### Letters from Baron Haller to his daughter: on the truths of the Christian religion. Translated from the German / [Albrecht von Haller].

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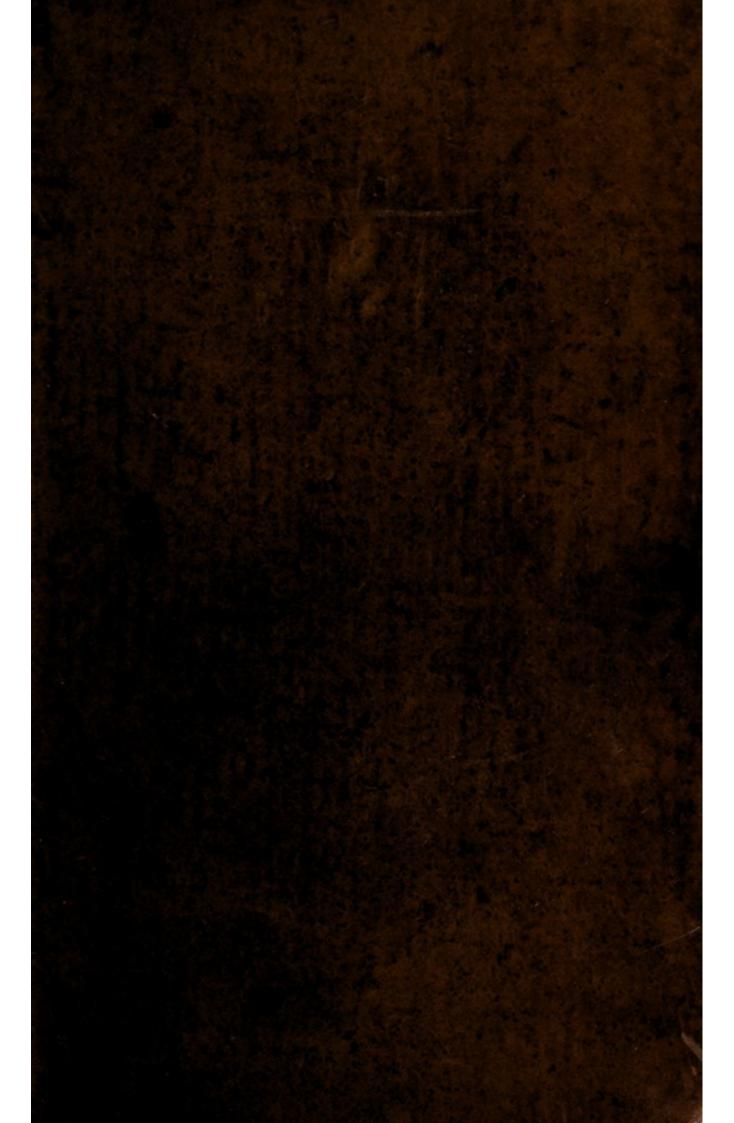
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# LETTERS

FROM

## BARON HALLER

T O

HIS DAUGHTER.

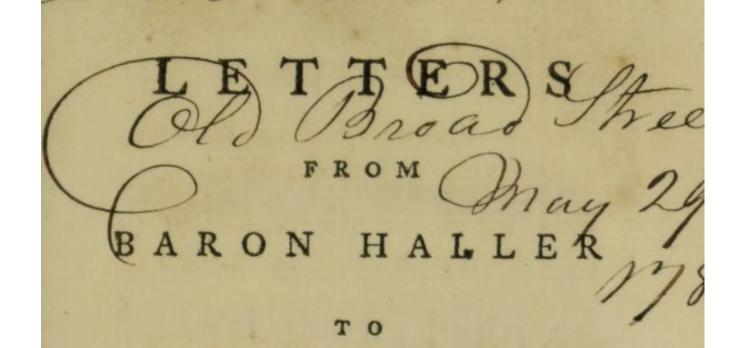
# LETTERS

FROM

## BARON HALLER

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HIS DAUGHTER.



HIS DAUGHTER,

ON THE

TRUTHS of the CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN.

### LONDON:

Printed for J. MURRAY, No. 32, Fleet-ffreet; and WILLIAM CREECH, at Edinburgh.

M. DCC. LXXX.

LETTER

M.O.M.

BARON HALLER

HIS DAUGHTER,

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TRUTHS of the Contestion Extension.

TREBUNATED REGIS THE GERMAN.



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## TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

the, which exceed its

The Y who have studied Nature most, and penetrated deepest into her secret recesses, have discovered themselves, and demonstrated to others, that human science is bounded by a narrow horizon, and that our knowledge is impersect within the circle. Beyond the sphere of mortal vision, lie many truths which we can neither discern nor comprehend. A conviction

of the weakness of human understanding prepares the philosophic mind for the admission of truths, which exceed its capacity, upon moral evidence. A little philosophy leads to atheism: a great deal brings back the mind to religion. Paschal, Bacon, Boyle, Berkeley, Maclaurin, Boerhaave, Newton, Clarke, in proportion as they explored with fuccess the mysteries of creation, felt their breafts warmed with devotion to its great Governor and Author. -The name of HALLER, which is already so illustrious in the world of letters; will one day be venerable and dear to the friends of religion and virtue, the number

ber of whom his writings will contribute to increase. This great and good man, in the earlier part of his life, had his doubts concerning the objects of the Christian Faith: but these doubts were dispelled by a fuccessful application to every branch of science on the one hand; and by a candid examination of the facred oracles on the other. The first, by purging his foul, according to his own emphatic phrase, of arrogance and pride, filled it with that poverty of spirit, which, of all the Christian graces, as we are instructed by divine wisdom, first enters the kingdom of heaven. The

Second

fecond convinced him that the divine revelation, conveyed in the holy scriptures, was a boon worthy of the merciful author of our nature to give, and such as was fit for guilty mortals to receive, with humble gratitude and reverence.

branch of foience on the one

There are hours of despondency and languor in every human life, which can neither be prevented nor remedied by the most prosperous worldly circumstances, or by the greatest skill of man.—The healing art, which Mr. Haller applied with unequalled success to the diseases of the body, could not, as he experienced.

perienced in his own person, reach that diffatisfaction with the present, and that apprehension and dread of a future state, which at certain feafons in fome, and in certain stages of life in all, disturb the breasts of mankind. In the multitudes of his thoughts within him, thy comforts, O Lord! delighted his foul. Thy laws were to him a delightful subject of attention, and a joyful. object of hope. He tasted of the fountain of life, whose refreshing streams so fortified his foul, that he beheld undifmayed the king of terrors! In has enamed save

The consolation which he felt himself,

dealines with the lone of men.

himfelf, he was anxious to impart to others. Like the Saviour of the world, he went about doing good to the fouls and bodies of men. He eagerly seized the numberless opportunities, which his profession of a physician gave him, of convincing those with whom he conversed of the truth, and of converting them to the practice of the Christian religion. And this he did, not only by his instructions, but by his example. For he was charitable to the poor; he sympathized in the tenderest manner with the distressed; and was humane and just in all his dealings with the fons of men.

A thousand

A thousand incidents, which passed unheeded by the vulgar eye, recalled to his mind the Deity: and when he recollected or heard that great name, he gave vent, in whatever company or circumstances he happened to be placed, to some pious ejaculation, with his eyes and hands lifted up towards Heaven.

While his humane and feeling mind embraced in the bonds of love all his fellow men, and interested him in their present and future concerns, there was one person whom God and nature had recommended to his peculiar tenderness

tenderness and care. He had a daughter, dear to him as his own foul. He knew the inquietudes to which the common lot of humanity would subject her throughout life, and the fears that would alarm her tender breaft at the approach of death, of which, it was some consolation to him, that " be would not live " to be the mournful witness." To her he addressed, at different times, but in a regular fuccession, these Letters, which were afterwards, by his permission, published for the benefit of the world at large. They have met, on the continent, and it is to be hoped tendernels

hoped they will meet, in this island, with a favourable reception. For,

attends to one form, and thereby

Ift. The author has exhibited, in an incredibly small compass, the completest defence of Christianity, in our judgment, that has yet been offered to the world. Other writers have urged particular arguments in favour of this cause—with great ability and ingenuity. Mr. HALLER collects the best arguments of the ablest divines in every period of Christianity; arranges them in a judicious order; and brings their united force into one centre of percussion. The separate rays which

which flow from the genius and pious industry of Christians in different ages and nations, he attracts to one focus, and thereby illuminates the object, he means to illustrate, by an effulgence of light which is sufficient to penetrate and dispel the thickest clouds of ignorance, error, and prejudice.

2dly. It is not only his object to shew that Jesus of Nazareth was a person divinely commissioned from Heaven for the reformation of the world; but that he was in reality the Son of God, and that he poured out his soul a propitiation for the sins of men.—

We

We have defenders of Christianity, Socinians and Arians, who frame systems of religion to themselves, and then prove this religion by texts of scripture. Finding that they cannot raise their conceptions to the sublimity of all Divine truth; they think they do good service to the cause of Christianity by lowering Divine truths to human conception. Thus they admit certain parts, and reject others, of a system that must be wholly rejected or wholly admitted. Mr. HALLER receives with pious awe, even what he cannot comprehend, and with humble confidence walks forward into those regions where, according to the figure of the poet -" Lame

Lame Faithleads Understanding blind."-Yet even there, in those facred walks, where the grandeur and incomprehensibility of the furrounding objects lay prostrate the powers of the human mind, he finds room for the exercise of reason in the service of the Christian cause. He shews the credibility of mysteries which exceed our comprehension, by manifold analogies taken from the process of nature in the inanimate, animal, and rational world. He analyzes, in some degree, the economy of Divine Grace, vindicates even the hardest doctrines of Christianity, if we may be allowed this expression, and throughout

throughout all its parts justifies the ways of God to man.

3dly. There is something in these Letters of Mr. HALLER which not only convinces the judgment, but which operates upon the heart, and inclines the will. His feeling representations of the misery of human life, and of the fitness of the Christian religion to remedy that misery, interest the affections in the cause of truth, and dispose the reader to give it a fair hearing. Abstracted demonstrations of the being and attributes of God; formal and fyllogistical proofs of the resurrection of Christ, have but a feeble influence

fluence on the understanding, because they have none on the pasfions. It is the will that directs the power of attention, and without attention there is no room for the exercise of judgment. Where there is a prepoffession against any doctrine, the mind, fwift as lightning, fixes its whole force on the arguments that tend to invalidate its truth; and, as the resources of a fertile imagination and fubtile genius are infinite, the sceptic easily retreats into the labyrinths of metaphyfics. It is an easy matter to be convinced of what we wish to be true; and in matters that admit of reasoning, it is, on the contrary,

trary, difficult to perfuade mankind of the truth of what they wish were false. It is the peculiar excellency of this little performance, that while it shews the truth of Christianity by arguments, it disposes the will to give those arguments a candid, a favourable attention—we become acquainted with the Divine Perfon, whose mission from heaven, it is the author's object to prove; and we are ready to cry out, of ourselves " truly this man was the " Son of God."

4thly. The variety and extent of Mr. Haller's learning must strike both Believers and Infidels. The b 2 former

former will rejoice in the acquisition of fo able an advocate for fo good a cause: the latter will be somewhat startled, when they find so universal a genius a believer in Jesus Christ; for be must be selfconceited indeed, who refuses even to examine a religion of which HALLER was a disciple; a man so deeply versed in oriental, classical, and modern languages; and in science of every kind, metaphysical, mathematical, physiological, moral, and theological.-The various knowledge of the author appears even in this little volume of familiar epiftles to his daughter. Nor will any person who reads them, imagine that he made a display

a display of knowledge through vanity or oftentation. No: this devout man was too deeply impressed with sentiments of God, to think of himself: much less would he have given way to any effusions of vanity. But, as rivers take a tincture from the foil through which they pass; so the genius and turn of thinking of a man of letters, is apt to display itself in his conversation, or in his writings, on any subject.

