

rank of divinity, by those who reaped the benefit of their labours.

This gave rise to the observation of Machiavel,* that the doctrines of the Christian religion, meaning the Catholic (for he knew no other), which recommend only passive courage and suffering, had subdued the spirit of mankind, and had fitted them for slavery and subjection; an observation which would certainly be just, were there not many other circumstances in human society which control the genius and character of a religion.

Brasidas seized a mouse, and being bit by it, let it go, *There is nothing so contemptible*, said he, *but what may be safe, if it has but courage to defend itself.*[†] Bellarmine patiently and humbly allowed the fleas and other odious vermin to prey upon him. *We shall have heaven*, said he, *to reward us for our sufferings: But these poor creatures have nothing but the enjoyment of the present life.*[‡] Such difference is there between the maxims of a Greek hero and a Catholic saint!

SECTION XI.

WITH REGARD TO REASON OR ABSURDITY.

HERE is another observation to the same purpose, and a new proof that the corruption of the best things begets the worst. If we examine, without prejudice,

* Discorsi, lib. vi. † Plut. Apoph. ‡ Bayle, Article BELLARMIN.

the ancient heathen mythology, as contained in the poets, we shall not discover in it any such monstrous absurdity as we may at first be apt to apprehend. Where is the difficulty in conceiving, that the same powers or principles, whatever they were, which formed this visible world, men and animals, produced also a species of intelligent creatures, of more refined substance and greater authority than the rest? That these creatures may be capricious, revengeful, passionate, voluptuous, is easily conceived; nor is any circumstance more apt, among ourselves, to engender such vices, than the license of absolute authority. And, in short, the whole mythological system is so natural, that, in the vast variety of planets and worlds, contained in this universe, it seems more than probable that, somewhere or other, it is really carried into execution.

The chief objection to it with regard to this planet is, that it is not ascertained by any just reason or authority. The ancient tradition, insisted on by heathen priests and theologers, is but a weak foundation; and transmitted also such a number of contradictory reports, supported all of them by equal authority, that it became absolutely impossible to fix a preference amongst them. A few volumes, therefore, must contain all the polemical writings of Pagan priests: And their whole theology must consist more of traditional stories and superstitious practices than of philosophical argument and controversy.

But where theism forms the fundamental principle of any popular religion, that tenet is so conformable to sound reason, that philosophy is apt to incorporate itself with such a system of theology. And if the other dogmas of that system be contained in a sacred book, such as the Alcoran, or be determined by any visible

authority, like that of the Roman pontiff, speculative reasoners naturally carry on their assent, and embrace a theory, which has been instilled into them by their earliest education, and which also possesses some degree of consistence and uniformity. But as these appearances are sure, all of them, to prove deceitful, philosophy will soon find herself very unequally yoked with her new associate; and instead of regulating each principle, as they advance together, she is at every turn perverted to serve the purposes of superstition. For besides the unavoidable incoherences, which must be reconciled and adjusted, one may safely affirm, that all popular theology, especially the scholastic, has a kind of appetite for absurdity and contradiction. If that theology went not beyond reason and common sense, her doctrines would appear too easy and familiar. Amazement must of necessity be raised: Mystery affected: Darkness and obscurity sought after: And a foundation of merit afforded to the devout votaries, who desire an opportunity of subduing their rebellious reason, by the belief of the most unintelligible sophisms.

Ecclesiastical history sufficiently confirms these reflections. When a controversy is started, some people always pretend with certainty to foretel the issue. Whichever opinion, say they, is most contrary to plain sense, is sure to prevail; even where the general interest of the system requires not that decision. Though the reproach of heresy may, for some time, be bandied about among the disputants, it always rests at last on the side of reason. Any one, it is pretended, that has but learning enough of this kind to know the definition of ARIAN, PELAGIAN, ERASTIAN, SOCINIAN, SABELLIAN, EUTYCHIAN, NESTORIAN, MONOTHELITE, &c.

not to mention **PROTESTANT**, whose fate is yet uncertain, will be convinced of the truth of this observation. It is thus a system becomes more absurd in the end, merely from its being reasonable and philosophical in the beginning.

To oppose the torrent of scholastic religion by such feeble maxims as these, that *it is impossible for the same thing to be and not to be*, that *the whole is greater than a part*, that *two and three make five*, is pretending to stop the ocean with a bulrush. Will you set up profane reason against sacred mystery? No punishment is great enough for your impiety. And the same fires which were kindled for heretics, will serve also for the destruction of philosophers.

SECTION XII.

WITH REGARD TO DOUBT OR CONVICTION.

WE meet every day with people so sceptical with regard to history, that they assert it impossible for any nation ever to believe such absurd principles as those of Greek and Egyptian paganism; and at the same time so dogmatical with regard to religion, that they think the same absurdities are to be found in no other communion. Cambyses entertained like prejudices; and very impiously ridiculed, and even wounded, Apis, the great god of the Egyptians, who appeared to his profane senses nothing but a large spotted bull. But Herodotus judiciously ascribes this sally of passion to a real

madness or disorder of the brain: Otherwise, says the historian, he never would have openly affronted any established worship: For on that head, continues he, every nation are best satisfied with their own, and think they have the advantage over every other nation.

It must be allowed that the Roman Catholics are a very learned sect; and that no one communion, but that of the Church of England, can dispute their being the most learned of all the Christian churches: Yet Averroes, the famous Arabian, who, no doubt, had heard of the Egyptian superstitions, declares, that of all religions, the most absurd and nonsensical is that, whose votaries eat, after having created, their deity.

I believe, indeed, that there is no tenet in all paganism which would give so fair a scope to ridicule as this of the *real presence*; for it is so absurd, that it eludes the force of all argument. There are even some pleasant stories of that kind, which, though somewhat profane, are commonly told by the Catholics themselves. One day a priest, it is said, gave inadvertently, instead of the sacrament, a counter, which had by accident fallen among the holy wafers. The communicant waited patiently for some time, expecting that it would dissolve on his tongue: But finding that it still remained entire, he took it off. *I wish*, cried he to the priest, *you have not committed some mistake: I wish you have not given me God the Father: He is so hard and tough there is no swallowing him.*

A famous general, at that time in the Muscovite service, having come to Paris for the recovery of his wounds, brought along with him a young Turk whom he had taken prisoner. Some of the doctors of the Sorbonne (who are altogether as positive as the der-

vices of Constantinople), thinking it a pity that the poor Turk should be damned for want of instruction, solicited Mustapha very hard to turn Christian, and promised him, for his encouragement, plenty of good wine in this world, and paradise in the next. These allurements were too powerful to be resisted; and therefore, having been well instructed and catechised, he at last agreed to receive the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper.

The priest, however, to make every thing sure and solid, still continued his instructions, and began the next day with the usual question, *How many gods are there? None at all!* replies Benedict, for that was his new name. *How! none at all!* cries the priest. *To be sure,* said the honest proselyte. *You have told me all along that there is but one God: And yesterday I ate him.*

Such are the doctrines of our brethren the Catholics. But to these doctrines we are so accustomed, that we never wonder at them, though, in a future age, it will probably become difficult to persuade some nations; that any human, two-legged creature could ever embrace such principles. And it is a thousand to one, but these nations themselves shall have something full as absurd in their own creed, to which they will give a most implicit and most religious assent.

I lodged once at Paris in the same hotel with an ambassador from Tunis, who, having passed some years at London, was returning home that way. One day I observed his Moorish excellency diverting himself under the porch, with surveying the splendid equipages that drove along; when there chanced to pass that way some *Capucin* friars, who had never seen a Turk, as he, on his part, though accustomed to the European

dresses, had never seen the grotesque figure of a *Capucin*: And there is no expressing the mutual admiration with which they inspired each other. Had the chaplain of the embassy entered into a dispute with these Franciscans, their reciprocal surprise had been of the same nature. Thus all mankind stand staring at one another; and there is no beating it into their heads, that the turban of the African is not just as good or as bad a fashion as the cowl of the European.—*He is a very honest man*, said the prince of Sallee, speaking of de Ruyter, *it is a pity he were a Christian*.

How can you worship leeks and onions? we shall suppose a Sorbonnist to say to a priest of Sais. If we worship them, replies the latter, at least we do not at the same time eat them. But what strange objects of adoration are cats and monkeys? says the learned doctor. They are at least as good as the relics or rotten bones of martyrs, answers his no less learned antagonist. Are you not mad, insists the Catholic, to cut one another's throat about the preference of a cabbage or a cucumber? Yes, says the Pagan; I allow it, if you will confess, that those are still madder who fight about the preference among volumes of sophistry, ten thousand of which are not equal in value to one cabbage or cucumber.*

* It is strange that the Egyptian religion, though so absurd, should yet have borne so great a resemblance to the Jewish, that ancient writers, even of the greatest genius, were not able to observe any difference between them. For it is remarkable that both Tacitus and Suetonius, when they mention that decree of the senate under Tiberius, by which the Egyptian and Jewish proselytes were banished from Rome, expressly treat these religions as the same: and it appears, that even the decree itself was founded on that supposition. ‘Actum et de sacris Egyptiis, Judaicisque pellendis; factumque patrum consultum, ut quatuor millia libertini generis ea superstitione infectâ quis idonea ætas, in insulam

Every bystander will easily judge (but unfortunately the bystanders are few), that if nothing were requisite to establish any popular system, by exposing the absurdities of other systems, every votary of every superstition could give a sufficient reason for his blind and bigotted attachment to the principles in which he has been educated. But without so extensive a knowledge on which to ground this assurance (and perhaps better without it), there is not wanting a sufficient stock of religious zeal and faith among mankind. Diodorus Siculus^a gives a remarkable instance to this purpose, of which he was himself an eyewitness. While Egypt lay under the greatest terror of the Roman name, a legionary soldier having inadvertently been guilty of the sacrilegious impiety of killing a cat, the whole people rose upon him with the utmost fury; and all the efforts of the prince were not able to save him. The senate and people of Rome, I am persuaded, would not then have been so delicate with regard to their national deities. They very frankly, a little after that time, voted Augustus a place in the celestial mansions; and would have dethroned every god in heaven for his sake, had he seemed to desire it. *Presens divus habebitur Augustus*, says Horace. That is a very important point: And in other nations and other ages, the same

Sardiniam veherentur, coercendis illic latrocinii; et si ob gravitatem cœli interissent, vile damnum: Ceteri cederent Italia, nisi certam ante diem profanos ritus exuissent. Tacit. Ann. lib. ii. c. 85. 'Externas cœremonias, Egyptios, Judaicosque ritus compescuit; coactus qui *superstitione ea* tenebantur, religiosas vestes cum instrumento omni comburere,' &c. Sueton. Tiber. c. 36. These wise heathens, observing something in the general air, and genius, and spirit of the two religions, to be the same, esteemed the differences of their dogmas too frivolous to deserve any attention.

^a Lib. i.

circumstance has not been deemed altogether indifferent.^b

Notwithstanding the sanctity of our holy religion, says Tully,^c no crime is more common with us than sacrilege: But was it ever heard of, that an Egyptian violated the temple of a cat, an ibis, or a crocodile? There is no torture an Egyptian would not undergo, says the same author in another place,^d rather than injure an ibis, an aspic, a cat, a dog, or a crocodile. Thus it is strictly true what Dryden observes,

‘ Of whatso’er descent their Godhead be,
Stock, stone, or other homely pedigree,
In his defence his servants are as bold,
As if he had been born of beaten gold. ’

ABBALOM and ACHTOPHEL.

Nay, the baser the materials are, of which the divinity is composed, the greater devotion is he likely to excite in the breast of his deluded votaries. They exult in their shame, and make a merit with their deity, in bragging, for his sake, all the ridicule and contumely of his enemies. Ten thousand crusaders enlists themselves under the holy banners; and even openly triumph in those parts of their religion, which their adversaries regard as the most reproachful.

There occurs, I own, a difficulty in the Egyptian system of theology; as, indeed, few systems of that kind

^b When Louis XIV. took on himself the protection of the Jesuits' College of Claremont, the society ordered the king's arms to be put up over the gate, and took down the cross, in order to make way for it; which gave occasion to the following epigram:

Sustulit hinc CRASER, posuitque insignia Regis:
Impia gens, alium nescit habere Deum.

^c De Nat. Deor. l. i.

^d Tusc. Quæst. lib. v.

are entirely free from difficulties. It is evident, from their method of propagation, that a couple of cats, in fifty years, would stock a whole kingdom; and if that religious veneration was still paid them, it would, in twenty more, not only be easier in Egypt to find a god than a man, which Petronius says was the case in some parts of Italy; but the gods must at last entirely starve the men, and leave themselves neither priests nor votaries remaining. It is probable, therefore, that this wise nation, the most celebrated in antiquity for prudence and sound policy, foreseeing such dangerous consequences, reserved all their worship for the full-grown divinities, and used the freedom to drown the holy spawn or little suckling gods, without any scruple or remorse. And thus the practice of warping the tenets of religion, in order to serve temporal interests, is not, by any means, to be regarded as an invention of these later ages.

The learned philosophical Varro, discoursing of religion, pretends not to deliver any thing beyond probabilities and appearances: Such was his good sense and moderation! But the passionate, the zealous Augustin, insults the noble Roman on his scepticism and reserve, and professes the most thorough belief and assurance.* A heathen poet, however, contemporary with the saint, absurdly esteems the religious system of the latter so false, that even the credulity of children, he says, could not engage them to believe it.†

It is strange, when mistakes are so common, to find every one positive and dogmatical; and that the zeal often rises in proportion to the error. *Moverunt*, says

* De civitate Dei, l. iii. c. 17.

† Claudii Rutilii Numitiani iter, lib. ii l. 386.

Spartian, *et ea tempestate, Judæi bellum quod vetabantur mutilare genitalia.*²

If ever there was a nation or a time in which the public religion lost all authority over mankind, we might expect that infidelity in Rome, during the Ciceronian age, would openly have erected its throne, and that Cicero himself, in every speech and action, would have been its most declared abettor. But it appears, that, whatever sceptical liberties that great man might take in his writings or in philosophical conversation, he yet avoided, in the common conduct of life, the imputation of deism and profaneness. Even in his own family, and to his wife Terentia, whom he highly trusted, he was willing to appear a devout religionist; and there remains a letter, addressed to her, in which he seriously desires her to offer sacrifice to Apollo and Æsculapius, in gratitude for the recovery of his health.³

Pompey's devotion was much more sincere: In all his conduct during the civil wars, he paid a great regard to auguries, dreams, and prophecies.¹ Augustus was tainted with superstition of every kind. As it is reported of Milton, that his poetical genius never flowed with ease and abundance in the spring, so Augustus observed, that his own genius for dreaming never was so perfect during that season, nor was so much to be relied on, as during the rest of the year. That great and able emperor was also extremely uneasy when he happened to change his shoes, and put the right foot shoe on the left foot.² In short, it cannot be doubted but the votaries of the established supersti-

² In vita Adriani.

¹ Lib. xiv. epist. 7.

¹ Cicero de Divin. lib. c. 24.

² Sueton. Aug. cap. 90, 91, 92. Plin. lib. ii. cap. 7.

tion of antiquity were as numerous in every state as those of the modern religion are at present. Its influence was as universal, though it was not so great. As many people gave their assent to it, though that assent was not seemingly so strong, precise, and affirmative.

We may observe, that, notwithstanding the dogmatical, imperious style of all superstition, the conviction of the religionists, in all ages, is more affected than real, and scarcely ever approaches, in any degree, to that solid belief and persuasion which governs us in the common affairs of life. Men dare not avow, even to their own hearts, the doubts which they entertain on such subjects: They make a merit of implicit faith, and disguise to themselves their real infidelity, by the strongest asseverations and most positive bigotry. But nature is too hard for all their endeavours, and suffers not the obscure, glimmering light, afforded in those shadowy regions, to equal the strong impressions made by common sense and by experience. The usual course of men's conduct belies their words, and shows that their assent in these matters is some unaccountable operation of the mind between disbelief and conviction, but approaching much nearer to the former than to the latter.

