinct interests, and whose passions of course, carry them to keep these dissensions and feuds alive. If they were content to explain what they understand, to adore what they understand not, to leave in mystery all that CHRIST and his apostles have left so, to a time that is not yet come, and to teach others to content themselves with natural theology, and such revealed theology as this; the evils spoken of would soon cease, and the scandal consequently. If they proceeded in this manner, there would be ample matter left to employ their tongues and their pens, and none to employ the swords and daggers of the rest of mankind. The law of God would be a plain and consistent law, and no color would remain for infidels to form this argument. " Either the scriptures do not contain the law of God, or it was not in the intention of God
" to

“ to promote the peace and happiness of mankind, or he did
 “ not proportion the means to his end:” every one of which
 propositions is blasphemy, and yet, as theology has corrupted
 genuine christianity, it will be hard to evade them all.

BUT since such a change as this may be wished for by good
 men, rather than expected by any man, it is proper to consider
 what can be done to lessen an irremediable evil, and whether
 good policy cannot furnish an antidote against the poison
 of theology; on which I shall say a word or two before I finish
 this long essay. There are arguments, no doubt, even of
 the political kind, and of irresistible force, against atheists who
 reject all religion, latitudinarians who admit all alike, and
 rigidists who suffer one alone. If the first prevail, there will
 be no religious conscience at all; if the second, there will
 be as many as there are religious sects in every society; if the
 third, persecution for religion will be made a maxim of government,
 as it is made in some countries, to the bane of society, and to the
 shame of the christian profession. Do there remain then no means
 to prevent the fatal effects of theological disputes, and ecclesiastical
 quarrels? Some countries are so miserable, by principles of bigotry
 incorporated with those of their government, and by the establishment
 of inquisitions, that there remain no such means, but by the total
 extirpation of all those who differ, or who are suspected to differ,
 from the established doctrines. In other countries, tho a rigid spirit
 prevails, yet if inquisitions are not established, and if ecclesiastics
 do not govern, it is very possible by skill and management to allay,
 for the most part, the ferments which theology is apt to raise in
 the state, and to blunt the fury of those who call themselves
 orthodox, and every man who dissents in opinion from them
 heretical. In countries where this rigid spirit is not that of the
 government, tho dissension cannot be entirely prevented, the bad
 influence and effects of it may. To make

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government effectual to all the good purposes of it, there must be a religion; this religion must be national; and this national religion must be maintained in reputation and reverence; all other religions or sects must be kept too low to become the rivals of it. These are in my apprehension first principles of good policy. The establishment of a religious order subject to the civil magistrate, and subservient to the civil power, not that of a religious society pretending to be the allies and aiming to be the masters of the civil, may be reconciled very well to these principles, and sure I am, that they may be pursued, not only without persecution, but without the invasion of any one right which men can justly claim under the freest and most equitable government. The parliament of one thousand six hundred and forty one declared, that human laws cannot bind conscience; which is a declaration every sect makes out of power, and none observe willingly in it. But be it so. Human laws, however, may and ought to exclude those men from power in the state, kings especially, who profess a private conscience repugnant to the public conscience of that state. Such men will make use of power, and the better men they are, the more to propagate their own schemes of religion, to strengthen their own party and to recommend their particular notions about ecclesiastical government, which cannot be done without manifest danger to the public peace. The wisdom of our constitution has therefore joined, admirably well together, the two most compatible things in the world, how incompatible soever they may have been represented, a test and a toleration; and by rejecting alike the principles of latitudinarians and rigidists, has gone far to prevent those evils that gave occasion to the objection of atheists: as I hope that I have done in this essay, to prove, by considering the nature, rise, progress, and effects of authority in matters of religion, that theology has been always liable to this objection, christianity never. Christianity, genuine christianity, is contained in the gospels, it is the word of God,

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it requires, therefore, our veneration, and a strict conformity to it. Traditional christianity, or that artificial theology which passes for genuine, and which we all profess, is derived from the writings of fathers and doctors of the church, and from the decrees of councils. It is therefore the word of men, and of men, for the most part, either very weak, very mad, or very knavish. It requires, therefore, no regard, nor any inward conformity to it. You have, I know, at your elbow a very foul-mouthed and a very trifling critic, who will endeavor to impose upon you on this occasion, as he did on a former. He will tell you again, that I contradict myself, and that by going about to destroy the authority of the fathers and the church, which I reject, I go about to destroy the authenticity of the gospels, which I admit. But if the dogmatical pedant should make this objection, be pleased to give him this answer; that I do indeed admit the gospels, not on the testimony of the spirit, like CALVIN, but on that of the fathers and doctors of the church, who not only bear this testimony separately; but, assembled in a council at Laodicea, rejecting many other gospels, made a canon of these: and yet that his objection is impertinent, since I may receive the gospels on the credit of these men, of whom I think very little better than I do of him, for authentic scriptures, just as well as he receives the books of the old Testament, concerning which he has started so many idle paradoxes, for such, on the credit of the Jews, tho he rejects their oral law and the fabulous traditions of their rabbins. Thus I shall conclude this long essay, wherein I have recalled the sum of what I have said to you in conversation, and which has, I fear, too much of the loose and wandering air of conversation.

The End of the FOURTH VOLUME.