5thly. The parental tenderness that breathes throughout these Letters, interests the reader both in their author and in the person to whom they are addressed; b 3 and

and gains his favourable attention to the whole performance.—Many parents will adopt the fentiments of Mr. HALLER, and present this little book to their children as the dearest pledge of parental affection. For what parent but would wish, in the last stage of life, to address from his heart these words to his child? "The king of terrors " approaches me with hasty steps: " but I behold his advances with-" out difmay. Beyond that æra " of my existence, I see objects of " joy and hope, which invite me " to leave this world, and to step " forward into eternity; into " mansions of holiness and bliss, " where death shall be banished

ee for

" for ever, and where fin shall

" have no place. After having

" finished your course, you will

" again meet your father in those

" glorious and peaceful abodes,

" where the idea of our frail

" mortality shall no longer dif-

" turb our breasts, or fill them

" with shame; and where the

" miseries of this life shall no

" longer draw tears from our

" eyes."

## PERA de. Exist

"have no places chiese having "half "half "half "half your courfe, you will " spin and your courfe, you will " glorious and percelul abodes, " where the " mortality thall no longer diff " with thank our broads, of fill them " with thank our broads, of fill them " longer day that the shall no " longer day the shall no

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LETTERS,

# LETTERS, &c.

## LETTER I.

Comfort of Religion at the hour of death, and on the entrance into another state of existence. Necessity of establishing faith on a sirm foundation. Character of modern Sceptics. Catalogue of eminent defenders of the Christian faith. The Author's apology for engaging in the same cause. Arguments in favour of Religion come with peculiar weight from a layman. Defects and errors in the writings as well of divines as philosophers.

I T affords me, my dear child, great fatisfaction, to observe the serious turn of your mind, though you are now at an age, when the world ap-

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pears in its gayest and most alluring colours. But this life, however diversified with pleasing charms, must have an end, though at present it may feem at a remote distance. I, perhaps, shall not live to be the forrowful witness of such an event; but that day, which is to terminate your existence, approaches insensibly; and when the awful moment arrives, what then will be your support? The caresses of your fond children, the conversation of your beloved friends, will be but a feeble refuge. Do you think, that it will be in the power of medicine to stop the fleeting breath, or retard the fatal hour? The earth will feem to bend beneath your tottering feet, and you will enter into an eternity, immense and unfathomable; where will be found other joys and other griefs than you shall have experienced

perienced in this life. Evils will prefent themselves, in this new state, with
a more terrible aspect; and joys, insinitely superior to all that the world
afforded. At this last period of life,
when your eyes will no longer behold
the light—when your ears will no
more hear the well-known voice of
those who were dearest to you—when
you will feel the arrows of death
pierce your trembling heart, who will
support you in this scene of fear and
dread, if God withdraws his succour?

It is a just and trite observation, that to arm ourselves, by a voluntary inattention, against the day of evilagainst that day which must decide our lot for ever, is a mark of the highest folly and extravagance. Miserable expedient! which cannot delay a single moment, nor improve, in the least, the destiny which awaits us. The

enemies of Revelation have sometimes made a confession well worthy our attention. They acknowledge, that a Christian, whose faith, notwithstanding, in their opinion, is chimerical, ceases not to be happy, even at the time when his body is almost deprived of its vivifying powers, and is hastening to a state of corruptionat that moment, in which the foul feems deprived of every support. They confess, that his hopes, however ill-founded they esteem them, and deserving the contempt of philofophy, never forfake him, but embolden and encourage him to the last. His faith, fay they, inspires him with resolution. Armed with this, he dares to look Death in the face; because, after this period of existence is finished, he extends his view to an eternity of happiness.

But faith, unless firmly established, cannot produce this effect; neither can it be called faith, if it is not supported on some real foundation. If we believe more through the influence of custom and example, than from the arguments of reason, or the internal conviction of our own minds, this kind of persuasion is false and groundless, nor is capable of giving confidence or peace. Death is an object frightful to human nature: the fufferings which precede it, the constant and regular lapse of time which unavoidably draws us nearer to our dissolution, must excite in us painful and disagreeable sentiments; and such as it is not in our power to suppress; and when our faith is wavering, we are less able to make a stand against them. But if we would entertain more pleafing thoughts, they must arise from

the

the consideration of a future state of felicity; the certain hope of which has the same effect upon the mind, as those impressions which we receive from sensible objects.

To a conviction founded upon an attentive examination of the grounds of our faith, we must join a perfect perfuasion, that this eternal happiness will not be indifcriminately conferred, but must be the reward of some preceding merit. Without this fentiment, we cannot experience any of those consolations, which we particularly stand in need of at that time, when there is nothing upon earth from whence we can derive any folid satisfaction. We must judge for ourfelves-must see, as it were with our own eyes, the proofs of religion: we must feel the force of them. Both the understanding and the heart must

give their affent, if we are desirous of their having any influence upon our passions. Apply yourself, therefore, with all confidence, to those researches. The rock of salvation is solidity itself; it cannot be shaken, either by the doubts of the sceptic, or the sarcasm of the sneerer.

Your father, who now addresses you, during the period of a long life, spent in continual labour and study, thought himself obliged to consecrate some of his leisure hours, to enquiries of this nature. The result of which was, that those truths which have been called in question, always appeared to him the more evident and respectable, the more attentively he examined the reasons and proofs on which they were founded.

But who are those sceptics and those sneerers, which, in this our day, so B 4 much

much abound? The one have never studied the principles of the Christian faith; frivolity and precipitation mark their character; with them ridicule fupplies the place of reason, and they are bufily employed in an unprofitable pursuit. They ought rather to regret the loss of that time, which should have been devoted to a serious enquiry after truth. The others, the freethinkers of the age, who are at the head of a party, and the heroes of it, have never been at the pains to acquire a knowledge of the ancient languages, and of history-a knowledge, nevertheless, very effential in affifting them to form a right judgment of the fundamental doctrines of faith. I have read the works of their most famous authors. Not one of them was capable of understanding the true and precise acceptation

firm

tation of the terms made use of in the facred writings-Not one of them had entered deep enough into the study of Nature, to trace Divinity in the various objects which furround us, notwithstanding those displays are so numerous, fo eminent and illustrious, in every work of creation, whether we consider its defign or disposition. Therefore that which furnished Hobbes with a subject of infidelity, confirmed Newton in his faith-that which was to Ofray a matter of sport, was to Boerhaave an extensive theme for wonder and adoration.

I know that a young mother, refiding in a gay city, cannot so abstract herself from company, as either to study the oriental languages, or to make a proficiency in chronological researches. Yet without these aids, she may find sufficient means to con-

firm her mind in the truth of the Christian faith. In languages which are more known, we have a number of apologies, written in favour of religion; which appear to me fully fufficient to remove all those doubts and difficulties, which are thrown in our way by Sceptics. The pious Madame de Sevigne, a woman of high rank, and one who possessed a fine and elegant taste, was not insensible to what religion had taught concerning eternity. She well understood the merit of the illustrious \* Abbadie, and rendered him

<sup>\*</sup> A celebrated Protestant divine, born at Noy, in the province of Bearn, in 1654. After having sinished his studies, he was made minister of the French church at Berlin, from whence he came to London in 1690, where he was for some time minister of the French church in the Savoy, and was afterwards promoted

him ample justice. Ditton has demonstrated, with most convincing energy, the truth of the refurrection of Christ. Sherlock hath examined this fact, with all the accuracy and precifion which are employed in our courts of justice +. Another writer, who is yet living, renowned for eloquence and a talent for poetry; not more illustrious by birth, than diftinguished by eminent abilities, Lord Lyttelton, I mean, an English nobleman, hath ably proved, by examining the conversion of St. Paul, that nothing else but the actual appearance of one from heaven, was able to pro-

moted to the deanery of Killaloe in Ireland. He published several works in French that were much esteemed, particularly, "A Treatise on the Truth of the Christian Religion."

† In a Piece intituled—" The Trial of the Witnesses of the Resurrection."

duce conviction in so bitter an enemy to Christ and his gospel. It is perhaps rather differviceable to the cause of religion, that Tach hath been compelled to abandon a work, which he had begun with a design of invalidating its tenets. For the least appearance of perfecution only ferves to make converts, even in a bad cause. You well know with what minuteness and philosophic precision, our friend M. Bonnet hath proved the divine mission of our Saviour. A woman might perfectly understand all these books; and there would be nothing wanting to her conviction, if fhe could be fure, that none of the facts were supposititious, none of the arguments fophistical, which the authors have made use of. The patrons of infidelity, who would be delighted to discover any defects in these arguments,

guments, would undoubtedly have brought them to light, if there had been any to be found; and instead of these objections so often resuted, the repetition of which has been disgusting to every reader of sense, they would not have omitted to usher them into the world with an air of triumph, and thereby have exposed the defenders of religion.

I thought, however, though perhaps too hastily, that my observations on these important truths, might not be altogether unprofitable. What the churchmen have written on religious matters, has, in general, gained but inserior credit. Their arguments have lost much of their weight, from the consideration of their having been urged by persons who were bound, both by honour and interest, to defend the profession in which they were en-

gaged. In other writings, published in favour of religion, some discover and condemn a certain characteristical peculiarity of genius or turn of thinking. They also find fault with those ingenious conjectures, which authors, fond of displaying ingenuity, fometimes very improperly intersperse in their works, even on subjects of religion. Other authors on the fame subjects, have been censured for their prolixity, which, however, is not without its use. It is oftentimes necessary to check the juvenile impatience of some men, whose attachment to pleasure is such, that they cannot spare from their amusements that time which is necessary even to read a few pages with attention.

Some persons have been of opinion, that if a layman, who, in the course of a long life, hath had occasion to testify

testify his love for the truth, and hath facrificed to it great temporary advantages, was to write in defence of the faith, and to found his arguments on fuch facts only as were incontestable, his fuffrage would carry with it much greater weight and authority. Some friends of mine, from the too good opinion they have been pleased to entertain of me, have suggested, that it was in my power to accomplish the task, agreeably to their ideas; and that under my hands, the work would be useful not only to you, but to other young persons who have, at the same time, an inclination to studious enquiries. They were perfuaded, that the less erudition there should be in the work, the less there would be of novelty, but the more of truth, whose sacred rights might be much better defended, than by using the common-place argu-

ments generally adopted by this class of writers; many of which are too vague to be allowed. In short, it is for your fake alone, that I now address you on this fubject, not to procure the approbation of the learned. The last words of a father, far advanced in years, and who fees his end approaching, will doubtless make a greater impression on your heart, than all the lessons of a skilful teacher. You cannot but confess, that in my present fituation, at a time of life, when the world offers nothing which can excite the passions, it must be conviction only, and a perfect perfuation of the truth, that hath induced me to this undertaking. But there is yet another reason which determined me to form the present design. It appears to me, that the Theologians, and even many pious Christians, have confidered fidered God in no other view, than in the relation in which he stands with man; their ideas, therefore, of this adorable Being, are very narrow and confined. On the other hand, the Philosophers have not regarded him in the character of Father, Judge, and Benefactor; but only of the Creator of all things, and Governor of the world; but sometimes their idea hath been more limited, and they have described him simply as the Governor of empires.