Since, therefore, the mind of man appears of so loose and unsteady a texture, that, even at present, when so many persons find an interest in continually employing on it the chisel and the hammer, yet are they not able to engrave theological tenets with any lasting impression, how much more must this have been the case in ancient times, when the retainers to the holy function were so much fewer in comparison! No wonder that the appearances were then very inconsistent, and that men, on some occasions, might seem determined infi-

dels, and enemies to the established religion, without being so in reality, or at least, without knowing their own minds in that particular.

Another cause, which rendered the ancient religions much looser than the modern, is, that the former were *traditional*, and the latter are *scriptural*; and the tradition in the former was complex, contradictory, and, on many occasions, doubtful; so that it could not possibly be reduced to any standard and canon, or afford any determinate articles of faith. The stories of the gods were numberless, like the popish legends; and though every one, almost, believed a part of these stories, yet no one could believe or know the whole: While, at the same time, all must have acknowledged that no one part stood on a better foundation than the rest. The traditions of different cities and nations were also, on many occasions, directly opposite; and no reason could be assigned for preferring one to the other. And as there was an infinite number of stories with regard to which tradition was nowise positive, the gradation was insensible, from the most fundamental articles of faith, to those loose and precarious fictions. The Pagan religion, therefore, seemed to vanish like a cloud, whenever one approached to it, and examined it piecemeal. It could never be ascertained by any fixed dogmas and principles. And though this did not convert the generality of mankind from so absurd a faith, for when will the people be reasonable? yet it made them falter and hesitate more in maintaining their principles, and was even apt to produce, in certain dispositions of mind, some practices and opinions which had the appearance of determined infidelity.

To which we may add, that the fables of the Pagan religion were, of themselves, light, easy, and familiar;

without devils, or seas of brimstone, or any object that could much terrify the imagination. Who could forbear smiling, when he thought of the loves of **MARS** and **VENUS**, or the amorous frolics of **JUPITER** and **PAN**? In this respect, it was a true poetical religion; if it had not rather too much levity for the graver kinds of poetry. We find that has been adopted by modern bards; nor have these talked with greater freedom and irreverence of the gods, whom they regarded as fictions, than the ancients did of the real objects of their devotion.

The inference is by no means just, that, because a system of religion has made no deep impression on the minds of a people, it must therefore have been positively rejected by all men of common sense, and that opposite principles, in spite of the prejudices of education, were generally established by argument and reasoning. I know not but a contrary inference may be more probable. The less importunate and assuming any species of superstition appears, the less will it provoke men's spleen and indignation, or engage them into inquiries concerning its foundation and origin. This in the mean time is obvious, that the empire of all religious faith over the understanding is wavering and uncertain, subject to every variety of humour, and dependent on the present incidents which strike the imagination. The difference is only in the degrees. An ancient will place a stroke of impiety and one of superstition alternately throughout a whole discourse: ¹ A mo-

¹ Witness this remarkable passage of Tacitus: '*Præter multiplices rerum humanarum casus, cælo terraque prodigia, et fulminum monitus, et futurorum præsentia, læta, tristia, ambigua, manifesta. Nec enim unquam atrocioribus populi Romani cladibus, magisque justis judiciis approbatum est, non esse curæ Diis securitatem nostram, esse ultionem.*'

dern often thinks in the same way, though he may be more guarded in his expression.

Lucian tells us expressly,^m that whoever believed not the most ridiculous fables of Paganism was deemed by the people profane and impious. To what purpose, indeed, would that agreeable author have employed the whole force of his wit and satire against the national religion, had not that religion been generally believed by his countrymen and contemporaries?

Livyⁿ acknowledges as frankly, as any divine would at present, the common incredulity of his age; but then he condemns it as severely. And who can imagine, that a national superstition, which could delude so ingenious a man, would not also impose on the generality of the people?

The Stoics bestowed many magnificent and even impious epithets on their sage; that he alone was rich, free, a king, and equal to the immortal gods. They forgot to add, that he was not superior in prudence and understanding to an old woman. For surely nothing can be more pitiful than the sentiments which that sect entertained with regard to religious matters; while they seriously agree with the common augurs, that, when a raven croaks from the left, it is a good omen; but a bad one when a rook makes a noise from the same quarter. Panætius was the only Stoic among the Greeks who so much as doubted with regard to

Hist. lib. i. Augustus's quarrel with Neptune is an instance of the same kind. Had not the emperor believed Neptune to be a real being, and to have dominion over the sea, where had been the foundation of his anger? And if he believed it, what madness to provoke still farther that deity: The same observation may be made upon Quintilian's exclamation on account of the death of his children, lib. vi. Præf.

^m Philopseudes.

ⁿ Lib. 10. cap. 40.

auguries and divinations.* Marcus Antoninus† tells us, that he himself had received many admonitions from the gods in his sleep. It is true, Epictetus‡ forbids us to regard the language of rooks and ravens; but it is not that they do not speak truth: It is only because they can foretel nothing but the breaking of our neck or the forfeiture of our estate; which are circumstances, says he, that nowise concern us. Thus the Stoics joined a philosophical enthusiasm to a religious superstition. The force of their mind, being all turned to the side of morals, unbent itself in that of religion.¶

Plato¶ introduces Socrates affirming, that the accusation of impiety raised against him was owing entirely to his rejecting such fables as those of SATURN'S castrating his father URANUS, and JUPITER'S dethroning SATURN: Yet in a subsequent dialogue,‡ Socrates confesses that the doctrine of the mortality of the soul was the received opinion of the people. Is there here any contradiction? Yes, surely: But the contradiction is not in Plato; it is in the people, whose religious principles in general are always composed of the most discordant parts, especially in an age when superstition sat so easy and light upon them.¶

* Cicero de Divin. lib. i. cap. 3. et 7.

† Lib. i. § 17.

‡ Ench. § 17.

¶ The Stoics, I own, were not quite orthodox in the established religion; but one may see, from these instances, that they went a great way. And the people undoubtedly went every length.

¶ Eutyphro.

‡ Phædo.

¶ Xenophon's conduct, as related by himself, is, at once, an incontestable proof of the general credulity of mankind in those ages, and the incoherences, in all ages, of men's opinions in religious matters. That

The same Cicero, who affected, in his own family, to appear a devout religionist, makes no scruple, in a public court of judicature, of treating the doctrine of a

great captain and philosopher, the disciple of Socrates, and one who has delivered some of the most refined sentiments with regard to a deity, gave all the following marks of vulgar superstition. By Socrates's advice, he consulted the oracle of Delphi before he would engage in the expedition of Cyrus. De Exped. lib. iii. p. 294. ex edit. Leunclavii. Sees a dream the night after the generals were seized, which he pays great regard to, but thinks ambiguous. Id. p. 295. He and the whole army regard sneezing as a very lucky omen. Id. p. 300. Has another dream, when he comes to the river Centrites, which his fellow-general Chiroso-phus also pays great regard to. Id. lib. iv. p. 323. The Greeks, suffering from a cold north wind, sacrifice to it; and the historian observes, that it immediately abated. Id. p. 329. Xenophon consults the sacrifices in secret, before he would form any resolution with himself about settling a colony. Lib. 5. p. 359. He was himself a very skilful augur. Id. p. 361. Is determined by the victims to refuse the sole command of the army which was offered to him. Lib. vi. p. 273. Cleander, the Spartan, though very desirous of it, refuses it for the same reason. Id. p. 392. Xenophon mentions an old dream with the interpretation given him, when he first joined Cyrus, p. 373. Mentions also the place of Hercules's descent into hell, as believing it, and says the marks of it are still remaining. Id. p. 375. Had almost starved the army, rather than lead them to the field against the auspices. Id. p. 362, 363. His friend, Euclides, the augur, would not believe that he had brought no money from the expedition; till he (Euclides) sacrificed, and then he saw the master clearly in the Extā. Lib. vii. p. 425. The same philosopher, proposing a project of mines for the increase of the Athenian revenues, advises them first to consult the oracle. De Rat. Red. p. 392. That all this devotion was not a farce, in order to serve a political purpose, appears both from the facts themselves, and from the genius of that age, when little or nothing could be gained by hypocrisy. Besides, Xenophon, as appears from his Memorabilia, was a kind of heretic in those times, which no political devotee ever is. It is for the same reason I maintain, that Newton, Locke, Clarke, &c. being *Arians* or *Socinians*, were very sincere in the creed they professed: And I always oppose this argument to some libertines, who will needs have it, that it was impossible but that these philosophers must have been hypocrites.

future state as a ridiculous fable, to which nobody could give any attention. * Sallust † represents Cæsar as speaking the same language in the open senate. †

But that all these freedoms implied not a total and universal infidelity and scepticism amongst the people, is too apparent to be denied. Though some parts of the national religion hung loose upon the minds of men, other parts adhered more closely to them. And it was the chief business of the sceptical philosophers to show, that there was no more foundation for one than for the other. This is the artifice of Cotta in the dialogues concerning the *nature of the gods*. He refutes the whole system of mythology, by leading the orthodox gradually from the more momentous stories which were believed, to the more frivolous which every one ridiculed: From the gods to the goddesses; from the goddesses to the nymphs; from the nymphs to the fawns and satyrs. His master, Carneades, had employed the same method of reasoning. †

Upon the whole, the greatest and most observable differences between a *traditional, mythological* religion, and a *systematical, scholastic* one, are two: The former is often more reasonable, as consisting only of a multitude of stories, which, however groundless, imply no

* Pro Cluentio, cap. 61.

† De bello Catilin.

* Cicero (Tusc. Quæst.) lib. i. cap. 5, 6, and Seneca (Epist. 24.), as also Juvenal (Satyr. 2.) maintain, that there is no boy or old woman so ridiculous as to believe the poets in their accounts of a future state. Why then does Lucretius so highly exalt his master for freeing us from these terrors? Perhaps the generality of mankind were then in the disposition of Cephalus in Plato (de Rep. lib. i.), who, while he was young and healthful, could ridicule these stories; but as soon as he became old and infirm, began to entertain apprehensions of their truth. This we may observe not to be unusual even at present.

† Sext. Empir. advers. Mathem. lib. viii.

express absurdity and demonstrative contradiction; and sits also so easy and light on men's minds, that though it may be as universally received, it happily makes no such deep impression on the affections and understanding.

SECTION XIII.

IMPIOUS CONCEPTIONS OF THE DIVINE NATURE IN ¹⁹ POPULAR RELIGIONS OF BOTH KINDS.

THE primary religion of mankind arises chiefly from an anxious fear of future events; and what ideas will naturally be entertained of invisible, unknown powers, while men lie under dismal apprehensions of any kind, may easily be conceived. Every image of vengeance, severity, cruelty, and malice, must occur, and must augment the ghastliness and horror which oppresses the amazed religionist. A panic having once seized the mind, the active fancy still farther multiplies the objects of terror; while that profound darkness, or, what is worse, that glimmering light with which we are environed, represents the spectres of divinity under the most dreadful appearances imaginable. And no idea of perverse wickedness can be framed, which those terrified devotees do not readily, without scruple, apply to their deity.

This appears the natural state of religion when sur-

¹⁹ In Edition N, it stood 'in most popular religions of both kinds.'

vèyed in one light. But if we consider, on the other hand, that spirit of praise and eulogy which necessarily has place in all religions, and which is the consequence of these very terrors, we must expect a quite contrary system of theology to prevail. Every virtue, every excellence, must be ascribed to the Divinity, and no exaggeration will be deemed sufficient to reach those perfections with which he is endowed. Whatever strains of panegyric can be invented, are immediately embraced, without consulting any arguments or phenomena: It is esteemed a sufficient confirmation of them, that they give us more magnificent ideas of the divine object of our worship and adoration.

Here, therefore, is a kind of contradiction between the different principles of human nature which enter into religion. Our natural terrors present the notion of a devilish and malicious deity: Our propensity to adulation leads us to acknowledge an excellent and divine. And the influence of these opposite principles is various, according to the different situation of the human understanding.

In very barbarous and ignorant nations, such as the Africans and Indians, nay, even the Japanese, who can form no extensive ideas of power and knowledge, worship may be paid to a being whom they confess to be wicked and detestable, though they may be cautious, perhaps, of pronouncing this judgment of him in public, or in his temple, where he may be supposed to hear their reproaches.

Such rude imperfect ideas of the Divinity adhere long to all idolaters; and it may safely be affirmed, that the Greeks themselves never got entirely rid of them. It is remarked by Xenophon, ^b in praise of

^b Mem. lib. i.

Socrates, that this philosopher assented not to the vulgar opinion, which supposed the gods to know some things, and be ignorant of others: He maintained that they knew every thing; what was done, said, or even thought. But as this was a strain of philosophy much above the conception of his countrymen, we need not be surprised, if very frankly, in their books and conversation, they blamed the deities whom they worshipped in their temples. It is observable, that Herodotus, in particular, scruples not, in many passages, to ascribe *envy* to the gods; a sentiment, of all others, the most suitable to a mean and devilish nature. The Pagan hymns, however, sung in public worship, contained nothing but epithets of praise, even while the actions ascribed to the gods were the most barbarous and detestable. When Timotheus, the poet, recited a hymn to DIANA, in which he enumerated, with the greatest eulogies, all the actions and attributes of that cruel, capricious goddess: *May your daughter*, said one present, *become such as the deity whom you celebrate!*^c

But as men farther exalt their idea of their divinity, it is their notion of his power and knowledge only, not of his goodness, which is improved. On the contrary, in proportion to the supposed extent of his science and authority, their terrors naturally augment; while they believe that no secrecy can conceal them from his scrutiny, and that even the inmost recesses of their breast lie open before him. They must then be careful not to form expressly any sentiment of blame and disap-

^c It was considered among the ancients as a very extraordinary philosophical paradox, that the presence of the gods was not confined to the heavens, but was extended every where, as we learn from Lucian.—*Hermotimus sive De sectis*.

^d Plutarch. de Superstit.

probation. All must be applause, ravishment, ecstasy. And while their gloomy apprehensions make them ascribe to him measures of conduct which, in human creatures, would be highly blamed, they must still affect to praise and admire that conduct in the object of their devotional addresses. Thus it may safely be affirmed, that popular religions are really, in the conception of their more vulgar votaries, a species of dæmonism; and the higher the deity is exalted in power and knowledge, the lower, of course, is he depressed in goodness and benevolence, whatever epithets of praise may be bestowed on him by his amazed adorers. Among idolaters, the words may be false, and belie the secret opinion; But among more exalted religionists, the opinion itself contracts a kind of falsehood, and belies the inward sentiment. The heart secretly detests such measures of cruel and implacable vengeance; but the judgment dares not but pronounce them perfect and adorable. And the additional misery of this inward struggle aggravates all the other terrors by which these unhappy victims to superstition are forever haunted.

Lucian^e observes, that a young man, who reads the history of the gods in Homer or Hesiod, and finds their factions, wars, injustice, incest, adultery, and other immoralities so highly celebrated, is much surprised afterwards, when he comes into the world, to observe that punishments are by law inflicted on the same actions, which he had been taught to ascribe to superior beings. The contradiction is still perhaps stronger between the representations given us by some later religions and our natural ideas of generosity, le-

^e Necyomantia.

nity, impartiality, and justice; and in proportion to the multiplied terrors of these religions, the barbarous conceptions of the divinity are multiplied upon us. ' Nothing can preserve untainted the genuine principles of morals in our judgment of human conduct, but the

' Bacchus, a divine being, is represented by the heathen mythology as the inventor of dancing and the theatre. Plays were anciently even a part of public worship on the most solemn occasions, and often employed in times of pestilence to appease the offended deities. But they have been zealously proscribed by the godly in later ages; and the play-house, according to a learned divine, is the porch of hell.

But in order to show more evidently that it is possible for a religion to represent the Divinity in still a more immoral and unamiable light than he was pictured by the ancients, we shall cite a long passage from an author of taste and imagination, who was surely no enemy to Christianity. It is the Chevalier Ramsay, a writer who had so laudable an inclination to be orthodox, that his reason never found any difficulty, even in the doctrines which freethinkers scruple the most, the trinity, incarnation, and satisfaction: His humanity alone, of which he seems to have had a great stock, rebelled against the doctrines of eternal reprobation and predestination. He expresses himself thus: ' What strange ideas,' says he, ' would an Indian or a Chinese philosopher have of our holy religion, if they judged by the schemes given of it by our modern freethinkers, and pharisaical doctors of all sects? According to the odious and too vulgar system of these incredulous scoffers and credulous scribblers, '— the God of the Jews is a most cruel, unjust, partial, and fantastical being. He created, about 6000 years ago, a man and a woman, and placed them in a fine garden of Asja, of which there are no remains. This garden was furnished with all sorts of trees, fountains, and flowers. He allowed them the use of all the fruits of this beautiful garden, except one, that was planted in the midst thereof, and that had in it a secret virtue of preserving them in continual health and vigour of body and mind, of exalting their natural powers, and making them wise. The devil entered into the body of a serpent, and solicited the first woman to eat of this forbidden fruit; she engaged her husband to do the same. To punish this slight curiosity and natural desire of life and knowledge, God not only threw our first parents out of paradise, but he condemned all their posterity to temporal misery, and the greatest part of them to eternal pains, though the souls of these innocent children have no more relation to that Adam than to those of Nero and Mahomet; since,

absolute necessity of these principles to the existence of society. If common conception can indulge princes in a system of ethics, somewhat different from that which should regulate private persons, how much more those superior beings, whose attributes, views, and na-

according to the scholastic drivellers, fabulists, and mythologists, all souls are created pure, and infused immediately into mortal bodies, as soon as the fetus is formed. To accomplish the barbarous, partial decree of predestination and reprobation, God abandoned all nations to darkness, idolatry, and superstition, without any saving knowledge or salutary graces; unless it was one particular nation, whom he chose as his peculiar people. This chosen nation was, however, the most stupid, ungrateful, rebellious, and perfidious of all nations. After God had thus kept the far greater part of all the human species, during near 4000 years, in a reprobate state, he changed all of a sudden, and took a fancy for other nations besides the Jews. Then he sent his only begotten Son to the world, under a human form, to appease his wrath, satisfy his vindictive justice, and die for the pardon of sin. Very few nations, however, have heard of this gospel; and all the rest, though left in invincible ignorance, are damned without exception, or any possibility of remission. The greatest part of those who have heard of it have changed only some speculative notions about God, and some external forms in worship: For, in other respects, the bulk of Christians have continued as corrupt as the rest of mankind in their morals; yea, so much the more perverse and criminal, that their fights were greater. Unless it be a very small select number, all other Christians, like the Pagans, will be for ever damned; the great sacrifice offered up for them will become void and of no effect; God will take delight for ever in their torments and blasphemies; and though he can by one *fat* change their hearts, yet they will remain for ever unconverted and unconvertible, because he will be for ever unappeasable and irreconcilable. It is true, that all this makes God odious, a hater of souls rather than a lover of them; a cruel vindictive tyrant, an impotent or a wrathful daemon, rather than an all-powerful beneficent Father of spirits: Yet all this is a mystery. He has secret reasons for his conduct that are impenetrable; and though he appears unjust and barbarous, yet we must believe the contrary, because what is injustice, crime, cruelty, and the blackest malice in us, is in him justice, mercy, and sovereign goodness. Thus the incredulous free-thinkers, the judaizing Christians, and the fantastical doctors, have disfigured and dishonoured the sublime mysteries of our holy faith; thus they

ture, are so totally unknown to us? *Sunt superis s uia jura.*² The gods have maxims of justice peculiar to themselves.

SECTION XIV.

BAD INFLUENCE OF POPULAR RELIGIONS²⁰ ON MORALITY.

HERE I cannot forbear observing a fact, which may be worth the attention of such as make human nature the object of their inquiry. It is certain, that in every religion, however sublime the verbal definition which it gives of its divinity, many of the votaries, perhaps the greatest number, will still seek the divine favour, not by virtue and good morals, which alone can be accept-

have confounded the nature of good and evil; transformed the most monstrous passions into divine attributes, and surpassed the pagans in blasphemy, by ascribing to the Eternal Nature, as perfections, what makes the most horrid crimes amongst men. The grosser pagans contented themselves with divinising lust, incest, and adultery; but the predestinarian doctors have divinised cruelty, wrath, fury, vengeance, and all the blackest vices.'—See the Chevalier Ramsay's philosophical principles of natural and revealed religion, Part II. p. 401.

The same author asserts, in other places, that the *Arminian* and *Molinist* schemes serve very little to mend the matter: And having thus thrown himself out of all received sects of Christianity, he is obliged to advance a system of his own, which is a kind of *Origenism*, and supposes the pre-existence of the souls both of men and beasts, and the eternal salvation and conversion of all men, beasts and devils. But this notion, being quite peculiar to himself, we need not treat of. I thought the opinions of this ingenious author very curious; but I pretend not to warrant the justness of them.

² Ovid. *Metam.* lib. ix. 501.

²⁰ In Edition N, it stood '*most popular.*'

able to a perfect being, but either by frivolous observances, by intemperate zeal, by rapturous ecstasies, or by the belief of mysterious and absurd opinions. The least part of the *Sadder*, as well as of the *Pentateuch*, consists in precepts of morality; and we may also be assured, that that part was always the least observed and regarded. When the old Romans were attacked with a pestilence, they never ascribed their sufferings to their vices, or dreamed of repentance and amendment. They never thought, that they were the general robbers of the world, whose ambition and avarice made desolate the earth, and reduced opulent nations to want and beggary. They only created a dictator,^a in order to drive a nail into a door; and by that means, they thought that they had sufficiently appeased their incensed deity.

In *Ægina*, one faction forming a conspiracy, barbarously and treacherously assassinated seven hundred of their fellow-citizens; and carried their fury so far, that one miserable fugitive having fled to the temple, they cut off his hands, by which he clung to the gates, and carrying him out of holy ground, immediately murdered him. *By this impiety*, says Herodotus,¹ (not by the other many cruel assassinations) *they offended the gods, and contracted an inexpiable guilt.*

Nay, if we should suppose, what never happens, that a popular religion were found, in which it was expressly declared, that nothing but morality could gain the divine favour; if an order of priests were instituted to inculcate this opinion, in daily sermons, and with all the arts of persuasion; yet so inveterate are the people's prejudices, that, for want of some other superstition,

^a Called Dictator *clavis figendæ causa*. T. Livii. l. vii. c. 3. ¹ Lib. vi.

they would make the very attendance on these sermons the essentials of religion, rather than place them in virtue and good morals. The sublime prologue of Zaleucus's^b laws inspired not the Locrians, so far as we can learn, with any sounder notions of the measures of acceptance with the deity, than were familiar to the other Greeks.

This observation, then, holds universally: But still one may be at some loss to account for it. It is not sufficient to observe, that the people every where degrade their deities into a similitude with themselves, and consider them merely as a species of human creatures, somewhat more potent and intelligent. This will not remove the difficulty. For there is no *man* so stupid, as that, judging by his natural reason, he would not esteem virtue and honesty the most valuable qualities which any person could possess. Why not ascribe the same sentiment to his deity? Why not make all religion, or the chief part of it, to consist in these attainments?

Nor is it satisfactory to say, that the practice of morality is more difficult than that of superstition, and is therefore rejected. For, not to mention the excessive penances of the *Brachmans* and *Talapoins*; it is certain, that the *Rhamadan* of the Turks, during which the poor wretches, for many days, often in the hottest months of the year, and in some of the hottest climates of the world, remain without eating or drinking from the rising to the setting sun; this *Rhamadan*, I say, must be more severe than the practice of any moral duty, even to the most vicious and depraved of mankind. The four lents of the Muscovites, and the austerities of some *Roman Catholics*, appear more

^b To be found in Diod. Sic. lib. xii.

disagreeable than meekness and benevolence. In short, all virtue, when men are reconciled to it by ever so little practice, is agreeable: All superstition is for ever odious and burdensome.

Perhaps the following account may be received as a true solution of the difficulty. The duties which a man performs as a friend or parent, seem merely owing to his benefactor or children; nor can he be wanting to these duties, without breaking through all the ties of nature and morality. A strong inclination may prompt him to the performance: A sentiment of order and moral obligation joins its force to these natural ties: And the whole man, if truly virtuous, is drawn to his duty without any effort or endeavour. Even with regard to the virtues which are more austere, and more founded on reflection, such as public spirit, filial duty, temperance, or integrity; the moral obligation, in our apprehension, removes all pretension to religious merit: and the virtuous conduct is deemed no more than what we owe to society and to ourselves. In all this, a superstitious man finds nothing which he has properly performed for the sake of this deity, or which can peculiarly recommend him to the divine favour and protection. He considers not, that the most genuine method of serving the Divinity is by promoting the happiness of his creatures. He still looks out for some more immediate service of the Supreme Being, in order to allay those terrors with which he is haunted. And any practice recommended to him, which either serves to no other purpose in life, or offers the strongest violence to his natural inclinations, that practice he will the more readily embrace, on account of those very circumstances which should make him absolutely reject it. It seems the more purely religious, because it proceeds from no mixture of any other motive

or consideration. And if, for its sake, he sacrifices much of his ease and quiet, his claim of merit appears still to rise upon him in proportion to the zeal and devotion which he discovers. In restoring a loan, or paying a debt, his divinity is nowise beholden to him; because these acts of justice are what he was bound to perform, and what many would have performed, were there no god in the universe. But if he fast a day, or give himself a sound whipping; this has a direct reference, in his opinion, to the service of God. No other motive could engage him to such austerities. By these distinguished marks of devotion, he has now acquired the Divine favour; and may expect, in recompense, protection and safety in this world, and eternal happiness in the next.

Hence the greatest crimes have been found, in many instances, compatible with a superstitious piety and devotion: Hence it is justly regarded as unsafe to draw any certain inference in favour of a man's morals from the fervour or strictness of his religious exercises, even though he himself believe them sincere. Nay, it has been observed, that enormities of the blackest dye have been rather apt to produce superstitious terrors, and increase the religious passion. Bomilcar having formed a conspiracy of assassinating at once the whole senate of Carthage, and invading the liberties of his country, lost the opportunity from a continual regard to omens and prophecies. *Those who undertake the most criminal and most dangerous enterprises are commonly the most superstitious*, as an ancient historian¹ remarks on this occasion. Their devotion and spiritual faith rise with their fears. Catiline was not contented with the established deities, and received rites of the national reli-

¹ Diod. Sic. lib. xv.

gion : His anxious terrors made him seek new inventions of this kind,^a which he never probably had dreamed of, had he remained a good citizen, and obedient to the laws of his country.

To which we may add, that after the commission of crimes, there arise remorse and secret horrors, which give no rest to the mind, but make it have recourse to religious rites and ceremonies, as expiations of its offences. Whatever weakens or disorders the internal frame, promotes the interests of superstition : And nothing is more destructive to them, than a manly, steady virtue, which either preserves us from disastrous melancholy accidents, or teaches us to bear them. During such calm sunshine of the mind, these spectres of false divinity never make their appearance. On the other hand, while we abandon ourselves to the natural undisciplined suggestions of our timid and anxious hearts, every kind of barbarity is ascribed to the Supreme Being, from the terrors with which we are agitated, and every kind of caprice, from the methods which we embrace in order to appease him. *Barbarity, caprice* ; these qualities, however nominally disguised, we may universally observe, form the ruling character of the Deity in popular religions. Even priests, instead of correcting these depraved ideas of mankind, have often been found ready to foster and encourage them. The more tremendous the divinity is represented, the more tame and submissive do men become to his ministers : And the more unaccountable the measures of acceptance required by him, the more necessary does it become to abandon our natural reason, and yield to their ghostly guidance and direction. Thus it may be

^a Cic. Catil. i. ; Sallust. de Bello Catil.

allowed, that the artifices of men aggravate our natural infirmities and follies of this kind, but never originally beget them. Their root strikes deeper into the mind, and springs from the essential and universal properties of human nature.

SECTION XV.

GENERAL COROLLARY.

THOUGH the stupidity of men, barbarous and un-instructed, be so great, that they may not see a Sovereign Author in the more obvious works of nature to which they are so much familiarized; yet it scarcely seems possible, that any one of good understanding should reject that idea, when once it is suggested to him. A purpose, an intention, a design, is evident in every thing; and when our comprehension is so far enlarged as to contemplate the first rise of this visible system, we must adopt, with the strongest conviction, the idea of some intelligent cause or author. The uniform maxims too, which prevail throughout the whole frame of the universe, naturally, if not necessarily, lead us to conceive this intelligence as single and undivided, where the prejudices of education oppose not so reasonable a theory. Even the contrarieties of nature, by discovering themselves every where, become proofs of some consistent plan, and establish one single purpose or intention, however inexplicable and incomprehensible.

Good and ill are universally intermingled and confounded : happiness and misery, wisdom and folly, virtue and vice. Nothing is pure and entirely of a piece. All advantages are attended with disadvantages. An universal compensation prevails in all conditions of being and existence. And it is not possible for us, by our most chimerical wishes, to form the idea of a station or situation altogether desirable. The draughts of life, according to the poet's fiction, are always mixed from the vessels on each hand of Jupiter : Or if any cup be presented altogether pure, it is drawn only, as the same poet tells us, from the left-handed vessel.

The more exquisite any good is, of which a small specimen is afforded us, the sharper is the evil allied to it ; and few exceptions are found to this uniform law of nature. The most sprightly wit borders on madness ; the highest effusions of joy produce the deepest melancholy ; the most ravishing pleasures are attended with the most cruel lassitude and disgust ; the most flattering hopes make way for the severest disappointments. And, in general, no course of life has such safety (for happiness is not to be dreamed of) as the temperate and moderate, which maintains, as far as possible, a mediocrity, and a kind of insensibility, in every thing.

As the good, the great, the sublime, the ravishing, are found eminently in the genuine principles of theism ; it may be expected, from the analogy of nature, that the base, the absurd, the mean, the terrifying, will be equally discovered in religious fictions and chimeras.

The universal propensity to believe in invisible, intelligent power, if not an original instinct, being at least a general attendant of human nature, may be considered as a kind of mark or stamp, which the Divine

NOTE

workman has set upon his work; and nothing surely can more dignify mankind, than to be thus selected from all other parts of the creation, and to bear the image or impression of the universal Creator. But consult this image as it appears in the popular religions of the world. How is the Deity disfigured in our representations of him! What caprice, absurdity, and immorality are attributed to him! How much is he degraded even below the character which we should naturally, in common life, ascribe to a man of sense and virtue!

What a noble privilege is it of human reason to attain the knowledge of the Supreme Being; and, from the visible works of nature, be enabled to infer so sublime a principle as its Supreme Creator! But turn the reverse of the medal. Survey most nations and most ages. Examine the religious principles which have, in fact, prevailed in the world. You will scarcely be persuaded that they are any thing but sick men's dreams: Or perhaps will regard them more as the playsome whimsies of monkeys in human shape, than the serious, positive, dogmatical asseverations of a being, who dignifies himself with the name of rational.

Hear the verbal protestations of all men: Nothing so certain as their religious tenets. Examine their lives: You will scarcely think that they repose the smallest confidence in them.

The greatest and truest zeal gives us no security against hypocrisy: The most open impiety is attended with a secret dread and compunction.

No theological absurdities so glaring that they have not sometimes been embraced by men of the greatest and most cultivated understanding. No religious pre-

cepts so rigorous that they have not been adopted by the most voluptuous and most abandoned of men.