The first represent God too much like man, and neglect, or regard with too great indifference, the interesting relations that man stands in with God, as being his creature, as being a sinner, and as having the blessing of grace. They seem to have forgotten, or to have overlooked, that love which we all owe to the supreme Being; nor

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to have recommended that humble reverence, and profound respect, which is due to the Omnipotent Creator of all things. This God, who is the Saviour of men, the Lord of all created worlds, is entitled to the profoundest respect and adoration from all his creatures.

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nd as having the bleffing of graces.

### LETTER II.

A description of that anxiety and terror which hangs over every mind in life, at death, and above all on its entrance into the world of Spirits. Holiness of the Divine Nature. Vice the natural object of punishment. Necessity of punishing sin, in order to maintain the order of the universe. Many intermediate orders of intelligent beings between the Deity and man. Pride and arrogance of human nature. Delay of the punishment of sin not an argument against its certainty. Corruption, selfishness, and consequently injustice, of buman nature asserted, in contradiction to certain philosophers; and described, from its earliest appearance in infancy, to its full beight and maturity. Vanity of worldly pursuits, and importance of a preparation for eternity. Love of the world and the things of the world, the grand source of enw, malice, and contention. The mind purified and tranquillized by the prospect and hope of futurity. Remaining power of corruption in the best and most pious minds. Necessity of an atonement for fin acknowledged by Socrates.

have feen a book, written for the instruction of children, which begun with this important question—

-What is thy consolation in life and in death?-It is not the world which can give it you, or insure even for a moment, any of those talents or advantages which you possess-such as youth, health, fortune, conjugal affection, children of promifing hopes, and in short, whatever contributes to render life agreeable. An unexpected malady-you yourfelf have experienced it-may fecretly canker the bloom of youth, and deprive it of all its charms and enjoyments. The fword of death is suspended over your head by a tender thread; neither canthe world defend you from those strokes of adversity, which are the inevitable lot of mortals. Or, supposing that the years pass away without the visitations of sickness, yet, in their revolving course, your natural vigour is diminished; as in cases of rebellion,

where the strength of the nation is weakened, by a division of its forces. Your foul, which is of an immortal nature, will fometimes obtrude on you a reflection, that the body, upon which you have built great expectations, is daily tumbling into ruins. You scarcely perceive the secret course of a river, which accompanies you in your passage, and upon whose current you are carried down, till, with consternation, you find yourself at the very entrance of it, just ready to emerge into the wide ocean, where you will find no more banks-no more agreeable prospects to charm the eye-no more chearful companions-no more objects to gratify the senses, or indulge your favourite taste and inclination; all these sources of delight will vanish for ever. Having, by an irrefistible impulse, entered this

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boundless expanse, alone and unattended, how will you support the idea, that there is nothing remaining to you, but this immensity with which you are surrounded?

This image, fo often applied, and which affected in a most lively manner, even in the midst of her pleafures, the ingenious Sevigne, is but a faint resemblance of its archetype. The current of time, whose rapidity you cannot oppose, and of which you have already passed a considerable part, will carry you into the presence of your Judge-a being of perfect purity and holiness-who is divested of all those passions, which the poverty of human language has ascribed to him, and of whose violence we need not therefore be afraid. But although he is infinitely good, he does not approve of fin, nor regard good and evil

evil with an eye of indifference. These two things are naturally and essentially different; and being thus diametrically opposite to each other, cannot be held in the same estimation by a Being, who not only knows their difference, but fees them both without any disguise or artifice. Even man, imperfect and guilty as he is, disapproves and despises the liar, the traitor, the ungrateful, and the envious; but the opposite qualities he honours and admires, wherever they are found. How much more then will He, who is absolute perfection, who can never judge otherwise than agreeably to moral rectitude and truth, abhor and detest vice? If God sees, as it were, with a glance, the moral good and evil of his creatures, and yet makes no discrimination in human actions, a universaldisorder must take place, amongst

all intelligent beings, which disorder would be the inevitable consequence of this supposed indifference in God.

We cannot form a competent idea of the Supreme Being; he is superior to every image which derives its origin from the fenses. It is, however, certain, that he is omnipotent, allwife, and infinite in every perfection. We have every possible reason to think, that betwixt this Being and man, there are other creatures, who approach nearer to God in fanctity, virtue, and perfection; and who are far fuperior to man. I know, that in strict propriety of speech, there cannot be an uniform gradation betwixt finite and infinite; but the distance between God and feeble mortals is fo immense, that we may suppose, with the highest probability, that, in the celestial habitations, are beings of amuch

more excellent nature than man, whose understanding is so much limited, and whose heart is so exceedingly depraved. How great then is the pride of man, which will not admit of any thing fuperior to himself! Presuming upon his own dignity, he appropriates a rank more elevated than his faculties intitle him to; but refuses, at the same time, to acknowledge, that hereceived these endowments from God. Will the great Governor of the universe approve of this behaviour in his creature; who dares to harbour in his breast a kind of rebellion against the arrangements of infinite Wifdom? Can the man, who is thus influenced by pride, ever condefcend to these submissions which reafon requires; or bear with an eye of complacency the pre-eminence of beings more noble and exalted than himself? Can he, without a mortifying humiliation,

humiliation, behold himself placed in the lowest rank of finite beings; or resign without murmuring, those prerogatives which he vainly arrogates?

All other transgressions of the law of God are equally, in their own nature, deferving of punishment, by the Sovereign Judge, who disapproves of, and condemns them; for his laws are an eternal and immutable flandard for the trial of human actions, of which he furely is capable of making a just estimate, who perfectly knows their value and extent. Beings, who live in subordination to his laws, must necessarily receive the approbation of him whose faithful subjects they are. But fuch as neglect those duties which are intrinsically good, and, though commanded to obey them, prefer an opposite rule of behaviour-as the liar, the envious, the eruel,

cruel, the impure, and the misanthrope—must infallibly be regarded by God as rebels to his laws, and punished for their disobedience. The delay of judgment ought not to embolden them. Men may lose the remembrance of their own actions; the impressions which the fenses receive, diminish gradually, like one who having fenfibly offended us to-day, justly apprehends our resentment; but after a few months are past, forgets the offence, and regards it with indifference. But in God there is no forgetfulness: the faults of the first men are recorded in the book of immutable wisdom, and are written in a manner more indelible than if they were inscribed upon columns of adamant. The fins of the early ages are as perfectly known to him now, as they were at the time they were commit-

ted. His hatred to evil is unalterable, as well as its consequences. An action, which had incurred his difpleasure because it was evil in its own nature, cannot change its complexion by time, in the eyes of infinite Wisdom. After a thousand years, its turpitude will be the same as at first; and therefore entitled to the fame condemnation. But fuch is the inconfistency of the human mind, that we overlook the criminality of our own actions, and pass a general amnesty on our former vices, when we can no longer practise them. It is not so with the immortal Judge, who hath before him his own laws; fo that he cannot pardon at one time, what was obnoxious to punishment at another.

You, my daughter, will not here object, that we are not so depraved.

The education which you have received, and your own conscience, will not fuffer this arrogant thought to enter into your mind. But our new philosophers have carried their vanity so far, as even to deny the corruption of the human heart; or at least they do not perceive its existence, but in their enemies, or the most notorious malefactors; in them they discover the enormities of vice. It is a weak apology, made by some for the commisfion of evil, that man brings into the world with him the fource of it, which is felf-love—that every one must purfue the bent of its inclination-fubmit wholly to it, and make, if possible, the rest of mankind subservient to its will—that it is oftentimes displeased even with the elements, and would quarrel with the sky if the wind blew, or the rain fell, differently from its wishes.

wishes. When heavy bodies, by their own weight, descend to the earth, this also is a cause of pain and inquietude; it would have them act in repugnance to the laws of gravitation. In the infant, we see the effects of felf-love; it there reigns absolute. Before he has been capable of feeling the influence of example, he opposes his feeble strength to every constraint; he seizes, with a kind of fury, whatever he defires; he fnatches from another infant his toys; and invades, like an Alexander, what is not his own; like him too, he triumphs over his spoils, and is deaf to every remonstrance of reason.

When the infant is advanced in years, and reason begins to exert its powers, he then perceives that the world is not his own, but that other men have the same pretensions and similar claims to what he would appro-

priate to himself; the consequence of which is, at least in theory, a kind of war amongst all those who aspire at universal monarchy. Hobbes not only perceived the truth of this theory, but has plainly afferted that it was now in practice; though he does not fay that fuch a state of contention is lawful and reasonable. I have obferved these sentiments to prevail amongst the most miserable and vilest of men. I have feen the contempt which they had for others; but the complacency and approbation, with which they have contemplated all that they did themselves; -- a way of thinking which Boileau hath finely defcribed in his inimitable fatires; where those haughty tyrants, who would hold the world in subjection, are drawn in their genuine colours. A female philosopher of this class, has been in-

genuous enough to confess, that if wishes were able to commit murder, those who are in possession of the things which they covet, and which they think would make them happy, would be in great danger of losing their lives. Ofray, another of these philofophers, hath attempted to vindicate vice, upon certain principles which he has formed into a system; the foundation of which is, that virtue is an exotic, planted in our hearts with some degree of violence, or, in other words, by the efforts of education; on the contrary, vice may be called an indigenous production, which there flourishes, as in a kindly soil, and favourable to its growth.

A superficial view of human nature, or of our own heart, not entirely ignorant of its duties, must convince us, that man, even in a civilized state, confines

confines his love and his esteem to himself—that he easily discovers the faults of other men—that he thinks them inserior to himself—that the grand and principal scope of all his actions, is the satisfaction of his own desires, whatever they may be; and that he leaves no method untried, by which he may gratify his vanity, or accomplish those ends, which the brutal passions of Barbarians pursue in a more open, undisguised manner.

I have often observed, not without a mixture of pleasantry and concern, the mean and despicable jealousy, which the greatest philosophers and most celebrated poets have had of one another; and how they have endeavoured to tarnish that merit in a rival, which threatened to equal or eclipse their own. With what rancour and invective have they attacked

those who refused them the incense of praise! What indecent railleries have they employed, when they would expose to ridicule, such as were not servile enough to think as they did! After having shot all their empossoned arrows, against those persons whom they hated without a cause, they scrupled not to say, with an air of affected indifference—" I was only in sport."

There are some persons who deny the corruption of human nature; yet these very men, if their pride receives the least mortification, are immediately inflamed with resentment, and treat the supposed aggressor as their mortal enemy.

It is not amongst the champions of vice alone, that we are to look for instances of this depravity of mankind. Turn your eyes, my dear child, unto yourself; examine your own heart—

that heart, filled with fweetness and beneficence; which hath never given the least disquietude to your parents, your husband, or your friends-that heart, fo compassionate, and susceptible of the tenderest and most benevolent fentiments; which rejoices to fee virtue recompensed, though in a stranger, whose affliction also it can footh and mollify.-Compare your thoughts and actions with the perfect and invariable laws of God, and fee how far you are removed from that perfection, which alone can render you acceptable to the Supreme Being. It cannot be envy which induces me thus to degrade a person whom I love; but the facred obligation of truth, impels me to place before your eyes this divine law, that you may the better judge of the imperfection of human actions.