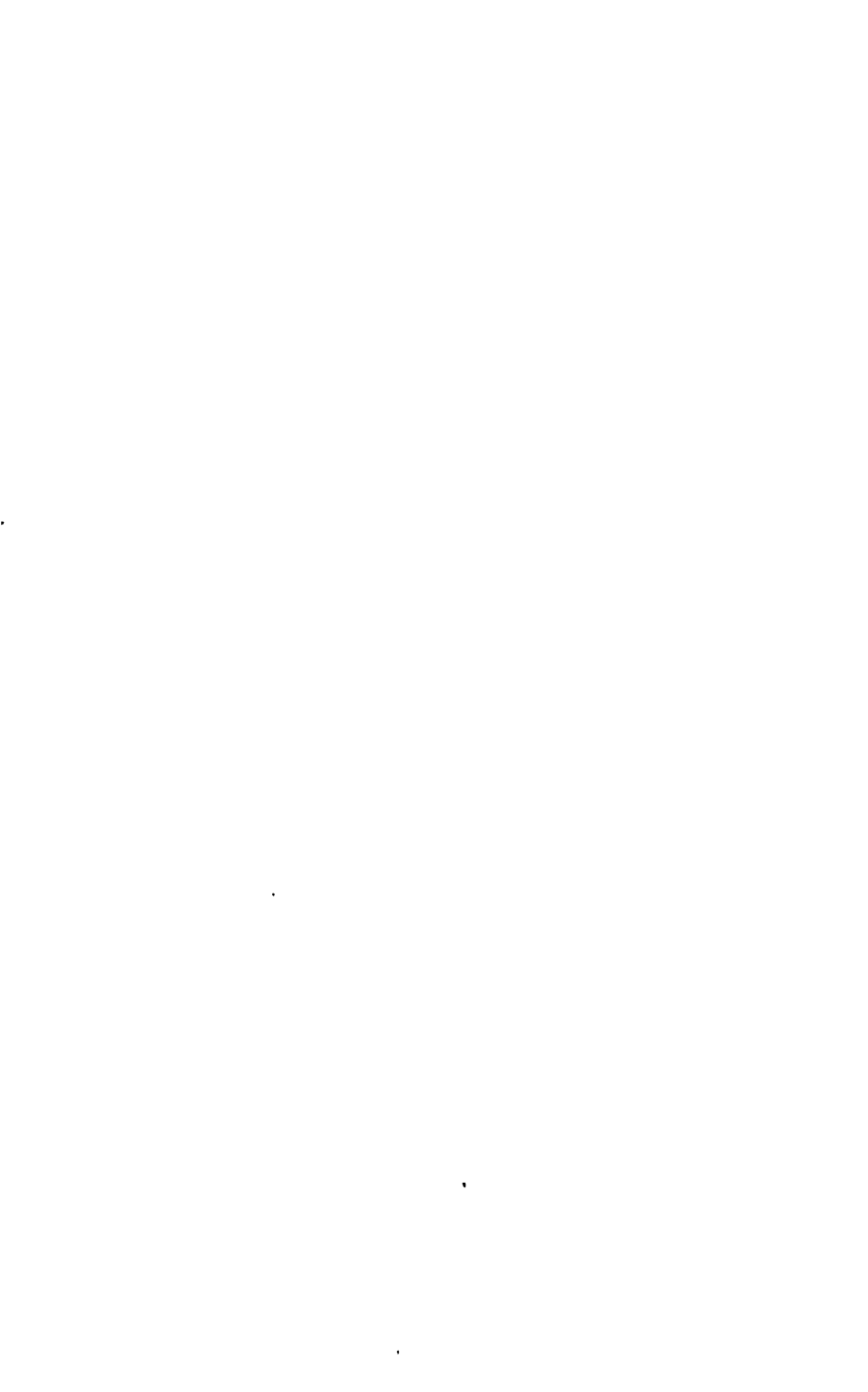
Ignorance is the mother of devotion; a maxim that is proverbial, and confirmed by general experience. Look out for a people entirely destitute of religion: If you find them at all, be assured that they are but few degrees removed from brutes.

What so pure as some of the morals included in some theological systems? What so corrupt as some of the practices to which these systems give rise?

The comfortable views, exhibited by the belief of futurity, are ravishing and delightful. But how quickly vanished on the appearance of its terrors, which keep a more firm and durable possession of the human mind!

The whole is a riddle, an enigma, an inexplicable mystery. Doubt, uncertainty, suspense of judgment, appear the only result of our most accurate scrutiny concerning this subject. But such is the frailty of human reason, and such the irresistible contagion of opinion, that even this deliberate doubt could scarcely be upheld; did we not enlarge our view, and opposing one species of superstition to another, set them a quarrelling; while we ourselves, during their fury and contention, happily make our escape into the calm, though obscure, regions of philosophy.

*Every page of this story shows the
importance of being an excellent
philosopher. It is to be learned
from reading it is much.*



ADDITIONAL ESSAYS.

K K 2

ESSAY I.

OF IMPUDENCE AND MODESTY. 21

I HAVE always been of opinion, that the common complaints against Providence are ill-grounded, and that the good or bad qualities of men are the causes of their good or bad fortune, more than what is generally imagined. There are, no doubt, instances to the contrary, and these too pretty numerous; but few in comparison of the instances we have of a right distribution of prosperity and adversity: nor, indeed, could it be otherwise from the common course of human affairs. To be endowed with a benevolent disposition, and to love others, will almost infallibly procure love and esteem, which is the chief circumstance in life, and facilitates every enterprise and undertaking, besides the satisfaction which immediately results from it. The case is much the same with the other virtues. Prosperity is naturally, though not necessarily, attached to virtue and merit; and adversity, in like manner, to vice and folly.

21 This Essay occurs in Editions A, C, D.

I must, however, confess, that this rule admits of an exception with regard to one moral quality, and that *modesty* has a natural tendency to conceal a man's talents, as *impudence* displays them to the utmost, and has been the only cause why many have risen in the world, under all the disadvantages of low birth and little merit. Such indolence and incapacity is there in the generality of mankind, that they are apt to receive a man for whatever he has a mind to put himself off for; and admit his overbearing airs as proofs of that merit which he assumes to himself. A decent assurance seems to be the natural attendant on virtue, and few men can distinguish impudence from it: as, on the other hand, diffidence, being the natural result of vice and folly, has drawn disgrace upon modesty, which in outward appearance so nearly resembles it.

“ I was lately lamenting to a friend of mine, who loves a conceit, that popular applause should be bestowed with so little judgment, and that so many empty forward coxcombs should rise up to a figure in the world: upon which he said there was nothing surprising in the case. *Popular fame*, says he, is nothing but breath or air; and air very naturally presses into a vacuum.”^b

As impudence, though really a vice, has the same effects upon a man's fortune as if it were a virtue, so we may observe, that it is almost as difficult to be attained, and is, in that respect, distinguished from all the other vices, which are acquired with little pains, and continually increase upon indulgence. Many a man, being sensible that modesty is extremely prejudicial to him in making his fortune, has resolved to be

^b This paragraph is omitted in EDITION D.

impudent, and to put a bold face upon the matter; but it is observable, that such people have seldom succeeded in the attempt, but have been obliged to relapse into their primitive modesty. Nothing carries a man through the world like a true genuine natural impudence. Its counterfeit is good for nothing, nor can ever support itself. In any other attempt, whatever faults a man commits and is sensible of, he is so much nearer his end. But when he endeavours at impudence, if he ever failed in the attempt, the remembrance of that failure will make him blush, and will infallibly disconcert him; after which every blush is a cause for new blushes, till he be found out to be an arrant cheat, and a vain pretender to impudence.

If any thing can give a modest man more assurance, it must be some advantages of fortune, which chance procures to him. Riches naturally gain a man a favourable reception in the world, and give merit a double lustre, when a person is endowed with it; and they supply its place, in a great measure, when it is absent. It is wonderful to observe what airs of superiority fools and knaves, with large possessions, give themselves above men of the greatest merit in poverty. Nor do the men of merit make any strong opposition to these usurpations; or rather seem to favour them by the modesty of their behaviour. Their good sense and experience make them diffident of their judgment, and cause them to examine every thing with the greatest accuracy. As, on the other hand, the delicacy of their sentiments makes them timorous lest they commit faults, and lose in the practice of the world that integrity of virtue, so to speak, of which they are so jealous. To make wisdom agree with confidence, is as difficult as to reconcile vice and modesty.

These are the reflections, which have occurred upon this subject of impudence and modesty : and I hope the reader will not be displeas'd to see them wrought into the following allegory.

Jupiter, in the beginning, join'd *Virtue*, *Wisdom*, and *Confidence* together ; and *Vice*, *Folly*, and *Diffidence* ; and thus connected, sent them into the world. But though he thought that he had match'd them with great judgment, and said that *Confidence* was the natural companion of *Virtue*, and that *Vice* deserv'd to be attend'd with *Diffidence*, they had not gone far before dissension arose among them. *Wisdom*, who was the guide of the one company, was always accus'tom'd, before she ventur'd upon any road, however beaten, to examine it carefully, to inquire whither it led, what dangers, difficulties, and hinderances might possibly or probably occur in it. In these deliberations she usually consum'd some time ; which delay was very displeasing to *Confidence*, who was always inclin'd to hurry on, without much forethought or deliberation, in the first road he met. *Wisdom* and *Virtue* were inseparable : but *Confidence* one day, following his impetuous nature, advanced a considerable way before his guides and companions ; and not feeling any want of their company, he never inquir'd after them, nor ever met with them more. In like manner, the other society, though join'd by Jupiter, disagreed and separated. As *Folly* saw very little way before her, she had nothing to determine concerning the goodness of roads, nor could give the preference to one above another ; and this want of resolution was increased by *Diffidence*, who, with her doubts and scruples, always retard'd the journey. This was a great annoyance to *Vice*, who lov'd not to bear of difficulties and delays, and was

never satisfied without his full career, in whatever his inclinations led him to. *Folly*, he knew, though she harkened to *Diffidence*, would be easily managed when alone; and, therefore, as a vicious horse throws his rider, he openly beat away his controller of all his pleasures, and proceeded on his journey with *Folly*, from whom he is inseparable. *Confidence* and *Diffidence* being, after this manner, both thrown loose from their respective companies, wandered for some time; till at last chance led them at the same time to one village. *Confidence* went directly up to the great house, which belonged to *Wealth*, the lord of the village; and, without staying for a porter, intruded himself immediately into the innermost apartments, where he found *Vice* and *Folly* well received before him. He joined the train; recommended himself very quickly to his landlord; and entered into such familiarity with *Vice*, that he was inlisted in the same company with *Folly*. They were frequent guests to *Wealth*, and from that moment inseparable. *Diffidence*, in the mean time, not daring to approach the great house, accepted of an invitation from *Poverty*, one of the tenants; and entering the cottage, found *Wisdom* and *Virtue*, who, being repulsed by the landlord, had retired thither. *Virtue* took compassion of her, and *Wisdom* found, from her temper, that she would easily improve; so they admitted her into their society. Accordingly, by their means, she altered in a little time somewhat of her manner, and becoming much more amiable and engaging, was now known by the name of *Modesty*. As ill company has a greater effect than good, *Confidence*, though more refractory to counsel and example, degenerated so far by the society of *Vice* and *Folly*, as to pass by the name of IMPUDENCE. Mankind, who saw these societies as

Jupiter first joined them, and knew nothing of these mutual desertions, are thereby led into strange mistakes; and, wherever they see *Impudence*, make account of finding *Virtue* and *Wisdom*; and wherever they observe *Modesty*, call her attendants *Vice* and *Folly*.

ESSAY II.

OF LOVE AND MARRIAGE. 33

I KNOW not whence it proceeds, that women are so apt to take amiss every thing which is said in disparagement of the married state; and always consider a satire upon matrimony as a satire upon themselves. Do they mean, that they are the parties principally concerned, and that, if a backwardness to enter into that state should prevail in the world, they would be the the greatest sufferers? or, are they sensible, that misfortunes and miscarriages of the married state are owing more to their sex than to ours? I hope they do not intend to confess either of these two particulars, or to give such an advantage to their adversaries the men, as even to allow them to suspect it.

“ I have often had thoughts of complying with this humour of the fair sex, and of writing a panegyric upon marriage; but in looking around for materials they seemed to be of so mixed a nature, that at the conclusion of my reflections, I found that I was as much disposed to write a satire, which might be placed on the oppo-

site pages of the panegyric; and I am afraid, that as satire is, on most occasions, more read than panegyric, I should have done their cause more harm than good by this expedient. To misrepresent facts is what, I know, they will not require of me. I must be more a friend to truth, than even to them, where their interests are opposite.

I shall tell the women what it is our sex complains of most in the married state; and if they be disposed to satisfy us in this particular, all the other differences will easily be accommodated. If I be not mistaken, 'tis their love of dominion which is the ground of the quarrel; though it is very likely, that they will think it an unreasonable love of it in us, which makes us insist so much upon that point. However this may be, no passion seems to have more influence on female minds than this for power; and there is a remarkable instance in history of its prevailing above another passion, which is the only one that can be supposed a proper counterpoise for it. We are told, that all the women in Scythia once conspired against the men, and kept the secret so well that they executed their design before they were suspected. They surprised the men in drink, or asleep; bound them all fast in chains, and having called a solemn council of the whole sex, it was debated what expedient should be used to improve the present advantage, and prevent their falling again into slavery. To kill all the men did not seem to be the relish of any part of the assembly, notwithstanding the injuries formerly received; and they were afterwards pleased to make a great merit of this lenity of theirs. It was, therefore, agreed to put out the eyes of the whole male sex, and thereby resign in all future time the vanity which they could draw from their beauty, in order

to secure their authority. We must no longer pretend to dress and show, said they; but then we shall be free from slavery. We shall hear no more tender sighs, but in return we shall hear no more imperious commands. Love must for ever leave us; but he will carry subjection along with him.

It is regarded by some as an unlucky circumstance, since the women were resolved to maim the men, and deprive them of some of their senses, in order to render them humble and dependent, that the sense of hearing could not serve their purpose, since it is probable the females would rather have attacked that than the sight; and, I think, it is agreed among the learned, that, in a married state, it is not near so great an inconvenience to lose the former senses as the latter. However this may be, we are told by modern anecdotes, that some of the Scythian women did secretly spare their husbands' eyes; persuming, I suppose, that they could govern them as well by means of that sense as without it. But so incorrigible and untractable were these men, that their wives were all obliged, in a few years, as their youth and beauty decayed, to imitate the example of their sisters: which it was no difficult matter to do in a state where the female sex had once got the superiority.

I know not if our Scottish ladies derive any thing of this humour from their Scythian ancestors; but I must confess, that I have often been surprised to see a woman very well pleased to take a fool for her mate, that she might govern with the less controul; and could not but think her sentiments, in this respect, still more barbarous than those of the Scythian women above mentioned; as much as the eyes of the understanding are more valuable than those of the body.

But to be just, and to lay the blame more equally, I am afraid it is the fault of our sex, if the women be so fond of rule; and that if we did not abuse our authority, they would never think it worth while to dispute it. Tyrants, we know, produce rebels; and all history informs us, that rebels, when they prevail, are apt to become tyrants in their turn. For this reason I could wish there were no pretensions to authority on either side, but that every thing was carried on with perfect equality, as between two equal members of the same body. And to induce both parties to embrace those amicable sentiments, I shall deliver to them Plato's account of the origin of Love and Marriage.

Mankind, according to that fanciful philosopher, were not, in their origin, divided into male and female, as at present; but each individual person was a compound of both sexes, and was in himself both husband and wife, melted down into one living creature. This union, no doubt, was very entire, and the parts very well adjusted together, since there resulted a perfect harmony betwixt the male and female, although they were obliged to be inseparable companions. And so great were the harmony and happiness flowing from it, that the *Androgynes* (for so Plato calls them) or men-women, became insolent upon their prosperity, and rebelled against the gods. To punish them for this temerity, Jupiter could contrive no better expedient than to divorce the male part from the female, and make two imperfect beings of the compound, which was before so perfect. Hence the origin of men and women, as distinct creatures. But notwithstanding this division, so lively is our remembrance of the happiness which we enjoyed in our primeval state, that we are never at rest in this situation; but each of these halves is continually

searching through the whole species to find the other half, which was broken from it; and when they meet, they join again with the greatest fondness and sympathy. But it often happens, that they are mistaken in this particular; that they take for their half what no way corresponds to them; and that the parts do not meet nor join in with each other, as is usual in fractures. In this case the union is soon dissolved, and each part is set loose again to hunt for its lost half, joining itself to every one whom it meets, by way of trial, and enjoying no rest till its perfect sympathy with its partner shows that it has at last been successful in its endeavours.

Were I disposed to carry on this fiction of Plato, which accounts for the mutual love betwixt the sexes in so agreeable a manner, I would do it by the following allegory.

When Jupiter had separated the male from the female, and had quelled their pride and ambition by so severe an operation, he could not but repent him of the cruelty of his vengeance, and take compassion on poor mortals, who were now become incapable of any repose or tranquillity. Such cravings, such anxieties, such necessities arose, as made them curse their creation, and think existence itself a punishment. In vain had they recourse to every other occupation and amusement. In vain did they seek after every pleasure of sense, and every refinement of reason. Nothing could fill that void which they felt in their hearts, or supply the loss of their partner, who was so fatally separated from them. To remedy this disorder, and to bestow some comfort, at least, on the human race in their forlorn situation, Jupiter sent down Love and Hymen, to collect the broken halves of human kind, and piece

them together in the best manner possible. These two deities found such a prompt disposition in mankind to unite again in their primeval state, that they proceeded on their work with wonderful success for some time, till, at last, from many unlucky accidents, dissension arose betwixt them. The chief counsellor and favourite of Hymen was Care, who was continually filling his patron's head with prospects of futurity, a settlement, family, children, servants; so that little else was regarded in all the matches they made. On the other hand, Love had chosen Pleasure for his favourite, who was as pernicious a counsellor as the other, and would never allow Love to look beyond the present momentary gratification, or the satisfying of the prevailing inclination. These two favourites became, in a little time, irreconcilable enemies, and made it their chief business to undermine each other in all their undertakings. No sooner had Love fixed upon two halves, which he was cementing together, and forming to a close union, but Care insinuates himself, and bringing Hymen along with him, dissolves the union produced by Love, and joins each half to some other half, which he had provided for it. To be revenged of this, Pleasure creeps in upon a pair already joined by Hymen; and calling Love to his assistance, they underhand contrive to join each half, by secret links, to halves which Hymen was wholly unacquainted with. It was not long before this quarrel was felt in its pernicious consequences; and such complaints arose before the throne of Jupiter, that he was obliged to summon the offending parties to appear before him, in order to give an account of their proceedings. After hearing the pleadings on both sides, he ordered an immediate reconciliation betwixt Love and Hymen, as the only expedient

for giving happiness to mankind ; and that he might be sure this reconciliation should be durable, he laid his strict injunctions on them never to join any halves without consulting their favourites Care and Pleasure, and obtaining the consent of both to the conjunction. Where this order is strictly observed, the Androgyne is perfectly restored, and the human race enjoy the same happiness as in their primeval state. The seam is scarce perceived that joins the two beings ; but both of them combine to form one perfect and happy creature.

ESSAY III.

OF THE STUDY OF HISTORY. 23

THERE is nothing which I would recommend more earnestly to my female readers than the study of history, as an occupation, of all others, the best suited both to their sex and education, much more instructive than their ordinary books of amusement, and more entertaining than those serious compositions, which are usually to be found in their closets. Among other important truths, which they may learn from history, they may be informed of two particulars, the knowledge of which may contribute very much to their quiet and repose. That our sex, as well as their's, are far from being such perfect creatures as they are apt to imagine, and that Love is not the only passion which governs the male world, but is often overcome by avarice, am-

bition, vanity, and a thousand other passions. Whether they be the false representations of mankind in those two particulars, which endear novels and romances so much to the fair sex, I know not; but must confess, that I am sorry to see them have such an aversion to matter of fact, and such an appetite for falsehood. I remember I was once desired by a young beauty, for whom I had some passion, to send her some novels and romances for her amusement to the country; but was not so ungenerous as to take the advantage, which such a course of reading might have given me, being resolved not to make use of poisoned arms against her. I therefore sent her Plutarch's Lives, assuring her, at the same time, that there was not a word of truth in them from beginning to end. She perused them very attentively, till she came to the lives of Alexander and Cæsar, whose names she had heard of by accident, and then returned me the book, with many reproaches for deceiving her.

I may, indeed, be told, that the fair sex have no such aversion to history as I have represented, provided it be *secret* history, and contain some memorable transaction proper to excite their curiosity. But as I do not find that truth, which is the basis of history, is at all regarded in these anecdotes, I cannot admit of this as a proof of their passion for that study. However this may be, I see not why the same curiosity might not receive a more proper direction, and lead them to desire accounts of those who lived in past ages, as well as of their cotemporaries. What is it to Cleora, whether Fulvia entertains a secret commerce of love with Philander, or not? Has she not equal reason to be pleased, when she is informed (what is whispered about among historians) that Cato's sister had an intrigue with Cæ-

sar, and palmed her son, Marcus Brutus, upon her husband for his own, though in reality he was her gallant's? And are not the loves of Messalina or Julia as proper subjects of discourse as any intrigue that this city has produced of late years?

But I know not whence it comes that I have been thus seduced into a kind of raillery against the ladies; unless, perhaps, it proceed from the same cause, which makes the person, who is the favourite of the company, be often the object of their good-natured jests and pleasantries. We are pleased to address ourselves after any manner to one who is agreeable to us, and at the same time presume, that nothing will be taken amiss by a person, who is secure of the good opinion and affections of every one present. I shall now proceed to handle my subject more seriously, and shall point out the many advantages, which flow from the study of history, and show how well suited it is to every one, but particularly to those who are debarred the severer studies, by the tenderness of their complexion, and the weakness of their education. The advantages found in history seem to be of three kinds, as it amuses the fancy, as it improves the understanding, and as it strengthens virtue.

In reality, what more agreeable entertainment to the mind, than to be transported into the remotest ages of the world, and to observe human society, in its infancy, making the first faint essays towards the arts and sciences; to see the policy of government, and the civility of conversation refining by degrees, and every thing which is ornamental to human life advancing toward its perfection? To remark the rise, progress, declension, and final extinction of the most flourishing empires; the virtues which contributed to their greatness, and

the vices which drew on their ruin? In short, to see all the human race, from the beginning of time, pass, as it were, in review before us, appearing in their true colours, without any of those disguises which, during their lifetime, so much perplexed the judgment of the beholders. What spectacle can be imagined so magnificent, so various, so interesting? What amusement, either of the senses or imagination, can be compared with it? Shall those trifling pastimes, which engross so much of our time, be preferred as more satisfactory, and more fit to engage our attention? How perverse must that taste be which is capable of so wrong a choice of pleasures?

But history is a most improving part of knowledge, as well as an agreeable amusement; and a great part of what we commonly call erudition, and value so highly, is nothing but an acquaintance with historical facts. An extensive knowledge of this kind belongs to men of letters; but I must think it an unpardonable ignorance in persons, of whatever sex or condition, not to be acquainted with the history of their own country, together with the histories of ancient Greece and Rome. A woman may behave herself with good manners, and have even some vivacity in her turn of wit; but where her mind is so unfurnished, it is impossible her conversation can afford any entertainment to men of sense and reflection.

I must add, that history is not only a valuable part of knowledge, but opens the door to many other parts, and affords materials to most of the sciences. And, indeed, if we consider the shortness of human life, and our limited knowledge, even of what passes in our own time, we must be sensible that we should be for ever children in understanding, were it not for this inven-

tion, which extends our experience to all past ages, and to the most distant nations; making them contribute as much to our improvement in wisdom, as if they had actually lain under our observation. A man acquainted with history may, in some respect, be said to have lived from the beginning of the world, and to have been making continual additions to his stock of knowledge in every century.

There is also an advantage in that experience, which is acquired by history, above what is learned by the practice of the world, that it brings us acquainted with human affairs, without diminishing in the least from the most delicate sentiments of virtue. And to tell the truth, I know not any study or occupation so unexceptionable as history in this particular. Poets can paint virtue in the most charming colours; but as they address themselves entirely to the passions, they often become advocates for vice. Even philosophers are apt to bewilder themselves in the subtlety of their speculations; and we have seen some go so far as to deny the reality of all moral distinctions. But I think it a remark worthy the attention of the speculative, that the historians have been, almost without exception, the true friends of virtue, and have always represented it in its proper colours, however they may have erred in their judgments of particular persons. Machiavel himself discovers a true sentiment of virtue in his history of Florence. When he talks as a politician, in his general reasonings, he considers poisoning, assassination, and perjury, as lawful arts of power; but when he speaks as an historian, in his particular narrations, he shows so keen an indignation against vice, and so warm an approbation of virtue in many passages, that I could not forbear applying to him that remark of Horace,

that if you chase away Nature, though with ever so great indignity, she will always return upon you. Nor is this combination of historians in favour of virtue, at all difficult to be accounted for. When a man of business enters into life and action, he is more apt to consider the characters of men, as they have relation to his interest, than as they stand in themselves; and has his judgment warped on every occasion by the violence of his passion. When a philosopher contemplates characters and manners in his closet, the general abstract view of the objects leaves the mind so cold and unmoved, that the sentiments of nature have no room to play, and he scarce feels the difference between vice and virtue. History keeps in a just medium between these extremes, and places the objects in their true point of view. The writers of history, as well as the readers, are sufficiently interested in the characters and events, to have a lively sentiment of blame or praise: and, at the same time, have no particular interest or concern to pervert their judgment.

Vero voces tum demum pectore ab imo
Eliciuntur.

LUCRET.

ESSAY IV.

OF AVARICE. § 4

It is easy to observe, that comic writers exaggerate every character, and draw their fop or coward with

stronger features than are any where to be met with in nature. This moral kind of painting for the stage has been often compared to the painting for cupolas and ceilings, where the colours are overcharged, and every part is drawn excessively large, and beyond nature. The figures seem monstrous and disproportioned, when seen too nigh; but become natural and regular, when set at a distance, and placed in that point of view, in which they are intended to be surveyed. For a like reason, when characters are exhibited in theatrical representations, the want of reality removes, in a manner, the personages; and rendering them more cold and unentertaining, makes it necessary to compensate, by the force of colouring, what they want in substance. Thus we find in common life, that when a man once allows himself to depart from truth in his narrations, he never can keep within bounds of probability; but adds still some new circumstance to render his stories more marvellous, and to satisfy his imagination. Two men in buckram suits became eleven to Sir John Falstaff, before the end of the story.

There is only one vice, which may be found in life with as strong features, and as high a colouring as need be employed by any satirist or comic poet; and that is Avarice. Every day we meet with men of immense fortunes, without heirs, and on the very brink of the grave, who refuse themselves the most common necessities of life, and go on heaping possessions on possessions under all the real pressures of the severest poverty. An old usurer, says the story, lying in his last agonies, was presented by the priest with the crucifix to worship. He opens his eyes a moment before he expires, considers the crucifix, and cries, *These jewels are not true; I can only lend ten pistoles upon such a pledge.*

This was probably the invention of some epigrammatist; and yet every one, from his own experience, may be able to recollect almost as strong instances of perseverance in avarice. It is commonly reported of a famous miser in this city, that finding himself near death, he sent for some of the magistrates, and gave them a bill of an hundred pounds, payable after his decease, which sum he intended should be disposed of in charitable uses; but scarce were they gone, when he orders them to be called back, and offers them ready money if they would abate five pounds of the sum. Another noted miser in the north, intending to defraud his heirs, and leave his fortune to the building an hospital, protracted the drawing of his will from day to day; and it is thought, that if those interested in it had not paid for the drawing of it, he would have died intestate. In short, none of the most furious excesses of love and ambition are, in any respect, to be compared to the extremes of avarice.

The best excuse that can be made for avarice is, that it generally prevails in old men, or in men of cold tempers, where all the other affections are extinct; and the mind being incapable of remaining without some passion or pursuit, at last finds out this monstrously absurd one, which suits the coldness and inactivity of its temper. At the same time, it seems very extraordinary, that so frosty, spiritless a passion should be able to carry us further than all the warmth of youth and pleasure. But if we look more narrowly into the matter, we shall find, that this very circumstance renders the explication of the case more easy. When the temper is warm and full of vigour, it naturally shoots out more ways than one, and produces inferior passions to counterbalance, in some degree, its predominant incli-

nation. It is impossible for a person of that temper however bent on any pursuit, to be deprived of all sense of shame, or all regard to sentiments of mankind. His friends must have some influence over him; and other considerations are apt to have their weight. All this serves to restrain him within some bounds. But it is no wonder that the avaricious man, being, from the coldness of his temper, without regard to reputation, to friendship or to pleasure, should be carried so far by his prevailing inclination, and should display his passion in such surprising instances.

Accordingly, we find no vice so irreclaimable as avarice; and though there scarcely has been a moralist or philosopher, from the beginning of the world to this day, who has not levelled a stroke at it, we hardly find a single instance of any person's being cured of it. For this reason, I am more apt to approve of those who attack it with wit and humour, than of those who treat it in a serious manner. There being so little hopes of doing good to the people infected with this vice, I would have the rest of mankind at least, diverted by our manner of exposing it; as indeed there is no kind of diversion, of which they seem so willing to partake.

Among the fables of Monsieur de la Motte, there is one levelled against avarice, which seems to me more natural and easy than most of the fables of that ingenious author. A miser, says he, being dead, and fairly interred, came to the banks of the Styx, desiring to be ferried over along with the other ghosts. Charon demands his fare, and is surprised to see the miser, rather than pay it, throw himself into the river, and swim over to the other side, notwithstanding all the clamour and opposition that could be made to him: All hell

was in an uproar; and each of the judges was meditating some punishment suitable to a crime of such dangerous consequence to the infernal revenues. Shall he be chained to the rock with Prometheus? Or tremble below the precipice in company with the Danaïdes? Or assist Sisyphus in rolling his stone? No, says Minos, none of these. We must invent some severer punishment. Let him be sent back to the earth, to see the use his heirs are making of his riches.

I hope it will not be interpreted as a design of setting myself in opposition to this celebrated author, if I proceed to deliver a fable of my own, which is intended to expose the same vice of avarice. The hint of it was taken from these lines of Mr Pope :

Damn'd to the mines, an equal fate betides
The slave that digs it, and the slave that hides.

Our old mother Earth once lodged an indictment against Avarice before the courts of heaven, for her wicked and malicious counsel and advice in tempting, inducing, persuading, and traitorously seducing the children of the plaintiff to commit the detestable crime of parricide upon her, and, mangling the body, ransack her very bowels for hidden treasure. The indictment was very long and verbose: but we must omit a great part of the repetitions and synonymous terms, not to tire our readers too much with our tale. Avarice, being called before Jupiter to answer to this charge, had not much to say in her own defence. The injury was clearly proved upon her. The fact, indeed was notorious, and the injury had been frequently repeated. When, therefore, the plaintiff demanded justice, Jupiter very readily gave sentence in her favour;

and his decree was to this purpose—That, since dame Avarice, the defendant, had thus grievously injured dame Earth, the plaintiff, she was hereby ordered to take that treasure, of which she had feloniously robbed the said plaintiff by ransacking her bosom, and restore it back to her without diminution or retention. From this sentence it will follow, says Jupiter to the by-standers, that in all future ages, the retainers of Avarice shall bury and conceal their riches, and thereby restore to the earth what they take from her.

ESSAY V.

OF ESSAY WRITING. 25

THE elegant part of mankind, who are not immersed in mere animal life, but employ themselves in the operations of the mind, may be divided into the *learned* and *conversible*. The learned are such as have chosen for their portion the higher and more difficult operations of the mind, which require leisure and solitude, and cannot be brought to perfection, without long preparation and severe labour. The conversible world join to a sociable disposition, and a taste for pleasure, an inclination for the easier and more gentle exercises of the understanding, for obvious reflections on human affairs, and the duties of common life, and for observation of the blemishes or perfections of the par-

ticular objects that surround them. Such subjects of thought furnish not sufficient employment in solitude, but require the company and conversation of our fellow creatures, to render them a proper exercise for the mind; and this brings mankind together in society, where every one displays his thoughts in observations in the best manner he is able, and mutually gives and receives information, as well as pleasure.