You have been instructed in your younger years, in the truths of the Christian faith; they made a lively impression upon your mind. You alfo apprehend the right which there is in God, of exacting from us a voluntary obedience; and you have a just sense of the importance of eternity, in comparison of which, thrones and sceptres, honours and distinctions, which men fo eagerly grasp at, are but as toys. What are our amusements which we purfue with fuch avidity? and what are the prerogatives which we are fo fond of exercifing over creatures as weak and infirm as ourselves? Ought not a being, who is possessed of an immortal soul, and who, to-morrow, may enter into eternity, for which state he was created -ought he not, to employ the . present day, with every exertion of

his mental powers, to rife above this world; though perhaps the greatest fuperiority which his reason can attain to, will be scarce perceptible in that scale of eminence and dignity, which, at last, reaches to the Deity himself? or ought he to confine his whole attention to fecular concerns, to procure the favour of a man, whom probably he despises in his heart; or to amass wealth, which he must soon leave behind him? And yet do not these things, fo contemptible in themselves, occupy all our days, and employ all our thoughts?

Betwixt the present moment and eternity, we flatter ourselves with a long interval of life; and though it is so short that it may be compared to the twinkling of an eye, yet in our imagination it appears without end; or at least we remove that end to so remote a

distance, that we conceive a greater relish for present joys, and value them at too high a rate. We consider the present as the only true, the only sure, and important happiness: futurity, dark and obscure, hath no charms, no evidence sufficient to determine our will.

It is this trifling estimate, which we make of eternity, that renders us indolent and careless in the great duties which we owe to God-that makes us ungrateful for his favours, deaf to his menaces, negligent of his fervice, cold in our devotions, and untouched with the fufferings of our Saviour. The value which we put upon present enjoyments, attaches our affections to the perishable things of this life, and excites in us an odium against those who would interrupt our pursuits, or rival us in them.

From hence proceed the vain opinion we have of our own merit; the custom of fecretly comparing it with that of other men, and of our acting unjustly in consequence of these partial comparisons; an inward envy at the prospect of advantages which they enjoy, and of which we judge them unworthy; a ridiculous approbation of our own actions and abilities; an ungovernable passion for frivolous amusements; the shameful facrifice of a great part of our time, in the fearch of fleeting, pleafures, which make a man neither better nor wifer; and a petulancy of temper, that will bear no opposition to our defires which we are so eager to gratify, and wait with fuch impatience for the arrival of the happy moment, that time feems to move with leaden feet.

But to close this mortifying detail. We will suppose, that after many victories gained by vice, its superior influence should at last give place to the repeated impressions of divine truth, and its power should be confiderably diminished.-Reslect, then, upon what paffes within you, and you will be obliged to confess, that even in this fituation, things temporal operate upon our minds with more force than things eternal; and that the thoughts of futurity have but too little effect upon our inclinations. We find this imperfection in men, who are yet the least addicted to the practice of vice; its influence is particularly felt in that age, when the passions are in their greatest vigour. How many criminal defires have taken full possession of our hearts, in the course of a short life! how many refolutions

resolutions have we formed for the indulgence of the passions, even those of the most guilty kind, though our reason has convinced us of the shame and indignity of fuch a proceeding! how often have the passions silenced all the remonstrances of reason! how often have they tempted even the best of men, into the commission of the most criminal actions; of which the Psalmist is a memorable instance! Such as we are, however, we must all appear before the tribunal of the perfect Judge! What heart will not tremble, when the faithful register of all our evil thoughts and actions will be opened before us? What must they expect, who, having spent their best days in the service of the pasfions, enfeebled by age, and terrified with the idea of approaching death, relinquished at last their vices, and,

like the prodigal in the gospel, sought an asylum from the frightful reproaches of their own conscience, in the arms of paternal compassion? Will they be rejected by the kindest and most benevolent of Beings? will their sincere repentance be of no avail? or, if they should be received into favour, who will efface the long catalogues of sin from the records of everlasting wisdom?

This question, my dear, is very ancient; it has been asked by the sagest philosophers. Socrates, who considered the study of virtue, as the only employment which deserved the attention of wise men, thus proposes it—How can sinful man make his peace with God? But shall we, weak and short-sighted mortals as we are—shall we presume to fathom the counsels of the Almighty? Socrates confessed

his doubts and uncertainty; and that he was not able to comprehend the determination and judgment of God with respect to sin; or how it will escape the effects of his hatred who is infinitely holy, and of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. He still continued, however, to confider God as a merciful being; and this mercy was to him a fource of confidence.-" I "doubt not, fays he, but God will " fend, at a time when his infinite " wisdom shall see fit, a man instructed " by himself, who shall reveal to the " world this most interesting of all " mysteries - how he will pardon 55 fins ?"

## LETTER III.

Ignorance and scepticism of the most enlightened Heathen philosophers, with regard to the great principles of morality and natural religion. Faint notions of a mediator among the ancient oriental nations; but none among the Greeks and Romans. Christianity could be established only by Divine power. A divine person sent into the world for the instruction of mankind, and the expiation of their sins. The grand doctrines of Christianity, which are familiar to our minds, strange and wonderful to those to whom they are entirely new.

GIVE thanks with me, my child, to the Supreme Judge, who, though he can neither excuse nor approve of any evil actions, averts, however, from his guilty creatures, the punishment which they have incurred. I am consident you understand my meaning; let us therefore praise this holy Being, who, notwithstanding his dislike to sin, hath

found out a way to receive the sinner into favour, to purify him, and to render him capable of enjoying his presence through endless ages.

He hath himself revealed to us this mystery, so incomprehensible to human wisdom; and hath, in reality, accomplished those hopes, which Socrates had conceived from the goodness of God. But this scheme, being fo infinitely great, hath much furpassed all the expectations of that philosopher. The Supreme Being hath manifested his will, by a man endowed with extraordinary gifts and abilities. [I shall have occasion, hereafter, to shew how little we might expect from mere man, towards the reformation of the world.] From what has happened, we may form a conclusion of what would have been the probable effect, if God had fent this embaffy

by one of the fons of men, and entrusted him with the mystery of reconciliation. The Greeks, a people highly civilized, whose natural talents feem to have been much superior to those who lived in climates less favourable, had, notwithstanding all their boafted wifdom, but an imperfect idea of the principal and most fimple truths. The existence of God the Creator—the plainest, and most obvious truth of all-was a subject of doubt and controverfy amongst their men of learning. With respect to the immortality of the foul, the wifest amongst them, it is true, entertained fome rays of hope; but all was dark and obscure; there were no proofs, nor certainty. The famous Confucius appears even to have had no idea of this interesting doctrine; his philofophy is nothing but a fystem of political litical conduct. One fect of these philosophers, it must be confessed, have considered morals in a very favourable point of view; but another party, more sincere, because they spoke from the feelings of their own heart, have placed the sovereign good in voluptuousness; and those principles, in Greece as well as in Rome, were adapted to the general taste.

A future life was, in the opinion of the virtuous Romans, and even of the grave Juvenal, a childish conceit; and in regard to the great point of religion and morals, the philosophers themselves were not able to instruct the people in what manner they should think or act. Men of the greatest integrity among the Heathens, as Cicero for example, whose sincerity appears unimpeachable, looked upon religion as a contrivance of the state,

to which custom had given a kind of prescriptive sanction. The consequence of which was—that the manners of the people, both in Greece and Rome, after the introduction of philosophy amongst them, became, without comparison, more corrupt than they were at a time when they had scarce emerged from barbarism.

If human wisdom had not the power of convincing men of the natural difference betwixt good and evil, and of the existence of a Sovereign Judge—if these two points of doctrine have not been generally received, how much less would it have been possible to persuade men, by reason alone, of the truth of that mystery which they could have no idea of? We find, indeed, that the ancient oriental nations, had some faint notions of a mediator; which were probably

probably derived from the remote traditions of the fons of Noah. These people believed in one God, eternal, immaterial, and infinite; their worship was without images and without temples. But amongst the Greeks and Romans, who were the farthest removed from the immediate defcendants of Noah, whose tradition seems to have been the only fource of those other truths, the knowledge of which has been preferved, we find not the least trace of this only means of reconciling God to man; and indeed, amongst the greatest part of the oriental nations, whatever remains there were of truth, idolatry had almost extinguished.

That it was not in the power of man, destitute of every succour from above, to promulgate and establish the doctrine of redemption, appears very evident, when we reflect on the opposition which Christianity encountered at its commencement; for we are not to confider those men, who were commissioned to announce this doctrine, revealed at first to them, as possessed of natural powers only; the apostles were endued with extraordinary gifts, and therefore were above the common level of mankind: they had feen the Mediator who was to effect this redemption; they had enjoyed the benefit of his conversation; had always attended, and even lived with him. Other persons likewise, whom they had converted to the faith, had been eye-witnesses of the actions of Jesus, and supported the narrations of the apostles, by their own testimony. The ambassadors of the heavenly messenger were armed, if I may fo express myself, with fupernatural

pernatural powers, which evidently confirmed their divine commission. But yet, what resistance did not the pride of man make to the preaching of the cross? What infidelity may we not remark in the most judicious Roman writers, whenever they had occasion to speak of Christ? The truth, we confess, hath at last made its way, and been victorious. But if it had been established by human means only-if the divinity of our Saviour had not been manifested by characters that could not be mistaken, the Christian religion would never have been received by nations, where a system of regular government prevailed.

In order to bring this work to a happy termination, God hath performed more than the wisest men could have required. He hath united,

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though in a manner entirely incomprehensible, his divine perfections to human nature, but in a subject absolutely free from fin. He hath announced to the world the glad tidings of falvation, by this extraordinary envoy, whose character is beyond all comparison. This distinguished personage came from heaven; and whilst he was upon earth, declared that he was fent by God himfelf, with whom he had dwelt before the commencement of time, and with whom he was coeval. He was not only the messenger of this great falvation, which was to be effected by some propitiatory sacrifice; but he was himself to be the victim flain for the atonement of the fins of mankind.

There is something in this mystery so prosound, as to astonish the understanding, and bassle the powers of rea-

fon. A Being eternal, infinite, and incomprehensible, appears to the world in the form of one of its meanest inhabitants; and submits to this indignity for the benefit and advantage of so wretched a creature as man, whom he instructs in all useful doctrines during his continuance upon earth, until he was put to a cruel and ignominious death.

This is the Christian creed. We imbibe it from our infancy; but the ideas which are thereby excited, becoming familiar to us, lose their energy; and yet how strange must they have appeared to those to whom they were entirely new! How incomprehensible is this alliance of the eternal with the finite, of the uncreate with the created, of the government of the whole world with a subjection to pain!

## LETTER IV.

Divine mission of Jesus Christ. In Him were united all those qualities which bespeak the true Ambassador of God. We believe the existence of many things, the manner of whose existence we can neither ascertain nor comprehend. This doctrine illustrated from observations and reasonings on the properties of bodies, or physical existence. Application of it to spiritual subjects.