The separation of the learned from the conversible world seems to have been the great defect of the last age, and must have had a very bad influence both on books and company; for what possibility is there of finding topics of conversation fit for the entertainment of rational creatures, without having recourse sometimes to history, poetry, politics, and the more obvious principles, at least, of philosophy? Must our whole discourse be a continued series of gossiping stories and idle remarks? Must the mind never rise higher, but be perpetually

Stun'd and worn out with endless chat,
Of Will did this, and Nan did that?

This would be to render the time spent in company the most unentertaining, as well as the most unprofitable, part of our lives.

On the other hand, learning has been as great a loser by being shut up in colleges and cells, and secluded from the world and good company. By that means every part of what we call *belles lettres* became totally barbarous, being cultivated by men without any taste for life or manners, and without that liberty and facility of thought and expression which can only be acquired by conversation. Even philosophy went to

wreck by this moping recluse method of study, and became as chimerical in her conclusions, as she was unintelligible in her style and manner of delivery; and, indeed, what could be expected from men who never consulted experience in any of their reasonings, or who never searched for that experience, where alone it is to be found, in common life and conversation?

It is with great pleasure I observe, that men of letters in this age have lost in a great measure that shyness and bashfulness of temper, which kept them at a distance from mankind; and, at the same time, that men of the world are proud of borrowing from books their most agreeable topics of conversation. It is to be hoped that this league between the learned and conversible worlds, which is so happily begun, will be still farther improved to their mutual advantage; and to that end, I know nothing more advantageous than such Essays as those with which I endeavour to entertain the public. In this view, I cannot but consider myself as a kind of resident or ambassador from the dominions of learning to those of conversation, and shall think it my constant duty to promote a good correspondence betwixt these two states, which have so great a dependence on each other. I shall give intelligence to the learned of whatever passes in company, and shall endeavour to import into company whatever commodities I find in my native country proper for their use and entertainment. The balance of trade we need not be jealous of, nor will there be any difficulty to preserve it on both sides. The materials of this commerce must chiefly be furnished by conversation and common life: the manufacturing of them alone belongs to learning.

As it would be an unpardonable negligence in an

ambassador not to pay his respects to the sovereign of the state where he is commissioned to reside ; so it would be altogether inexcusable in me not to address myself with a particular respect to the fair sex, who are the sovereigns of the empire of conversation. I approach them with reverence ; and were not my countrymen the learned, a stubborn independent race of mortals, extremely jealous of their liberty, and unaccustomed to subjection, I should resign into their fair hands the sovereign authority over the republic of letters. As the case stands, my commission extends no farther than to desire a league, offensive and defensive, against our common enemies, against the enemies of reason and beauty, people of dull heads and cold hearts. From this moment let us pursue them with the severest vengeance : let no quarter be given, but to those of sound understandings and delicate affections ; and these characters, it is to be presumed, we shall always find inseparable.

To be serious, and to quit the allusion before it be worn thread-bare, I am of opinion that women, that is, women of sense and education (for to such alone I address myself) are much better judges of all polite writing than men of the same degree of understanding ; and that it is a vain panic, if they be so far terrified with the common ridicule that is levelled against learned ladies, as utterly to abandon every kind of books and study to our sex. Let the dread of that ridicule have no other effect than to make them conceal their knowledge before fools, who are not worthy of it, nor of them. Such will still presume upon the vain title of the male sex to affect a superiority above them : but my fair readers may be assured, that all men of sense, who know the world, have a great deference for their judgment of such books as lie within the compass of their

knowledge, and repose more confidence in the delicacy of their taste, though unguided by rules, than in all the dull labours of pedants and commentators. In a neighbouring nation, equally famous for good taste, and for gallantry, the ladies are, in a manner, the sovereigns of the *learned* world, as well as of the *conversible*; and no polite writer pretends to venture before the public, without the approbation of some celebrated judges of that sex. Their verdict is, indeed, sometimes complained of; and, in particular, I find, that the admirers of Corneille, to save that great poet's honour upon the ascendant that Racine began to take over him, always said, that it was not to be expected, that so old a man could dispute the prize, before such judges, with so young a man as his rival. But this observation has been found unjust, since posterity seems to have ratified the verdict of that tribunal: and Racine, though dead, is still the favourite of the fair sex, as well as of the best judges among the men.

There is only one subject of which I am apt to distrust the judgment of females, and that is concerning books of gallantry and devotion, which they commonly affect as high flown as possible; and most of them seem more delighted with the warmth, than with the justness of the passion. I mention gallantry and devotion as the same subject, because, in reality, they become the same when treated in this manner; and we may observe, that they both depend upon the very same complexion. As the fair sex have a great share of the tender and amorous disposition, it perverts their judgment, on this occasion, and makes them be easily affected, even by what has no propriety in the expression or nature in the sentiment. Mr Addison's elegant discourses on religion have no relish with them, in

comparison of books of mystic devotion : and Otway's tragedies are rejected for the rakes of Mr Dryden.

Would the ladies correct their false taste in this particular, let them accustom themselves a little more to books of all kinds ; let them give encouragement to men of sense and knowledge to frequent their company ; and finally, let them concur heartily in that union I have projected betwixt the learned and conversible worlds. They may, perhaps, meet with more complaisance from their usual followers than from men of learning ; but they cannot reasonably expect so sincere an affection : and, I hope, they will never be guilty of so wrong a choice, as to sacrifice the substance for the shadow.

ESSAY VI.

OF MORAL PRJUDICES. 26

THERE is a set of men lately sprung up amongst us, who endeavour to distinguish themselves by ridiculing every thing, that has hitherto appeared sacred and venerable in the eyes of mankind. Reason, sobriety, honour, friendship, marriage, are the perpetual subjects of their insipid raillery ; and even public spirit, and a regard to our country, are treated as chimerical and romantic. Were the schemes of these anti-reformers to take place, all the bonds of society must be

broken, to make way for the indulgence of a licentious mirth and gaiety; the companion of our drunken frolics must be preferred to a friend or brother; dissolute prodigality must be supplied at the expense of every thing valuable, either in public or private; and men shall have so little regard to any thing beyond themselves, that, at last, a free constitution of government must become a scheme perfectly impracticable among mankind, and must degenerate into one universal system of fraud and corruption.

There is another humour which may be observed in some pretenders to wisdom, and which, if not so pernicious as the idle petulant humour above mentioned, must, however, have a very bad effect on those who indulge it. I mean that grave philosophic endeavour after perfection, which, under pretext of reforming prejudices and errors, strikes at all the most endearing sentiments of the heart, and all the most useful biasses and instincts, which can govern a human creature. The Stoics were remarkable for this folly among the ancients; and I wish some of more venerable characters in later times had not copied them too faithfully in this particular. The virtuous and tender sentiments, or prejudices, if you will, have suffered mightily by these reflections; while a certain sullen pride or contempt of mankind has prevailed in their stead, and has been esteemed the greatest wisdom; though, in reality, it be the most egregious folly of all others. Statilius being solicited by Brutus to make one of that noble band who struck the God-like stroke for the liberty of Rome, refused to accompany them, saying, *that all men were fools or mad, and did not deserve that a wise man should trouble his head about them.*

My learned reader will here easily recollect the rea-

son, which an ancient philosopher gave, why he would not be reconciled to his brother, who solicited his friendship. He was too much a philosopher to think that the connexion of having sprung from the same parent ought to have any influence on a reasonable mind, and expressed his sentiment after such a manner as I think not proper to repeat. When your friend is in affliction, says Epictetus, you may counterfeit a sympathy with him, if it give him relief; but take care not to allow any compassion to sink into your heart, or disturb that tranquillity, which is the perfection of wisdom. Diogenes being asked by his friends in his sickness, what should be done with him after his death? Why, says he, *throw me out into the fields.*—*What,* replied they, *to the birds or beasts?*—*No: place a cudgel by me, to defend myself withal.*—*To what purpose?* say they, *you will not have any sense, nor any power of making use of it.* Then if the beasts should devour me, cries he, *shall I be any more sensible of it?*—I know none of the sayings of that philosopher, which shows more evidently both the liveliness and ferocity of his temper.

How different from these are the maxims by which Eugenius conducts himself! In his youth, he applied himself, with the most unwearied labour, to the study of philosophy; and nothing was ever able to draw him from it, except when an opportunity offered of serving his friends, or doing a pleasure to some man of merit. When he was about thirty years of age, he was determined to quit the free life of a bachelor (in which otherwise he would have been inclined to remain), by considering that he was the last branch of an ancient family, which must have been extinguished had he died without children. He made choice of the virtuous and

beautiful Emira for his consort, who, after being the solace of his life for many years, and having made him the father of several children, paid at last the general debt to nature. Nothing could have supported him under so severe an affliction, but the consolation he received from his young family, who were now become dearer to him on account of their deceased mother. One daughter in particular is his darling, and the secret joy of his soul; because her features, her air, her voice; recal every moment the tender memory of his spouse, and fill his eyes with tears. He conceals this partiality as much as possible; and none but his intimate friends are acquainted with it. To them he reveals all his tenderness; nor is he so affectedly philosophical, as even to call it by the name of weakness. They know that he still keeps the birth-day of Emira with tears, and a more fond and tender recollection of past pleasures, in like manner as it was celebrated in her lifetime, with joy and festivity. They know that he preserves her picture with the utmost care, and has one picture in miniature, which he always wears next to his bosom; that he has left orders in his last will, that, in whatever part of the world he shall happen to die, his body shall be transported, and laid in the same grave with her's; and that a monument shall be erected over them, and their mutual love and happiness celebrated in an epitaph, which he himself has composed for that purpose.

A few years ago I received a letter from a friend, who was abroad on his travels, and shall here communicate it to the public. It contains such an instance of a philosophic spirit, as I think pretty extraordinary, and may serve as an example, not to depart too far from the received maxims of conduct and behaviour, by a

refined search after happiness or perfection. The story I have been since assured of as matter of fact.

SIR,

Paris, Aug. 2, 1737.

I know you are more curious of accounts of men than of buildings, and are more desirous of being informed of private history than of public transactions; for which reason I thought the following story, which is the common topic of conversation in this city, would be no unacceptable entertainment to you.

A young lady of birth and fortune, being left entirely at her own disposal, persisted long in a resolution of leading a single life, notwithstanding several advantageous offers that had been made to her. She had been determined to embrace this resolution, by observing the many unhappy marriages among her acquaintances, and by hearing the complaints which her female friends made of the tyranny, inconstancy, jealousy, or indifference of their husbands. Being a woman of strong spirit and an uncommon way of thinking, she found no difficulty either in forming or maintaining this resolution, and could not suspect herself of such weakness as ever to be induced, by any temptation, to depart from it. She had, however, entertained a strong desire of having a son, whose education she was resolved to make the principal concern of her life, and by that means supply the place of those other passions, which she was resolved for ever to renounce. She pushed her philosophy to such an uncommon length, as to find no contradiction betwixt such a desire and her former resolution; and accordingly looked about with great deliberation to find among all her male acquaintance, one whose character and person were agreeable to her, without being able to satisfy herself on that

head. At length, being in the playhouse one evening, she sees in the parterre, a young man of a most engaging countenance and modest deportment; and feels such a prepossession in his favour, that she had hopes this must be the person she had long sought for in vain. She immediately despatches a servant to him; desiring his company at her lodgings next morning. The young man was overjoyed at the message, and could not command his satisfaction, upon receiving such an advance from a lady of so great beauty, reputation, and quality. He was, therefore, much disappointed, when he found a woman, who would allow him no freedoms; and amidst all her obliging behaviour, confined and overawed him to the bounds of rational discourse and conversation. She seemed, however, willing to commence a friendship with him; and told him, that his company would always be acceptable to her, whenever he had a leisure hour to bestow. He needed not much entreaty to renew his visits, being so struck with her wit and beauty, that he must have been unhappy had he been debarred her company. Every conversation served only the more to inflame his passion, and gave him more occasion to admire her person and understanding, as well as to rejoice in his own good fortune. He was not, however, without anxiety, when he considered the disproportion of their birth and fortune; nor was his uneasiness allayed, even when he reflected on the extraordinary manner in which their acquaintance had commenced. Our philosophical heroine, in the mean time, discovered, that her lover's personal qualities did not belie his physiognomy; so that judging there was no occasion for any farther trial, she takes a proper opportunity of communicating to him her whole intention. Their intercourse continued for

some time, till at last her wishes were crowned, and she was now mother of a boy, who was to be the object of her future care and concern. Gladly would she have continued her friendship with the father; but finding him too passionate a lover to remain within the bounds of friendship, she was obliged to put a violence upon herself. She sends him a letter, in which she had inclosed a bond of annuity for a thousand crowns; desiring him, at the same time, never to see her more, and to forget, if possible, all past favours and familiarities. He was thunderstruck at receiving this message; and having tried in vain all the arts that might win upon the resolution of a woman, resolved at last to attack her by her foible. He commences a law-suit against her before the parliament of Paris, and claims his son, whom he pretends a right to educate as he pleased, according to the usual maxims of the law in such cases. She pleads, on the other hand, their express agreement before their commerce, and pretends that he had renounced all claim to any offspring that might arise from their embraces. It is not yet known how the parliament will determine in this extraordinary case, which puzzles all the lawyers as much as it does the philosophers. As soon as they come to any issue, I shall inform you of it, and shall embrace any opportunity of subscribing myself, as I do at present,

Sir,

Your most humble servant.

ESSAY VII,

OF THE MIDDLE STATION OF LIFE. 27

THE moral of the following fable will easily discover itself, without my explaining it. One rivulet meeting another, with whom he had been long united in strictest amity, with noisy haughtiness and disdain thus bespoke him—‘What, brother! still in the same state! Still low and creeping! Are you not ashamed, when you behold me, who, though lately in a like condition with you, am now become a great river, and shall shortly be able to rival the Danube or the Rhine, provided those friendly rains continue which have favoured my banks, but neglected yours?’—‘Very true,’ replies the humble rivulet: ‘You are now, indeed, swoln to a great size; but methinks you are become withal somewhat turbulent and muddy. I am contented with my low condition and my purity.’

Instead of commenting upon this fable, I shall take occasion from it to compare the different stations of life, and to persuade such of my readers as are placed in the middle station to be satisfied with it, as the most eligible of all others. These form the most numerous rank of men that can be supposed susceptible of philosophy; and therefore all discourses of morality ought principally to be addressed to them. The great are too much immersed in pleasure, and the poor too much

occupied in providing for the necessities of life, to hearken to the calm voice of reason. The middle station, as it is most happy in many respects, so particularly in this, that a man placed in it can, with the greatest leisure, consider his own happiness, and reap a new enjoyment, from comparing his situation with that of persons above or below him.

Agur's prayer is sufficiently noted—'Two things have I required of thee; deny me them not before I die: remove far from me vanity and lies; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me, lest I be full and deny thee, and say, who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.'—The middle station is here justly recommended, as affording the fullest security for virtue; and I may also add, that it gives opportunity for the most ample exercise of it, and furnishes employment for every good quality which we can possibly be possessed of. Those who are placed among the lower ranks of men, have little opportunity of exerting any other virtue besides those of patience, resignation, industry, and integrity. Those who are advanced into the higher stations, have full employment for their generosity, humanity, affability, and charity. When a man lies betwixt these two extremes, he can exert the former virtues towards his superiors, and the latter towards his inferiors. Every moral quality which the human soul is susceptible of, may have its turn, and be called up to action; and a man may, after this manner, be much more certain of his progress in virtue, than where his good qualities lie dormant, and without employment.