I Shall not attempt to explain this great mystery; let the relation of it suffice. At a time precisely marked by the ancient prophecies, there appeared a person endued with extraordinary powers; he communicated to men, a doctrine, which he declared he had received from God; and taught them what were the means which God, in his infinite wisdom, had adopted, to expiate their transgress-

sions. This divine person persormed all the conditions to which this pardon was annexed; and, taking upon himself the sins of the world, shed forth his blood, in order to efface them. If it is true, that this messenger or envoy of God hath actually appeared in the world-if it is true, that his words have been faithfully preserved-if it is true, that he hath confirmed his heavenly mission by an infinite number of miracles, and that his doctrine excelled, both in wisdom and purity, all that the united efforts of men have ever been able to difcover-if the fanctity of his life corresponded with the precepts he had delivered; and lastly, if this eminent person hath been equally incapable of deceiving and being deceived, equally exempt from error and falshood, we may then answer this grand question,

How can man make his peace with God? how can guilty mortals wait with confidence the sentence of the Sovereign Judge?-Nothing now remains, but the proof of his appearance. I shall therefore endeavour to enquire, what are the diftinguishing marks which ought to characterise a messenger sent from God; and to shew that they all met in the person of Jesus of Nazareth: for in him were united all those qualities which should evidence the true ambassador of God; from whence we must conclude, that all his words are true. It would be no proof of good fense, to question the veracity of such a person. What man is there who hath at all reflected on the narrow limits of the human understanding, and hath in the least studied nature, but hath had occasion to remark that we are affured, from experience, of the existence

existence of a great number of facts, which are contrary to our speculations? When we could examine the doubtful principles upon which we pretend to decide on the credibility of things, we may eafily perceive how little the objections, which are fuggested to us by the feeble lights by which we are directed in our refearches, should hinder us from believing that which is marked with the impression of truth. In material objects, we are daily obliged to confess, that what appeared to us as contradictory, is however true, and that of necessity; with how much more reafon then may we apply this observation to things which are spiritual. It is from experience, or from the conformity of a great number of events, that we ordinarily deduce the measure of possibility, or the rules by which

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to form our judgment; these are confined within certain limitations, beyond which we cannot penetrate. Who can comprehend, for example, a Being, who hath existed from all eternity, and who is without beginning? Yet the enemies of revelation confess the necessity of such a Being; demonstrative evidence forces from them this confession. Is not this acknowledging, that a thing really exists, which however is repugnant to all our conceptions? And are not the divisibility of bodies, and their motions, amongst those things which are incomprehensible? The last is proved by the evidence of the senses; but yet the understanding forms no clear idea of it; the first is admitted from the proofs of reason, though it has all the appearance of impossibility. This instance hath been often proposed; it

is not the less true, because of its application to our subject. An African hath never had an opportunity of feeing that water was capable of folidity, and of cutting like a piece of metal; an European hath never feen that mercury could be fixed, and become like folid filver. When, therefore, the African concludes, from an infinite number of experiments, the refult of which is always the same, that water will never lose its fluidity; and when an European makes a fimilar conclusion relative to mercury, from the same principle, it is manifest, that they both form erroneous deductions, by reasoning from the constant experience of all men and all times.

And whence is the cause of these errors? A variety of sacts and occurrences pass in review before us; from particular cases we are too apt

to draw a general inference, and conclude, that they must all resemble one another, though perhaps there are many of them which we have not feen.

If then we are liable to error, in regard to the properties of bodies, which, notwithstanding, are subject to the examination of the fenses, and if experience oftentimes obliges us to retract the judgment which we had formed; how much more cautious ought we to be, in pronouncing our opinions on the properties of spirit; or in prefuming to determine on the impossibility of a thing, because we have not proved it, and are not able to comprehend its essence or manner!

All that we would pretend to infer from these reflexions is, that the difficulties which present themselves, in

every kind of truths, though we may not be in a condition to form an absolute determination upon them, should not prevent us from giving them our affent, when once they are sufficiently proved. How little reason then have we to be surprised, if we meet with difficulties in conceiving the manner of the union betwixt God and man; since we have certain proofs, that our Saviour, who was incapable of falshood, hath represented himself as partaking of the Divine Nature?

## LETTER V.

Internal evidence of the Christian Religion neces-Sary, though not alone Sufficient for its confirmation. Digression to Dr. Boerhaave. Humble birth and education of Jesus Christ. The wisdom and purity of his moral precepts. perior excellence of the morality of the gospel to that of the wisest and most virtuous heathens, illustrated from the precepts concerning forgiveness of injuries and mental purity or chastity. A description of the miseries flowing from unlawful love. To direct the views of mankind to eternity, the great object of the doctrines and precepts of Jesus Christ. The sincerity with which our Saviour warned his difciples of the Sufferings which awaited him and themselves also, a proof that he acted not on human principles. A messenger from God an uncommon phenomenon. The proofs of his mission must be more convincing than those with aubich we are contented in the common occurrences of life.

THE excellency and purity of the doctrine of Christ, are not alone sufficient to prove his divinity,

or the intimate union of the Divine with the human nature. But if the doctrines of Christianity were unworthy of God; this circumstance alone would fufficiently evince that God was not their author. However excellent any doctrine may be, its excellence alone will not be a convincing proof that the teacher is divinely inspired, or that the Divinity dwells within him. It is however a necessary preliminary towards the establishment of this truth. We should never regard a man as a teacher fent from God, if his doctrine is not holy, and conformable to the perfections of him, from whom he fays it proceeds. In return, it will give a more favourable idea of him who teaches it; it will shine with no borrowed splendor, and will furnish more ample instructions than ever were communicated by a mortal man.

fince I was the disciple of the immortal Boerhaave; but his image is continually present to my mind. I have always before my eyes the venerable simplicity of that great man, who possessed, in an eminent degree, the talent of persuading. How many times hath he said, when speaking of the precepts of our Saviour—that this divine teacher knew mankind better than Socrates.

But what was Jesus in himself, when we abstract from his person every thing that was supernatural? He was the son of a mechanic, who was the parent of sishermen of no rank in the world. He had no master to instruct him; he had read nothing but the writings of Moses and the prophets, and had received no lessons from the Socrates's, the Plato's, the Confucius's

.Confucius's of the age: yet what was the doctrine taught by this fon of a common mechanic—this man, whofe relations were all of them men of obfeure birth, unimproved by education, and without any tincture of science? That the simple defire of committing a crime, is itself a sin; a truth, which though confidered in the present times as incontestable, and as the neceffary refult of a right conception of the nature of the human mind, was nevertheless, a doctrine entirely new, when taught by Christ. The Jews, it is true, regarded, as unlawful, many things which were confidered also as faults by the wifest heathens; though their notions of their criminality, did not rest upon just foundations. Those things only, in their apprehension, were morally evil, which were prohibited by the law, or which were re-

pugnant to the happiness of society. But they condemned only the action itself; that alone they thought worthy of punishment-a distinction not only abfurd, but in some meafure a felf-contradiction. When a debauched person fills his imagination with obscene pictures, the lewd ideas which he recalls, fail not to stimulate his defires with a degree of violence that he cannot resist. This will be necessarily followed by gratification, unless some external obstacle should prevent him from the commission of a fin which he had internally resolved on.

No dishonourable ideas will ever be formed in the pure soul of a virtuous woman; but if they should obtrude themselves on the mind, and there meet with a favourable reception, she will be disarmed of her modesty,

modesty, and fall an easy prey to the first temptation. It did not escape the observation of our Saviour, that the rejection of any evil thought was the best defence against vice. Every moment of time that is spent in meditations on fin, increases the power of the dangerous object which has possessed our imagination. Anger adds fuel to the flames, which a change of the situation of the body might have extinguished at the beginning. The illustrious Boerhaave has often admired this sentence of our Saviour: Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, bath committed adultery already with her in his heart. This maxim was in reality included in the ancient law against adultery. But mankind, through the blindness of their passions, could not discern it. By this short precept, Christ hath prefcribed F 2

fcribed in the most efficacious manner, the means of preferving us from fin. The first attacks of vice are generally feeble; reason has then some power over the mind; if then, at the very moment that fuch thoughts occur to us as have a tendency to withdraw us from our duty, we shall with all diligence suppress them, and employ our attention on other things, we may avoid the approaching danger, nor fall under the dominion of vice. But on the contrary, if we encourage these ideas, and are fond of contemplating them, they will not fail to entice us into evil.

This law, which subjects even our thoughts to the divine tribunal, is the only means of security in social life. Human justice hath no power over the passions and the desires of the heart; neither will it accomplish the end pro-

posed by the legislator. It will never banish crimes, though it may punish criminals. It is not possible, but that a mind, daily occupied in reflecting on the feductive allurements of voluptuousness, will devote itself to enjoyment as foon as it perceives a fit opportunity of procuring that fatisfaction, the fimple idea of which has afforded fo much pleasure. When we speak of the enjoyments of sense, we mean all the vices without distinction. The tribunals of human justice oppose them only with terror, in cases where they are made manifest by their effects. Is it not easy for a man blinded by his passions, to persuade himself, that he can conceal his faults from the eyes of his fellow creatures? It is not difficult for him, when his desires have obtained the fovereignty, to banish from his mind every idea that

can oppose them. Will he not suppress all thoughts of future punishment, during the time that he fixes his affections upon present pleasures? But the doctrine of Christ is not confined to the cutting off the young fhoots of these venemous plants; it destroys them in the bud, as the only means of preventing their growth. He who hath God always before him; in whom the fear of this tremendous Judge is one prevailing fentiment, and whose judgments are constantly before his eyes, will never attend to the vicious fuggestions of his own heart; he will shut his ears against the voice of those enchanting Syrens; he will not fuffer any impure ideas to defile his imagination; he will not even be exposed to the danger of falling into the last stage of a vice, of which he abhorred the very beginnings.

nings. That the man who confiders fin as the greatest of all evils, and indeed as the only evil, should at once abandon himself to its utmost excesses, is indeed impossible: nor is it unlikely that a man who guards against the first attacks of vice, will be able to elude its power.—But he who begins to fall, has no power to stop his progress; every moment increases his rapidity, till at last he plunges to the very bottom of the precipice.

It was a fatal error which prevailed amongst the Jews as well as Pagans; that we could make satisfaction to God for sins, and procure his kindness, by oblations and presents offered in the temples consecrated to his worship, and by a scrupulous observance of the ceremonial rites prescribed in the law: but these surely could not improve the man, or sanctify his heart.

F 4

Nothing

Nothing contributed more than this perfuasion, to quiet the guilty mind, and to banish from it all fear of the Almighty—that fear which is the beginning of wisdom. If a king, by the facrifice of his fon, could deliver himfelf from extreme danger, we should fee him armed with a poignard against the person of one, that is notwithstanding dear to him, and eagerly spilling that blood, the effusion of which is demanded by the supreme law of felf-preservation. If the building of a facred edifice could expiate treasons and murders, how little would they affect the impious hearts of those who could defray this expence? If a rich finner, by paying double tythes out of his large revenues, could render himself acceptable to God, would he not have the means in his own hands of transgressing at pleasure, and with

with impunity? The expenditure of wealth would not be to them fo great a facrifice, as to part with a favourite vice, which has been the fource of pleasure. How much more agreeable, then, will that religion be, which affords the means of grace, by the obfervance of certain formalities or exterior rites; and obliges not its votaries at the same time, to subdue their criminal appetites, in which they may indulge without depriving themselves of the favour of their judge, whose pardon for past faults they can purchase at so easy a rate! By a purchase, I mean all those outward forms to which a finner has recourse, in order to make his God propitious, without correcting his vices, or reforming his life. The pain to which the fanatic Indian submits, when enclosed in a vessel stuck with sharp pointspious

pious legacies, abstinence from certain meats, a particular kind of drefs, and other formalities of a like kind, are means very inefficacious for fatisfying the justice of an holy and righteous judge. If we read the gospel with the smallest attention, we may observe, that there is no error which is there attacked in more fevere terms, than the fatal fecurity into which a vicious people are lulled, by wicked and artful priefts. Christ, the finisher of our faith, clearly foresaw the baneful effects of this soporiferous poison, and how ineffectual it would render that religion which he had brought from heaven. Nothing is more flattering to men, than the hopes of falvation, without being obliged to offer any violence to their favourite inclinations. The wife and animating precepts of our divine legislator,

gislator, have been scarce sufficient to prevent Christians from falling into this dangerous delusion.

It is not my defign to give you, my daughter, a detail of the morality of the gospel. This task has been performed by others, who are more versed in it than myself. I would only in this place take notice of the forgiveness of injuries, a virtue almost unknown to the Jews; and though it was highly extolled by some of the wifest heathens, yet their practice by no means corresponded with the precept. And here it may not be improper to observe, that we often judge of the actions of Elias, of David, and of other holy men, by the laws of Christ. The forgiveness of injuries is the characteristic of a great mind; we are not unacquainted with it in theory; and we have feen examples of it upon the stage, which we have confidered

confidered as the natural effect of virtuous principles, imbibed in the heart, though unregenerated. But in ancient times, this maxim, so effential to a pure morality, was altogether unknown. This is evident from all the most ancient poets and historians. Are not all the gods and heroes of Homer implacable?—The kindness of David to Saul, his mortal enemy, is the only instance to be met with of this virtuous temper. We find no other example of this divine principle, in those rude times of violence and anarchy.

I cannot quit this subject, without remarking some other excellencies of the morality of Christ—a morality so superior to the prejudices of the vulgar. Ancient nations in general, adored as gods such as had formerly been men, and lived amongst them; they supposed also that their enemies had the

fame kind of local deities. Even the Jews, to whom God had revealed himself in all his majesty and terror, fuffered, notwithstanding, an idea so contrary to his infinite perfection, to enter into their gross minds. The temple-The temple, was a facred expression amongst them; and demonstrated the vain prejudice which prevailed throughout their whole nation -that God was only their God. It was this mistaken opinion, which induced them to reject a falvation that was intended for all mankind; their pride would not permit them to partake of it with others. But Jesus, though born amongst them, though a Jew by birth, clearly proved by his own conduct, that all these natural animosities—all those extraordinary privileges claimed by one fect over another, were destitute of every reafonable

fonable foundation. He refused nor to converse with a woman of Samaria; a nation despised at Jerusalem. He made a discovery of himself to her, in more express terms than he had done to any one before; he eat, and continued for some time, with this woman, whom his countrymen treated with contempt. He inculcated also in a parable, the principle of univerfal charity; by preferring the Samaritan, who had exercised it, to the Jewish priest, who had neglected this very important duty. He hath excluded from falvation, all those who profess his doctrine, but content themselves with a bare profession. He has openly declared, that those who regarded themselves as true believers, and as being the descendants of Abraham, should nevertheless suffer a greater condemnation than was referved

reserved for Tyre and Sidon. Notwithstanding the advantages and prerogatives which were peculiar to the Jews from their birth, and from the writings of the prophets, yet the Saviour of the world expressly forbad them from placing a vain confidence in those considerations, more than in the purity of their religion. He warned them against expecting the approbation of God, because they had rigorously observed all the rites of the ceremonial law. It was not from men that our Saviour had learned a morality so pure and holy; for such is its repugnance to all the emotions of their corrupt hearts, that even to this day, there are many among the difciples of Christ, who presume to call themselves the elect of God, and to condemn all others who are not of their fect or persuasion.

There is yet another feature which marks the excellency of the Christian doctrine; and that is, the purity which it requires in what is called our natural defires; but which are oftentimes too impetuous to be restrained by the laws of religion; I here mean the passion which unites the fexes-a passion which exercises dominion over the most generous and tender hearts. The philosophers both of Greece and China, have confidered this propenfity as necessarily resulting from the frame and constitution of man; they have therefore treated it with much lenity and indulgence; though the abuse of it is not less common, nor less pernicious, than either pride or avarice, which two passions they have attacked with the most powerful arguments, and painted in the blackest colours. Even the wife

wife Socrates could pardon, in some measure, these deviations from virtue, under the notion that they were the effects of a brutal instinct, to which even the best men were subject. It does not appear, that the philosophers thought there was any thing difgraceful in this vice; they rather considered it as a very venial fault in youth. Men of virtue in Greece, in Rome, and in China, even the two Antonini, have not blamed this promiscuous commerce of the sexes in others, and have even indulged it in themselves.

As I am writing to one of the female sex, I am sensible that I ought to treat this subject with the greatest delicacy; it is that consideration which prevents me from representing this vice in its genuine colours; I must therefore consine myself to such a description of it as may not give any offence to modesty. Unlawful love enfeebles all the powers of the foul, diverts it from every thing that is ferious, and gives it a distaste both of moral duty, and of whatever requires a certain degree of labour. It is attended with a long train of embarrassments, troubles, and misfortunes: it destroys the harmony and mutual confidence on which the happiness of the marriage state depends: it involves its unhappy votaries in unnecessary expences, and engages them in habits hurtful to society: it shuts our eyes against the prospect of eternity-awful in its own nature, but rendered more dreadful by the consciousness of a wicked course of life-and more closely rivets our affections to the things of this world, which, after death, cannot follow us. Jesus was born amongst

mongst a people, where polygamy was allowed; where the unlawful commerce of the fexes was countenanced, and where divorces were common: and fo complaifant were the interpreters of the law at that time, that the most trifling causes were sufficient to procure a separation. The Son of a carpenter made his appearance amongst the Jews, at a period when they were thus misled by their teachers. He preached to them the necessity of a more regular life; and of a purity of manners at that time unknown. But this precept of the gospel is familiar to modern times; honourable mention is made of it in all our treatises of morality; it is even introduced into our dramatic writings; and, in our commerce with the world, it is considered, as it were, a common or ordinary duty. But when G 2 Jefus

Jesus entered upon his divine commisfion, he was the only teacher who recommended chastity to men, who required of them conjugal fidelity, who reprobated the opposite vices, and condemned all impurity both in their defires and in their thoughts. From whence then came this law of chaftity and temperance, which no man before had thought of imposing on the world as a duty? It came not from man; it derived not its fource from the hearts in which those very passions that it condemned, had taken root: but we must look up to him, as the author of it, who was instructed by God; who commanded his disciples to be perfect, as our Father which is in heaven is perfect.

All the benefits of the doctrine of Christ seem to concenter in this one point—that eternity is the grand object we should have in view-consequently, that the main business of our lives, should be to prepare for it; and that we should esteem the favour of God, as the only true good. These ideas did not originate in the heart of man; no Socrates had perceived them; they were unknown to the Jews, notwithstanding the bright Luminary destined to enlighten the world, was first to shine upon them.

Agreeably to this fundamental rule, our Saviour condemns in his followers, that care and folicitude which are so incessantly occupied in the affairs of this world. He requires, that we should facrifice all that is dear to us, rather than fubmit to the pollutions of fin. He warns us, that the way of life is narrow and difficult; and that we cannot, without tribulation, enter into

the kingdom of heaven. He has cautioned us to dread the indignation of the Deity, as the only evil which ought to alarm us. The wifest philofophers amongst the heathens knew but little of a life to come; they never spake of it but in very doubtful and ambiguous terms. Their lessons, therefore, had not, upon the heart, that authority which alone can fubdue the will, and which, in our Saviour, was a manifestation of his divine origin. The firm perfuafion of a future life, of the being of a just God, who will reward or punish men according to their works, is the very foul and essence of the Christain religion.

I place, likewise, amongst those things which Jesus Christ could not have derived from human wisdom, the sincerity with which he informed

his disciples of the sufferings that awaited him, and of those which they also would partake of on earth. He omitted no opportunity to remove from their minds, all those temporal hopes which their national prejudices had led them to encourage; that the kingdom of the Messiah would be of this world, and that he would appear in all the splendour of a mighty monarch. That our Saviour's defign was to establish a spiritual monarchy, and that all his actions corresponded with that defign, is another testimony in favour of the Messiah. The artful Mahomet took great care to inform those, whom he was desirous to affociate with himself, for conducting the grand scheme which he had formed, that certain evils would await them, and that certain dangers must be courted. He endeavoured to infuse into

into them a spirit of heroism; otherwise they might have been disgusted with their situation, and he might have been deprived of their support. The disciples of our Saviour were men like ourselves; not the heroes of a stage, in whom the contempt of death is no extraordinary virtue. They feared for their great Leader; they would have perfuaded him to preserve his life; they were not without apprehensions for themselves, and fought their safety by flight, when they perceived danger approaching; they forfook their master, for whom they had the greatest affection, and of whom they had entertained the most exalted notions. These were the men to whom Jesus announced, that they were to fuffer and to die for him. He made this declaration to persons full of the idea of a victorious Messiah;

who had promifed themselves a participation of his future grandeur; and who aspired after the first honours in the new kingdom, which they expected to see established in Sion-erroneous opinions, but fufficiently characteristic of the propensities of human nature. This proceeding, fo fingular in its kind; the fincerity with which he informed his followers of the destiny which awaited them, evidently prove that Jesus acted not after the manner of men, nor like the chief of a party, who procure to themselves partizans by the promise of rewards: it was not his defign to gain disciples by the alluring offers of temporal advantages.

This unexampled candour and integrity, must naturally fix our attention upon the person by whom they were displayed. They discover a more

We have already remarked, that the doctrine of Christ was a great testimony in his favour; and that his wisdom was much superior to that which simple nature was capable of attaining. But I would speak more particularly to the person of this teacher, whose doctrine merits so great admiration. He united in himself all those excellencies which should characterise an heavenly messenger,

and fuch as we may expect in one fent from God, and instructed by him in the truths which he was to promulgate. But in a matter of this consequence, we should not be too hasty in our opinion. We should first consider, whether the design appears to be worthy of God, and whether the instrument employed was answerable to the execution of it; we should therefore examine. his principal actions, the events of his life, the credentials of his divine commission, and whether he was actually fent from heaven into this lower world.

which contributed to the rapidity

## LETTER VI.

The commencement of Christianity. By what means so pure a religion was established in so corrupt a world. The causes that contributed to the rapidity of its progress. The proofs which Christ hath given of his divine mission. Life and character of Jesus Christ.

Ight upon this subject, it will be useful to look back to the commencement of Christianity; and examine by what means its author was able to establish a religion so little calculated to please the world in its then state of depravity. We may at the same time extend our enquiries, by considering what were the causes which contributed to the rapidity of its progress; and what were the proofs which Christ hath given of his divine

divine mission. It is well known, that in the time of Constantine the Great, Christianity was so widely spread, that a council was affembled at Nice, composed of several bishops, that is, of those who had the care of the churches then erected in the principal cities of the empire. After that period, we find all those extenfive provinces from the country of the Parthians as far as Bretagne, filled with Christians. The churches who confessed the name of Jesus, encreased to this aftonishing degree, at a time when very severe edicts had been published against them, and when they groaned under the weight of divers persecutions. A short time before, the artful Dioclesian, who had for an affociate in the empire, the father of the same Constantine whom we have just mentioned, had determined

those who professed the Christian faith; and so highly did he applaud himself on account of his great success, that in order to preserve the memory of this bloody transaction, he caused an inscription to be engraven in marble, which implied—That he bad destroyed the very name of Christian.