But there is another virtue that seems principally to lie among equals, and is, for that reason, chiefly calcu-

lated for the middle station of life. This virtue is friendship. I believe most men of generous tempers are apt to envy the great, when they consider the large opportunities such persons have of doing good to their fellow-creatures, and of acquiring the friendship and esteem of men of merit. They make no advances in vain, and are not obliged to associate with those whom they have little kindness for, like people of inferior stations, who are subject to have their proffers of friendship rejected, even where they would be most fond of placing their affections. But though the great have more facility in acquiring friendships, they cannot be so certain of the sincerity of them, as men of a lower rank, since the favours they bestow may acquire them flattery, instead of good will and kindness. It has been very judiciously remarked, that we attach ourselves more by the services we perform than by those we receive, and that a man is in danger of losing his friends by obliging them too far. I should, therefore, choose to lie in the middle way, and to have my commerce with my friend varied both by obligations given and received. I have too much pride to be willing that all the obligations should lie on my side, and should be afraid, that, if they all lay on his, he would also have too much pride to be entirely easy under them, or have a perfect complacency in my company.

We may also remark of the middle station of life, that it is more favourable to the acquiring of wisdom and ability, as well as of virtue, and that a man so situate has a better chance for attaining a knowledge both of men and things, than those of a more elevated station. He enters with more familiarity into human life, and every thing appears in its natural colours before him; he has more leisure to form observations;

and has, besides, the motive of ambition to push him on in his attainments, being certain that he can never rise to any distinction or eminence in the world, without his own industry. And here I cannot forbear communicating a remark, which may appear somewhat extraordinary, viz. that it is wisely ordained by Providence, that the middle station should be the most favourable to the improving our natural abilities, since there is really more capacity requisite to perform the duties of that station, than is requisite to act in the higher spheres of life. There are more natural parts, and a stronger genius requisite to make a good lawyer or physician, than to make a great monarch. For let us take any race or succession of kings, where birth alone gives a title to the crown; the English kings, for instance, who have not been esteemed the most shining in history. From the Conquest to the succession of his present Majesty, we may reckon twenty-eight sovereigns, omitting those who died minors. Of these, eight are esteemed princes of great capacity, viz. the Conqueror, Harry II., Edward I., Edward III., Harry V. and VII., Elizabeth, and the late King William. Now, I believe every one will allow, that, in the common run of mankind, there are not eight, out of twenty-eight, who are fitted by nature to make a figure either on the bench or at the bar. Since Charles VII., ten monarchs have reigned in France, omitting Francis II. Five of those have been esteemed princes of capacity, viz. Louis XI., XII., and XIV., Francis I., and Harry IV. In short, the governing of mankind well requires a great deal of virtue, justice, and humanity, but not a surprising capacity. A certain Pope, whose name I have forgot, used to say, *Let us divert ourselves, my friends; the world governs itself.* There are, indeed,

some critical times, such as those in which Harry IV. lived, that call for the utmost vigour; and a less courage and capacity, than what appeared in that great monarch, must have sunk under the weight. But such circumstances are rare; and even then fortune does at least one half of the business.

Since the common professions, such as law or physic, require equal, if not superior capacity, to what are exerted in the higher spheres of life, it is evident, that the soul must be made of still a finer mould, to shine in philosophy or poetry, or in any of the higher parts of learning. Courage and resolution are chiefly requisite in a commander; justice and humanity in a statesman; but genius and capacity in a scholar. Great generals and great politicians are found in all ages and countries of the world, and frequently start up at once, even amongst the greatest barbarians. Sweden was sunk in ignorance, when it produced Gustavus Ericson, and Gustavus Adolphus: Muscovy, when the Czar appeared: and perhaps Carthage, when it gave birth to Hannibal. But England must pass through a long gradation of its Spencers, Johnsons, Wallers, Drydens, before it arise at an Addison or a Pope. A happy talent for the liberal arts and sciences is a kind of prodigy among men. Nature must afford the richest genius that comes from her hands; education and example must cultivate it from the earliest infancy; and industry must concur to carry it to any degree of perfection. No man needs be surprised to see Kouli-Kan among the Persians; but Homer, in so early an age among the Greeks, is certainly matter of the highest wonder.

A man cannot show a genius for war, who is not so fortunate as to be trusted with command; and it sel-

dom happens in any state or kingdom, that several at once are placed in that situation. How many Marlboroughs were there in the confederate army, who never rose so much as to the command of a regiment? But I am persuaded there has been but one Milton in England within these hundred years, because every one may exert the talents of poetry who is possessed of them; and no one could exert them under greater disadvantages than that divine poet. If no man were allowed to write verses, but the person who was beforehand named to be laureate, could we expect a poet in ten thousand years?

Were we to distinguish the ranks of men by their genius and capacity, more than by their virtue and usefulness to the public, great philosophers would certainly challenge the first rank, and must be placed at the top of mankind. So rare is this character, that perhaps there has not as yet been above two in the world who can lay a just claim to it. At least, Galileo and Newton seem to me so far to excel all the rest, that I cannot admit any other into the same class with them.

Great poets may challenge the second place; and this species of genius; though rare, is yet much more frequent than the former. Of the Greek poets that remain, Homer alone seems to merit this character: of the Romans, Virgil, Horace, and Lucretius: of the English, Milton and Pope: Corneille, Racine, Boileau, and Voltaire, of the French: and Tasso and Ariosto of the Italians.

Great orators and historians are perhaps more rare than great poets; but as the opportunities for exerting the talents requisite for eloquence, or acquiring the

knowledge requisite for writing history, depend in some measure upon fortune, we cannot pronounce these productions of genius to be more extraordinary than the former.

I should now return from this digression, and show that the middle station of life is more favourable to happiness, as well as to virtue and wisdom : but as the arguments that prove this seem pretty obvious, I shall here forbear insisting on them.

ESSAY VIII.²⁸

ON SUICIDE.

ONE considerable advantage that arises from philosophy, consists in the sovereign antidote which it affords to superstition and false religion. All other remedies against that pestilent distemper are vain, or at least uncertain. Plain good sense, and the practice of the world, which alone serve most purposes of life, are here found ineffectual : History, as well as daily experience, furnish instances of men endowed with the strongest capacity for business and affairs, who have all their lives crouched under slavery to the grossest

²⁸ This and the following Essay are inserted from the edition printed at London, under the following title. "Essays on Suicide, and the Immortality of the Soul, ascribed to the late David Hume, Esq. Never before published. With Remarks, intended as an Antidote to the Poison contained in these Performances, by the Editor. To which is added, two Letters on Suicide, from Rousseau's Eloisa. London, 1783."

superstition. Even gaiety and sweetness of temper, which infuse a balm into every other wound, afford no remedy to so virulent a poison, as we may particularly observe of the fair sex, who, though commonly possessed of these rich presents of nature, feel many of their joys blasted by this importunate intruder. But when sound philosophy has once gained possession of the mind, superstition is effectually excluded; and one may fairly affirm, that her triumph over this enemy is more complete than over most of the vices and imperfections incident to human nature. Love or anger, ambition or avarice, have their root in the temper and affections, which the soundest reason is scarce ever able fully to correct; but superstition being founded on false opinion, must immediately vanish when true philosophy has inspired juster sentiments of superior powers. The contest is here more equal between the distemper and the medicine; and nothing can hinder the latter from proving effectual, but its being false and sophisticated.

It will here be superfluous to magnify the merits of Philosophy by displaying the pernicious tendency of that vice of which it cures the human mind. The superstitious man, says Tully, * is miserable in every scene, in every incident in life; even sleep itself, which banishes all other cares of unhappy mortals, affords to him matter of new terror, while he examines his dreams, and finds in those visions of the night prognostications of future calamities. I may add, that though death alone can put a full period to his misery, he dares not fly to this refuge, but still prolongs a miserable existence, from a vain fear lest he offend his

* De Divin. lib. ii.

Maker, by using the power with which that beneficent Being has endowed him. The presents of God and nature are ravished from us by this cruel enemy; and notwithstanding that one step would remove us from the regions of pain and sorrow, her menaces still chain us down to a hated being, which she herself chiefly contributes to render miserable.

'Tis observed by such as have been reduced by the calamities of life to the necessity of employing this fatal remedy, that if the unseasonable care of their friends deprive them of that species of death which they proposed to themselves, they seldom venture upon any other, or can summon up so much resolution a second time, as to execute their purpose. So great is our horror of death, that when it presents itself under any form besides that to which a man has endeavoured to reconcile his imagination, it acquires new terrors, and overcomes his feeble courage: But when the menaces of superstition are joined to this natural timidity, no wonder it quite deprives men of all power over their lives, since even many pleasures and enjoyments, to which we are carried by a strong propensity, are torn from us by this inhuman tyrant. Let us here endeavour to restore men to their native liberty, by examining all the common arguments against suicide, and showing that that action may be free from every imputation of guilt or blame, according to the sentiments of all the ancient philosophers.

If suicide be criminal, it must be a transgression of our duty either to God, our neighbour, or ourselves. To prove that suicide is no transgression of our duty to God, the following considerations may perhaps suffice. In order to govern the material world, the almighty Creator has established general and immutable

laws, by which all bodies, from the greatest planet to the smallest particle of matter, are maintained in their proper sphere and function. To govern the animal world, he has endowed all living creatures with bodily and mental powers; with senses, passions, appetites, memory, and judgment, by which they are impelled or regulated in that course of life to which they are destined. These two distinct principles of the material and animal world continually encroach upon each other, and mutually retard or forward each other's operation. The powers of men and of all other animals are restrained and directed by the nature and qualities of the surrounding bodies; and the modifications and actions of these bodies are incessantly altered by the operation of all animals. Man is stopt by rivers in his passage over the surface of the earth; and rivers, when properly directed, lend their force to the motion of machines, which serve to the use of man. But though the provinces of the material and animal powers are not kept entirely separate, there results from thence no discord or disorder in the creation; on the contrary, from the mixture, union, and contrast of all the various powers of inanimate bodies and living creatures, arises that sympathy, harmony, and proportion, which affords the surest argument of Supreme Wisdom. The providence of the Deity appears not immediately in any operation, but governs every thing by those general and immutable laws which have been established from the beginning of time. All events, in one sense, may be pronounced the action of the Almighty; they all proceed from those powers with which he has endowed his creatures. A house which falls by its own weight, is not brought to ruin by his providence, more than one destroyed by the hands of men; nor are the human

*No more
provinces?*

faculties less his workmanship than the laws of motion and gravitation. When the passions play, when the judgment dictates, when the limbs obey ; this is all the operation of God ; and upon these animate principles, as well as upon the inanimate, has he established the government of the universe. Every event is alike important in the eyes of that infinite Being, who takes in at one glance the most distant regions of space, and remotest periods of time. There is no event, however important to us, which he has exempted from the general laws that govern the universe, or which he has peculiarly reserved for his own immediate action and operation. The revolution of states and empires depends upon the smallest caprice or passion of single men ; and the lives of men are shortened or extended by the smallest accident of air or diet, sunshine or tempest. Nature still continues her progress and operation ; and if general laws be ever broke by particular volitions of the Deity, 'tis after a manner which entirely escapes human observation. As, on the one hand, the elements and other inanimate parts of the creation carry on their action without regard to the particular interest and situation of men ; so men are intrusted to their own judgment and discretion in the various shocks of matter, and may employ every faculty with which they are endowed, in order to provide for their ease, happiness, or preservation. What is the meaning then of that principle, that a man who, tired of life, and hunted by pain and misery, bravely over- (!) comes all the natural terrors of death, and makes his escape from this cruel scene ; that such a man, I say, has incurred the indignation of his Creator, by encroaching on the office of divine providence, and disturbing the order of the universe ? Shall we assert,

that the Almighty has reserved to himself, in any peculiar manner, the disposal of the lives of men, and has not submitted that event, in common with others, to the general laws by which the universe is governed? This is plainly false: the lives of men depend upon the same laws as the lives of all other animals; and these are subjected to the general laws of matter and motion. The fall of a tower, or the infusion of a poison, will destroy a man equally with the meanest creature; an inundation sweeps away every thing without distinction that comes within the reach of its fury. Since therefore the lives of men are for ever dependent on the general laws of matter and motion, is a man's disposing of his life criminal, because in every case it is criminal to encroach upon these laws, or disturb their operation? But this seems absurd: All animals are intrusted to their own prudence and skill for their conduct in the world; and have full authority, as far as their power extends, to alter all the operations of nature. Without the exercise of this authority, they could not subsist a moment; every action, every motion of a man, innovates on the order of some parts of matter, and diverts from their ordinary course the general laws of motion. Putting together therefore these conclusions, we find that human life depends upon the general laws of matter and motion, and that it is no encroachment on the office of Providence to disturb or alter these general laws: Has not every one of consequence the free disposal of his own life? And may he not lawfully employ that power with which nature has endowed him? In order to destroy the evidence of this conclusion, we must show a reason why this particular case is excepted. Is it because human life is of such great importance, that it is a presumption for human

*Does the same acknowledge no distinction
between man and "other animals"?*
*He seems to agree entirely in
mixed nature. or man.*

prudence to dispose of it? But the life of a man is of no greater importance to the universe than that of an oyster: And were it of ever so great importance, the order of human nature has actually submitted it to human prudence, and reduced us to a necessity, in every incident, of determining concerning it.

Were the disposal of human life so much reserved as the peculiar province of the Almighty, that it were an encroachment on his right for men to dispose of their own lives, it would be equally criminal to act for the preservation of life as for its destruction. If I turn aside a stone which is falling upon my head, I disturb the course of nature; and I invade the peculiar province of the Almighty, by lengthening out my life beyond the period, which, by the general laws of matter and motion, he had assigned it.

A hair, a fly, an insect, is able to destroy this mighty being whose life is of such importance. Is it an absurdity to suppose that human prudence may lawfully dispose of what depends on such insignificant causes? It would be no crime in me to divert the Nile or Danube from its course, were I able to effect such purposes. Where then is the crime of turning a few ounces of blood from their natural channel?—Do you imagine that I repine at Providence, or curse my creation, because I go out of life, and put a period to a being which, were it to continue, would render me miserable? Far be such sentiments from me. I am only convinced of a matter of fact which you yourself acknowledge possible, that human life may be unhappy; and that my existence, if further prolonged, would become ineligible: but I thank Providence, both for the good which I have already enjoyed, and for the power with which I am

al; 'tis all the same case: its power is still derived from the Supreme Creator, and is alike comprehended in the order of his providence. When the horror of pain prevails over the love of life; when a voluntary action anticipates the effects of blind causes; 'tis only in consequence of those powers and principles which he has implanted in his creatures. Divine Providence is still inviolate, and placed far beyond the reach of human injuries.* 'Tis impious, says the old Roman superstition, to divert rivers from their course, or invade the prerogatives of nature. 'Tis impious, says the French superstition, to inoculate for the small-pox, or usurp the business of Providence, by voluntarily producing distempers and maladies. 'Tis impious, says the modern European superstition, to put a period to our own life, and thereby rebel against our Creator: And why not impious, say I, to build houses, cultivate the ground, or sail upon the ocean? In all these actions we employ our powers of mind and body to produce some innovation in the course of nature; and in none of them do we any more. They are all of them therefore equally innocent, or equally criminal. *But you are placed by Providence, like a sentinel, in a particular station; and when you desert it without being recalled, you are equally guilty of rebellion against your Almighty Sovereign, and have incurred his displeasure*—I ask, Why do you conclude that Providence has placed me in this station? For my part, I find that I owe my birth to a long chain of causes, of which many depended upon voluntary actions of men. *But Providence guided all these causes, and nothing happens in the universe without its consent and cooperation.* If so, then

* Tacit. Ann. lib. i.

neither does my death, however voluntary, happen without its consent; and whenever pain or sorrow so far overcome my patience, as to make me tired of life, I may conclude that I am recalled from my station in the clearest and most express terms. It is Providence surely that has placed me at this present moment in this chamber: But may I not leave it when I think proper, without being liable to the imputation of having deserted my post or station? When I shall be dead, the principles of which I am composed will still perform their part in the universe, and will be equally useful in the grand fabric, as when they composed this individual creature. The difference to the whole will be no greater than betwixt my being in a chamber and in the open air. The one change is of more importance to me than the other; but not more so to the universe.

It is a kind of blasphemy to imagine that any created being can disturb the order of the world, or invade the business of Providence! It supposes, that that being possesses powers and faculties which it received not from its Creator, and which are not subordinate to his government and authority. A man may disturb society, no doubt, and thereby incur the displeasure of the Almighty: But the government of the world is placed far beyond his reach and violence. And how does it appear that the Almighty is displeased with those actions that disturb society? By the principles which he has implanted in human nature, and which inspire us with a sentiment of remorse if we ourselves have been guilty of such actions, and with that of blame and disapprobation, if we ever observe them in others.—Let us now examine, according to the method proposed, whether Suicide be of this kind of actions, and be a breach of our duty to our *neighbour* and to *society*.

A man who retires from life does no harm to society: He only ceases to do good; which, if it is an injury, is of the lowest kind.—All our obligations to do good to society seem to imply something reciprocal. I receive the benefits of society, and therefore ought to promote its interests; but when I withdraw myself altogether from society, can I be bound any longer? But allowing that our obligations to do good were perpetual, they have certainly some bounds; I am not obliged to do a small good to society at the expense of a great harm to myself: why then should I prolong a miserable existence, because of some frivolous advantage which the public may perhaps receive from me? If upon account of age and infirmities, I may lawfully resign any office, and employ my time altogether in fencing against these calamities, and alleviating as much as possible the miseries of my future life; why may I not cut short these miseries at once by an action which is no more prejudicial to society?—But suppose that it is no longer in my power to promote the interest of society; suppose that I am a burden to it; suppose that my life hinders some person from being much more useful to society: In such cases, my resignation of life must not only be innocent, but laudable. And most people who lie under any temptation to abandon existence, are in some such situation; those who have health, or power, or authority, have commonly better reason to be in humour with the world.

A man is engaged in a conspiracy for the public interest; is seized upon suspicion; is threatened with the rack; and knows from his own weakness that the secret will be extorted from him: Could such a one consult the public interest better than by putting a quick period to a miserable life? This was the case of the famous and brave Strozi of Florence.—Again, suppose

a malefactor is justly condemned to a shameful death ; can any reason be imagined why he may not anticipate his punishment, and save himself all the anguish of thinking on its dreadful approaches ? He invades the business of Providence no more than the magistrate did who ordered his execution ; and his voluntary death is equally advantageous to society, by ridding it of a pernicious member.

That Suicide may often be consistent with interest and with our duty to ourselves, no one can question, who allows that age, sickness, or misfortune, may render life a burden, and make it worse even than annihilation. I believe that no man ever threw away life while it was worth keeping. For such is our natural horror of death, that small motives will never be able to reconcile us to it ; and though perhaps the situation of a man's health or fortune did not seem to require this remedy, we may at least be assured, that any one who, without apparent reason, has had recourse to it, was curst with such an incurable depravity or gloominess of temper as must poison all enjoyment, and render him equally miserable as if he had been loaded with the most grievous misfortunes. If Suicide be supposed a crime, 'tis only cowardice can impel us to it. If it be no crime, both prudence and courage should engage us to rid ourselves at once of existence when it becomes a burden. 'Tis the only way that we can then be useful to society, by setting an example, which, if imitated, would preserve to every one his chance for happiness in life, and would effectually free him from all danger or misery.^a

^a It would be easy to prove that suicide is as lawful under the Christian dispensation as it was to the Heathens. There is not a single text

ESSAY IX.

ON THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL.

By the mere light of reason it seems difficult to prove the immortality of the soul; the arguments for it are commonly derived either from metaphysical topics, or moral, or physical. But in reality it is the gospel, and the gospel alone, that has brought *life and immortality to light*.

I. Metaphysical topics suppose that the soul is im-

of scripture which prohibits it. That great and infallible rule of faith and practice which must controul all philosophy and human reasoning, has left us in this particular to our natural liberty. Resignation to Providence is indeed recommended in scripture; but that implies only submission to ills that are unavoidable, not to such as may be remedied by prudence or courage. *Thou shalt not kill*, is evidently meant to exclude only the killing of others, over whose life we have no authority. That this precept, like most of the scripture precepts, must be modified by reason and common sense, is plain from the practice of magistrates, who punish criminals capitally, notwithstanding the letter of the law. But were this commandment ever so express against suicide, it would now have no authority, for all the law of *Moses* is abolished, except so far as it is established by the law of nature. And we have already endeavoured to prove that suicide is not prohibited by that law. In all cases Christians and Heathens are precisely upon the same footing; *Cato* and *Brutus*, *Arrea* and *Portia* acted heroically; those who now imitate their example ought to receive the same praises from posterity. The power of committing suicide is regarded by *Pliny* as an advantage which men possess even above the Deity himself. "Deus non sibi potest mortem consciscere si velit, quod homini dedit optimum in tantis vitæ pœnis."—Lib. II. cap. 7.

material, and that 'tis impossible for thought to belong to a material substance. But just metaphysics teach us, that the notion of substance is wholly confused and imperfect; and that we have no other idea of any substance, than as an aggregate of particular qualities inhering in an unknown something. Matter, therefore, and spirit, are at bottom equally unknown; and we cannot determine what qualities inhere in the one or in the other. They likewise teach us, that nothing can be decided *à priori* concerning any cause or effect; and that experience, being the only source of our judgments of this nature, we cannot know from any other principle, whether matter, by its structure or arrangement, may not be the cause of thought. Abstract reasonings cannot decide any question of fact or existence. But admitting a spiritual substance to be dispersed throughout the universe, like the ethereal fire of the Stoics, and to be the only inherent subject of thought, we have reason to conclude from *analogy*, that nature uses it after the manner she does the other substance, *matter*. She employs it as a kind of paste or clay; modifies it into a variety of forms and existences; dissolves after a time each modification, and from its substance erects a new form. As the same material substance may successively compose the bodies of all animals, the same spiritual substance may compose their minds: Their consciousness, or that system of thought which they formed during life, may be continually dissolved by death, and nothing interests them in the new modification. The most positive assertors of the mortality of the soul never denied the immortality of its substance; and that an immaterial substance, as well as a material, may lose its memory or consciousness, appears in part from experience, if the soul be immaterial. Reasoning

from the common course of nature, and without supposing any new interposition of the Supreme Cause, which ought always to be excluded from philosophy, *what is incorruptible must also be ingenerable*. The soul therefore, if immortal, existed before our birth; and if the former existence no ways concerned us, neither will the latter. Animals undoubtedly feel, think, love, hate, will, and even reason, though in a more imperfect manner than men: Are their souls also immaterial and immortal?

II. Let us now consider the moral arguments, chiefly those derived from the justice of God, which is supposed to be farther interested in the future punishment of the vicious and reward of the virtuous.—But these arguments are grounded on the supposition that God has attributes beyond what he has exerted in this universe, with which alone we are acquainted. Whence do we infer the existence of these attributes? It is very safe for us to affirm, that whatever we know the Deity to have actually done is best; but it is very dangerous to affirm that he must always do what to us seems best. In how many instances would this reasoning fail us with regard to the present world?—But if any purpose of nature be clear, we may affirm, that the whole scope and intention of man's creation, so far as we can judge by natural reason, is limited to the present life. With how weak a concern from the original inherent structure of the mind and passions, does he ever look farther? What comparison either for steadiness or efficacy, betwixt so floating an idea and the most doubtful persuasion of any matter of fact that occurs in common life? There arise indeed in some minds some unaccountable terrors with regard to futurity; but these would quickly vanish were they not artificially fostered

by precept and education. And those who foster them, what is their motive? Only to gain a livelihood, and to acquire power and riches in this world. Their very zeal and industry, therefore, are an argument against them.

What cruelty, what iniquity, what injustice in nature, to confine all our concern, as well as all our knowledge, to the present life, if there be another scene still waiting us of infinitely greater consequence? Ought this barbarous deceit to be ascribed to a beneficent and wise Being?—Observe with what exact proportion the task to be performed, and the performing powers, are adjusted throughout all nature. If the reason of man gives him great superiority above other animals, his necessities are proportionably multiplied upon him: his whole time, his whole capacity, activity, courage, and passion, find sufficient employment in fencing against the miseries of his present condition; and frequently, nay, almost always, are too slender for the business assigned them.—A pair of shoes, perhaps, was never yet wrought to the highest degree of perfection which that commodity is capable of attaining; yet it is necessary, at least very useful, that there should be some politicians and moralists, even some geometers, poets, and philosophers among mankind. The powers of men are no more superior to their wants, considered merely in this life, than those of foxes and hares are, compared to *their* wants and to their period of existence. The inference from parity of reason is therefore obvious.

On the theory of the soul's mortality, the inferiority of women's capacity is easily accounted for. Their domestic life requires no higher faculties either of mind or body. This circumstance vanishes and becomes

absolutely insignificant on the religious theory: The one sex has an equal task to perform as the other; their powers of reason and resolution ought also to have been equal, and both of them infinitely greater than at present. As every effect implies a cause, and that another, till we reach the first cause of all, which is the Deity; every thing that happens is ordained by him, and nothing can be the object of his punishment or vengeance.—By what rule are punishments and rewards distributed? What is the Divine standard of merit and demerit? Shall we suppose that human sentiments have place in the Deity? How bold that hypothesis! We have no conception of any other sentiments.—According to human sentiments, sense, courage, good manners, industry, prudence, genius, &c. are essential parts of personal merits. Shall we therefore erect an elysium for poets and heroes like that of the ancient mythology? Why confine all rewards to one species of virtue? Punishment, without any proper end or purpose, is inconsistent with *our* ideas of goodness and justice; and no end can be served by it after the whole scene is closed. Punishment, according to *our* conception, should bear some proportion to the offence. Why then eternal punishment for the temporary offences of so frail a creature as man? Can any one approve of Alexander's rage, who intended to exterminate a whole nation because they had seized his favourite horse Bucephalus?¹

Heaven and hell suppose two distinct species of men, the good and the bad; but the greatest part of mankind float betwixt vice and virtue.—Were one to go round the world with an intention of giving a good

¹ Quint. Curtius. lib. vi. cap. 5.

supper to the righteous and a sound drubbing to the wicked, he would frequently be embarrassed in his choice, and would find the merits and demerits of most men and women scarcely amount to the value of either. To suppose measures of approbation and blame different from the human confounds every thing. Whence do we learn that there is such a thing as moral distinctions, but from our own sentiments?—What man who has not met with personal provocation (or what good-natured man who has) could inflict on crimes, from the sense of blame alone, even the common, legal, frivolous punishments? And does any thing steel the breast of judges and juries against the sentiments of humanity but reflection on necessity and public interest? By the Roman law, those who had been guilty of parricide, and confessed their crime, were put into a sack along with an ape, a dog, and a serpent, and thrown into the river. Death alone was the punishment of those who denied their guilt, however fully proved. A criminal was tried before Augustus, and condemned after a full conviction; but the humane emperor, when he put the last interrogatory, gave it such a turn as to lead the wretch into a denial of his guilt. “You surely (said the prince) did not kill your father?”^a This lenity suits our natural ideas of *right* even towards the greatest of all criminals, and even though it prevents so inconsiderable a sufferance. Nay, even the most bigotted priest would naturally without reflection approve of it, provided the crime was not heresy or infidelity; for as these crimes hurt himself in his *temporal* interest and advantages, perhaps he may not be altogether so indulgent to them. The chief source of moral ideas is the

^a Sueton. August. cap. 3.

the reflection on the interests of human society. Ought these interests, so short, so frivolous, to be guarded by punishments eternal and infinite? The damnation of one man is an infinitely greater evil in the universe than the subversion of a thousand millions of kingdoms. Nature has rendered human infancy peculiarly frail and mortal, as it were on purpose to refute the notion of a probationary state; the half of mankind die before they are rational creatures.

III. The physical arguments from the analogy of nature are strong for the mortality of the soul; and are really the only philosophical arguments which ought to be admitted with regard to this question, or indeed any question of fact.—Where any two objects are so closely connected that all alterations which we have ever seen in the one are attended with proportionable alterations in the other; we ought to conclude, by all rules of analogy, that, when there are still greater alterations produced in the former, and it is totally dissolved, there follows a total dissolution of the latter. Sleep, a very small effect on the body, is attended with a temporary extinction, at least a great confusion in the soul. The weakness of the body and that of the mind in infancy are exactly proportioned; their vigour in manhood, their sympathetic disorder in sickness, their common gradual decay in old age. The step further seems unavoidable; their common dissolution in death. The last symptoms which the mind discovers, are disorder, weakness, insensibility, and stupidity; the forerunners of its annihilation. The farther progress of the same causes increasing, the same effects totally extinguish it. Judging by the usual analogy of nature, no form can continue when transferred to a condition of life very different from the original one in which it was placed.

Trees perish in the water, fishes in the air, animals in the earth. Even so small a difference as that of climate is often fatal. What reason then to imagine, that an immense alteration, such as is made on the soul by the dissolution of its body, and all its organs of thought and sensation, can be effected without the dissolution of the whole? Every thing is in common betwixt soul and body. The organs of the one are all of them the organs of the other; the existence, therefore, of the one must be dependent on the other. The souls of animals are allowed to be mortal; and these bear so near a resemblance to the souls of men, that the analogy from one to the other forms a very strong argument. Their bodies are not more resembling, yet no one rejects the argument drawn from comparative anatomy. The Metempsychosis is therefore the only system of this kind that philosophy can hearken to.

Nothing in this world is perpetual; every thing, however, seemingly firm, is in continual flux and change: The world itself gives symptoms of frailty and dissolution. How contrary to analogy, therefore, to imagine that one single form, seeming the frailest of any, and subject to the greatest disorders, is immortal and indissoluble? What theory is that! how lightly, not to say how rashly, entertained! How to dispose of the infinite number of posthumous existences ought also to embarrass the (religious) theory. Every planet in every solar system, we are at liberty to imagine peopled with intelligent mortal beings, at least we can fix on no other supposition. For these then a new universe must every generation be created beyond the bounds of the present universe, or one must have been created at first so prodigiously wide as to admit of this continual influx of beings. Ought such bold suppositions

to be received by any philosophy, and that merely on the pretext of a bare possibility? When it is asked, Whether Agamemnon, Thersites, Hannibal, Varro, and every stupid clown that ever existed in Italy, Scythia, Bactria, or Guinea, are now alive; can any man think, that a scrutiny of nature will furnish arguments strong enough to answer so strange a question in the affirmative? The want of argument without revelation sufficiently establishes the negative.—*Quanto facilius*, says Pliny, *certiusque sibi quemque credere, ac specimen securitatis antigene tali sumere experimento.* Our insensibility before the composition of the body seems to natural reason a proof of a like state after dissolution.—Were our horrors of annihilation an original passion, not the effect of our general love of happiness, it would rather prove the mortality of the soul: For as nature does nothing in vain, she would never give us a horror against an impossible event. She may give us a horror against an unavoidable event, provided our endeavours, as in the present case, may often remove it to some distance. Death is in the end unavoidable; yet the human species could not be preserved had not nature inspired us with an aversion towards it. All doctrines are to be suspected which are favoured by our passions; and the hopes and fears which gave rise to this doctrine are very obvious.

'Tis an infinite advantage in every controversy to defend the negative. If the question be out of the common experienced course of nature, this circumstance is almost if not altogether decisive. By what arguments or analogies can we prove any state of existence, which no one ever saw, and which no way resembles any that

¹ Lib. 7. cap. 55.

that ever was seen? Who will repose such trust in any pretended philosophy as to admit upon its testimony the reality of so marvellous a scene? Some new species of logic is requisite for that purpose, and some new faculties of the mind, that they may enable us to comprehend that logic.

Nothing could set in a fuller light the infinite obligations which mankind have to Divine revelation, since we find that no other medium could ascertain this great and important truth. — 1305! B



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