If we examine into a more remote period, towards the beginning of the fecond century, about 70 years after the death of our Saviour, we shall find, that the Christians were so numerous, that the eloquent Pliny, a Pagan, and proconful of Bythinia, complained, that in his province the altars were abandoned, and the worship of the gods neglected. Further back, even about 30 years after the death of Christ, the Christians were death of Chr

tian religion was so well known, that it excited the jealoufy as well of the Pagans as of the Jews; they called it a fect odious to the whole world. The Pagans held it in abhorrence, because of its tendency to abolish the worship of the gods which they adored. The Jews were not the less enemies to the Christians, that they sprung from amongst themselves. The cruel Nero laid to their charge the burning of Rome; a crime which he had himself committed, from an extravagant vanity, of which it is impossible to assign the causes. Not long after his death, they formed a numerous fociety; and even in those early times, there were churches founded at Babylon, in Asia Minor, in Palestine, in Greece, in Italy, in Rome, and in almost all the provinces of the empire. It would be destroy-

ing all historical faith, and introducing an absolute pyrrhonism, not to infer from the writings of St. Paul, that under the emperors Nero and Claudius, there were a considerable number of churches in the principal cities, which were under the Roman government; that bishops (now called priests) and deacons, distinguished for their fidelity, presided over these churches; that they affembled for the public worship of Almighty God, and for celebrating the communion, by breaking of bread, according to the precept of our Lord, as a memorial of his death; that they read the scriptures, and explained all the articles of the Christian faith. And to come nearer to that interesting epocha, the death of our Saviour, we find, that not long after this event, there was a church established at Jerusalem,

at Antioch, and in the neighbouring towns. These first churches were founded by the Apostles themselves; whose painful task it was to preach the gospel in all places whithersoever they went. The ordinary fervices of the church, they entrusted to faithful ministers chosen for that purpose. We find also, that in an assembly of the principal disciples of our Saviour, held at Jerusalem, the grand question was disputed, whether the Gentiles were to be subject to the ceremonial law of Moses. Were we to trace the Christian doctrine to its origin, we should see that its promulgation and establishment were entrusted to the twelve disciples of Christ-men destitute of every thing which could attract public regard or confideration; fuch as birth, knowledge, or reputation: yet these were

the persons who published abroad the death—the ignominious death of their master. They accompanied him in all his labours and peregrinations; they were the auditors of his instructive lessons; and being furnished with wisdom which he had communicated to them, they became themselves the teachers of mankind.

Having thus ascended by an historical gradation, I come now to Jesus himself, the author of the Christian religion; who sprung from the royal house of David, and who devoted his whole life to the great work for which he was sent into the world. He taught like one instructed by God. As another proof of his divine origin, he lived without any of those faults and infirmities, to which men are subject. No one could impeach the rectitude of his conduct. His life

was an uninterrupted feries of instruction and example, both equally wife and holy. His enemies, exasperated at the fuccess of his doctrine, exerted their utmost efforts to stop its progress, and depreciate the estimation in which he was held. But neither the Celsuses, the Porphyries, the Julians, nor the Jews of past or modern times, have dared to attack the purity of his morals. The doubts, therefore, of the free-thinkers, whether the virtues ascribed to Jesus were absolutely without blemish, are frivolous and of no avail.

In the whole course of his life, we see no traces of ambition or worldly views; he even resused the thanks of those on whom he had performed miraculous cures, and whose deliverance from their various maladies, impressed them with the highest sense

of gratitude. And when the people, aftonished at the number as well as greatness of his miracles, were desirous of placing him on the throne of David, he, by withdrawing himself, refused this proof of their kindness and esteem. He endeavoured to eradicate from his disciples, all hopes of temporal advantages; and passed his days in voluntary poverty.

To avoid the conversation of men, to whom he appeared a burning and a shining light, he passed his nights in solitude and prayer. The gravity of his discourses, the majestic composure with which they were delivered, evidently marked their divine teacher. He spoke as never man spoke; this was the declaration of those who heard him, notwithstanding their prejudice against his person and doctrine: and to this testimony I cannot withhold

hold my affent, when I compare his discourses with any of those that have been delivered by the most eminent philosophers of Greece and China. He was continually employed in doing good; not out of oftentation, in performing prodigies wonderful and fupernatural, or in fevere acts of juftice for the punishment of offenders. His actions were more useful than brilliant, calculated to administer to the wants of men, and remedy the incurable evils of their nature. I shall not attempt, in this place, to demonstrate the reality of these supernatural works; a more favourable opportunity will offer in the fequel. I shall content myself for the present, with confidering the nature of these miracles, such as the apostles have represented them.

We behold an innocent man, de-H 3 livering livering himself up to the cruelty of his enemies, and when his hour was come, chearfully submitting to the pains of death. If he was an impoftor, what could have been his motive in this proceeding? The accusation that he was one, is fo daring an instance of impiety, that very few of the enemies of revelation have dared to hazard it. Were voluptuousness, riches or honours, the objects of his pursuit - of him, who constantly preached the great duties of religion; and who fuffered some of his disciples to forfake him, because they were terrified with the severity of his precepts, and would continue no longer to be witnesses of his miracles, or to hear those lessons, which, in their opinion, were too pure and holy?

All the actions of our Saviour—his whole conduct—are perfectly con-

sistent,

fiftent, and form, as it were, one entire piece, as might be expected in an ambaffador of God. They all center in one point-eternity is the sublime subject of his discourses. He furely did not leave the celestial habitations of his Father, for the trifling concerns of this life, which, however, are so eagerly courted by men. In every moment of his life-in every action which he performed, he never lost fight of the great object of his mission. The instructing men in the truth, and the devoting himself as a facrifice for their fins, was the important business with which he was charged.

But if he acted from other motives, his conduct was altogether inconfistent and unaccountable; for then there will appear the greatest opposition betwixt the cause and the

effects - betwixt the defign and the means which he employed .-Was he an impostor? Why did he feek for poverty, folitude, and death? Why did he cause some of his followers to leave him, by the terrifying menaces of future evil-by the feverity of his precepts, and by that degree of holiness which he required of them? Was he an enthusiast or a fanatic? This is an idea which the free-thinkers of the present time have been fond of starting. Why then did he not affect a behaviour more eccentric? Why did he fubmit himself, and subject those over whom he had acquired authority by the right of redemption, to the ceremonies of the law? Why did he teach doctrines which no human wisdom could have fuggested, and which no person before him had put in practice? Why did had all his actions a tendency to one constant, invariable design? His whole life was a prelude to his future fufferings; but to them he did not expose himself till the very hour was arrived, in which it was determined that he was to fubmit to death.

In short, all these objections, which the enemies of our faith have made against Christianity-objections that can serve no other purpose than to raife fome doubts in their minds, and which they have employed to defend a bad cause, and discredit revelation, cannot, however, diminish that profound respect, which the life and doctrine of our Saviour must naturally inspire in those who contemplate them with attention. This extraordinary person, so superior to all human calumny, when speaking of himself, boldly said, that he was the

man described in the writings of the prophets, and who had been promised to the world. He assured them, that God had entrusted to him these divine truths, which he was to declare to mankind, whose redemption he was to essect. There were extant a number of books, incontestably more ancient than Jesus, and the reign of Tiberius, all which announce a Prophet, a Saviour enriched with heavenly gifts, and promised by God to his people.

### LETTER VII.

Antiquity and authenticity of the Scriptures. Truth of Christianity proved by prophecy. The Christian religion opposite to the inclinations and passions of human nature.

I T is not, my dear child, my de-fign to run over all the prophecies that have foretold a Messiah, a Prophet, a Redeemer, who was to make fatisfaction for the fins of the world, and restore the kingdom of God. I shall content myself with refering to a few places in the ancient oracles, where the coming of our Saviour is predicted in very express terms.

But I must first surmise, that the antiquity of these books to which I allude, has never been disputed; neither are the objections of any weight

which have been urged against them. Three hundred years before the birth of Christ, all these books were translated into the Greek language at Alexandria; they were then very ancient; but it is sufficient for our purpose to alledge, that Jesus frequently appeals to them as to prophecies much older than himself, and with which the world abounded. Perhaps every one does not know in what manner the religion of the Jews was spread. It appears, from the writings of a fatyrical poet, the cotemporary and favourite of the emperor Augustus, that at Rome, which was the common rendezvous of all nations, and in particular of men of rank and fortune, many persons scrupled to violate the fabbath-day, by any kind of work or labour. All the Jews had their public feminaries, and books of their

Greek.

To this remark we must add, that we are removed some thousands of years from the time in which the books to which I appeal were written. The manners of men in the ages I speak of, their language, their expressions, are very different from those which prevail in the western hemifphere which we inhabit. Many things were easy and intelligible to those people who were of warm and lively imaginations, which we cannot, without great difficulty, comprehend. Custom had given a determinate sense to many of their figures, which appear to us strange and unusual. Their oral tradition served likewise as an explication to divers things, which in the infancy of the arts and sciences

were but seldom written, or set down in very few words.

It is, however, incontestable, that in the early ages, fallen man had the promise of a redeemer. The sage Persians, and the Brachmans, whose writings have of late years been studied, fpoke a long time fince, and with confidence, of the future appearance of a mediator. But what renders this general opinion the more credible, is, that the most ancient of all the prophecies relates to this Redeemer so universally expected; which prophecy is this-that the feed of the woman should bruise the serpent's headthat serpent which had seduced the mother of mankind.

When it was said to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, that in them should all the nations of the earth be blessed,

blessed, it is not possible to interpret this prediction in any other sense than this-that the Saviour of the world should be born of one of their descendants. We cannot, with any degree of reason, apply this prophecy to their posterity, considered in a general view; because they consisted of a people so different from the rest of the world, and with whom they had so little communication, that it is not to be prefumed that so universal a bleffing could be derived from them, and extend its influence over all the nations of the earth. The prophecy concerning Shiloh, which hath been the occasion of so much controversy, and of which fo many explications have been given, may, however, be elucidated from those most ancient predictions, which imply that the Messiah should be born at a time, when

when the sceptre departing from the house of Judah, should fall into the hands of a stranger, nor any longer be held by a person of Jewish extraction.

Moses had very expressly promised the appearance of a prophet, and indeed the only prophet, which would refemble him, more especially in this particular-That God would reveal to bim his will, which he was to communicate to men-in this confifted the peculiar prerogative of Moses, which distinguished him from all those whom God had raifed up in the midst of that nation. As it is my defign to treat of these subjects with as much brevity as possible, I should be drawn into a differtation too copious, were I to take notice of the several places in the plalms, where the coming of some extraordinary person is promifed III INV

" Mighty

promised to mankind; whom David has described in such brilliant colours, that they cannot possibly be applied to a mere man.

Such was the character given by Isaiah of the future Messiah, that it cannot agree with any other person but Jesus. His entire book, though a long one, contains little else but the history of this Messiah that was to come, and of the new church of which he was to be the head. When he describes this extraordinary gift from Heaven, which was to appear in the person of the Redeemer, he speaks of him in a kind of triumph, and with the utmost magnificence of language. — " Unto us a child is " born, unto us a fon is given, and " the government shall be upon his " shoulders; and his name shall be " called Wonderful, Counfellor, the

" Mighty God, the Everlasting Fa-" ther, the Prince of Peace. Of " the increase of his government and " peace, there shall be no end, upon " the throne of David and upon his " kingdom, to order it and to esta-" blish it with judgment and with " justice, from henceforth even for " ever." This prophet expressly foretold the very place of his birth; declaring, that a great light was to rise in Galilee of the Gentiles, for there was Nazareth situated. He also discriminated the family of which he was to be born, and that was of Jesse the father of David. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, which was a kind of an harbinger to the Messiah, was also to prepare for his coming. Mildness was to be the character of his reign; peace was to flourish upon the earth, and of his empire there was

was to be no end. He promised, that in this happy age, the wolf should dwell with the lamb, and the sucking child play on the hole of the asp. He farther speaks of him in these words: " He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor " cause his voice to be heard in the " ftreet. A bruised reed shall he not " break, and the smoaking flax shall " not be quenched: he shall seek " judgment in the earth, and the " ifles shall wait for his law. His " church shall extend as far as the " earth; remote people shall be con-" verted to him, and shall bring to " an end the ungrateful nation of the " Hebrews." And in order to fuppress that worldly temper of the Jews, which induced them to expect a temporal monarch, a king of human race, who should reign with uncontroled power, he has been very careful to describe, in the most pointed and expressive terms, the humble condition in which the Messiah was to appear, and the fufferings which were referved for him; but who would afterwards be exalted to the highest state of dignity. He reprefented him, at the same time, as a person whose exterior form would be humble, and whose appearance would be the meanest amongst the children of men.-" He shall grow before " him, fays Isaiah, as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground; " he hath no form nor comeliness; " and when we fee him, there is no " beauty that we should desire him. " He is despised and rejected of men, " a man of forrows and acquainted " with grief; and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despi-" fed, and we esteemed him not. " Surely " Surely he hath borne our griefs and " carried our forrows; yet we did " esteem him stricken, smitten of "God, and afflicted. But he was " wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the " chastisement of our peace was upon " him, and with his stripes are we " healed. All we like sheep have " gone aftray; we have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord " hath laid on him the iniquity of us " all. He was oppressed and he was " afflicted, yet he opened not his " mouth. He was taken from prison " and from judgment; he was cut " off from the land of the living; he " made his grave with the wicked " and with the rich in his death, be-" cause he had done no violence, nei-" ther was any deceit in his mouth. "Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise " him; I 3

" him; he hath put him to grief, " when thou shalt make his foul an " offering for fin, he shall see his feed, " he shall prolong his days, and the " pleasure of the Lord shall prosper " in his hand. He shall see of the tra-" vail of his foul, and shall be fatis-" fied; by his knowledge shall my " righteous fervant justify many; for " he shall fear their iniquities. There-" fore will I divide him a portion " with the great, and he shall divide " the spoil with the strong, because " he hath poured out his foul unto " death, and he was numbered with " the transgressors; and he bare the " fins of many, and made intercession " for the transgresfors."

Almost all the prophets have predicted the destruction of the Jewish nation, and the establishment of a new kingdom, without comparison more more extensive than that of Judah, and in greatness infinitely superior to it, at the time when it should be governed by the kings descended from David. The style of these predictions is in the oriental manner; and indeed could not be otherwise, to make any impression upon the minds of the inhabitants of those hot climates; where language, for many ages, even before the time of Moses, was always highly figurative, and to whom the profaic, uniform diction of the northern people, appeared insupportably frigid and difgusting.

In many other passages we discern evident traces of the promifed Redeemer. The place of his nativity is mentioned; and notwithstanding the addition of certain circumstances extraneous to him, yet we may plainly discover a person spoken of, whose lineage lineage would be very ancient, whose days would be eternal, and whose coming would exterminate idolatry.

To this fucceeded the famous prophecies of Daniel; which were so clear and accurate, that Porphyry, not being able to refute them, endeavoured to invalidate their divine authority, by infinuating that they were written after the event had happened. The fuspicions of this ancient writer, who has been too fuccessfully followed by the free-thinkers of the present age, may, with equal propriety, be applied in opposition to what we find in the writings of this prophet concerning the kings of Syria and Egypt. All the prophecies which regard the Messiah, were free from every appearance of compulsion—the book of Daniel was translated into the Greek language more than two centuries before

before the coming of Christ; which translation was in the hands both of the Jews and Gentiles.

Daniel, having addressed the Almighty in private prayer, that, out of his abundant goodness, he would pardon the fins of his people, and rebuild Jerusalem, received in a vision this answer-" Seventy weeks are " determined upon thy people, and " upon thy holy city, to finish the " transgression, and to make an end " of fins, and to make reconciliation " for iniquity, and to bring in ever-" lasting righteousness, and to feal " up the vision and prophecy, and " to anoint the most holy. Know, " therefore, and understand, that " from the going forth of the com-" mandment to restore and to build " Jerusalem, unto the Messiah the " prince, shall be seven weeks; and " threefcore

" threefcore and two weeks the streets

" shall be built again, and the wall,

" even in troublesome times. And

" after threescore and two weeks

" shall the Messiah be cut off, but

" not for himself: and the people

" of the prince that shall come, shall

" destroy the city and the fanctuary,

" and the end thereof shall be with

" a flood, and unto the end of the

" war, desolations are determined;

" and he shall confirm the covenant

with many for one week; and in

" the midst of the week he shall

" cause the facrifice and the obla-

" tion to cease; and for the over-

" fpreading of abominations he shall

" make it desolate, even until the

" confummation, and that determin-

" ed shall be poured upon the de-

" folate."

In another place, other events are foretold

foretold by this prophet; the time in which they were to happen is precifely marked; and it was fignified to him, that it was yet at some distance, but that he who was referved for this period, should not enter into his rest till the completion of these days. It was farther intimated, that the end of the world, for this is the fense of the original, was to be reckoned from the time that the daily facrifice should be abolished, and that abomination should be introduced, which was to be the cause of the great desolation that was to follow.

I designedly omit some particular characteristics of the Messiah, which are scattered in the writings of the prophets; more especially those that have a doubtful or ambiguous complexion.—I shall reduce the few materials which I have collected from

the prophecies, to the following obfervations.

In all the ancient books, on whose authenticity we may safely rely, this point of doctrine is constantly and invariably inculcated—That there would appear in the world a person of great dignity, who would bring salvation with him, and would re-establish justice.

This eminent personage is described under different characters. He was to spring from the posterity of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and from one of the descendants of David. He was to assume the prophetic office, and to perform supernatural works.

His power was not to be supported by force or violence; he was to reign by persuasion, by kindness, and benesits. The place of his birth was fixed, and the exact time of it determined. The edict of the king of Persia was the epocha from whence this computation was to be made.

His fufferings are described in a circumstantial manner; and painted in lively and pathetic colours. His death was also positively foretold.

But that which makes the greatest impression upon my mind, are the sollowing particulars—the grandeur and debasement which are blended in this extraordinary person, his divine origin, his mediatorial office, his sufferings, the meanness of his appearance, and the duties he discharged as redeemer of the world. This portrait hath not its original amongst mankind; it never was conceived by the wit of any mortal being. The Jews themselves, who in presence to the

Messiah, to whom in a more particular manner he was to be a Saviour, and who were his disciples and neighbours, could not, however, be persuaded that he was the person described by the prophets. Their fordid minds could form no other idea of a prince of the royal house of David, but as a king, the possessor at throne, a conqueror, and victorious monarch.

The prophets, notwithstanding, had united, in the most positive and express terms, this grandeur and meanness of condition in the character which they had drawn of the Saviour of mankind.

This person, they said, is from all eternity; he will carry with him sufficient proofs that he proceeded from God alone; yet he will be born, will

live in the greatest poverty, will suffer and be put to death.

He will rise from the dead; he will reign for ever; he will shower down his blessings upon all people; he will appease the Supreme Being; he will restore to men that justice which they had lost. He will die, not for himself but for the world; he will be bruised for their offences, he will lay down his life as an oblation for sin.

From the foundation of the world, there hath appeared but one man in whom are united all these characteristics; and this was Jesus of Nazareth, born in Bethlehem, descended from David, always addressed by that name by those who had recourse to him for relief; whom the people would more than once have placed upon the throne; whose parents, in the reign of Domitian, were exposed to great danger

danger because of their son, and who escaped death by reason of their poverty and abject condition.

This Jefus preached his doctrine without noise and tumult; he did nothing but what was good; the rectitude of his conduct was invariably the same, and never was calumninated; he was held in respect during the three first centuries after his coming into the world, in those forrowful times when the religion which he had announced, was condemned by the laws of the Pagans, mortally hated both by them and the Jews, and exposed to the cruelest assaults -when nothing prevented the enemies of the faith from making the strictest researches, to discover any fault with which they might accuse its author-in those times, when a learned sophist, at the head of the first

first university in the world, attacked the Christian doctrine by his writings, and employed all the artifices of the most inveterate persecutors, to exterminate it from the face of the earth-in those times, when a Celsus endeavoured to load it with the foulest reproaches—when a Lucian attempted to expose the Christians to ridicule, by the keenness and severity of his fatire-when the Jews anathematized and deserted them, as apostates from their religion and worship, and exhibited against them a most inveterate animofity, which they imbibed, as it were, in their cradle—in those times fo unfavourable to the Christian cause; no one, however, impeached the innocence of its divine Author -no one attacked the integrity and fimplicity of his first disciples. He faid of himself, and this indeed was

the substance of all his discourses, and of those of his apostles, that he came into the world to fuffer for the fins of men. In conformity to this defign, he refigned himself into the hands of his enemies: he received, as a disciple, one who, under the semblance of friendship, betrayed him; whose perfidy and intended guilt were however perfectly known to him. His last discourses were an intercesfion in favour of his deluded people, and his last words were a declaration, that he had accomplished his task.

By his death, the glorious promises of the prophets obtained their full accomplishment. An immense kingdom extended itself over all parts of the earth, and sprung, as it were, from his blood. The Gentiles, in great numbers, embraced the Christian

tian faith; the profession of which, notwithstanding, exposed them to almost inevitable death. Their manners were reformed; and an universal charity was introduced into the hearts of those, who before had hated all nations, except themselves. Chastity fucceeded to that profligacy and impurity, with which their very temples were defiled. Freedom was given to the flaves; and the world became one family of brethren, united by fimilar fentiments.

This character, which was too fublime for the reason of man to imagine or conceive, was perfectly realized in Christ; in whom we may discern all those features which are so clearly marked by the ancient prophets.

He whom God only could defcribe by his fervants, fo many ages before his coming, appeared at last with true greatness-a greatness re-

fulting

fulting from the immense benefits of the sacrifice of himself, which no man could foresee, because no man was capable of it.

The character of so divine a person, destined, however, to punishment, was never imagined by the wisest of men; and when the original was actually seen, it was to the Jews a stubling block, and to the Greeks soolishness.

Since the first converts amongst the most enlightened nations of the East, judged it necessary, in pursuance of the design they had in view, to conceal from their disciples the mean appearance of the mediator or redeemer whom they preached, would Isaiah, if he had been influenced by the same prudential motives, have drawn a picture, which was without resemblance, either in human events,

or in any ideas which had been conceived by man? Could there be found a person so impious as to assume the character of the Saviour of the world; a character of great utility to mankind, but which could not fail to bring upon him who personated it, if he would literally accomplish the prophecies, a long train of labours and sufferings, and at last a shameful death?

It is eafy to be seen, from an examination of the actions of our Saviour, that no impostor could possibly, by any artifice, realize in his own person, all those circumstances so particularly enumerated by the prophets; these could only be completely verified by him, who was the true archetype of the picture delineated. He must be born of a certain family, and of the blood of David.—Beth-

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lehem

lehem must be the place of his birth, and this light must first shine in Galilee. The time of his coming and his oblation had been fixed; the manner in which he must be interred, was particularly described; after his death the facrifice was to cease; the enfigns of the Romans, ornamented with the images of their false gods, were to be displayed in a place where they ought never to have appeared; he was himfelf to live in poverty, and to shed his blood for the fins of men; but his spiritual kingdom was to be infinite, as well in extent as duration. It was therefore requisite that the Mesfiah should accomplish in his own person, all those predictions of the prophets, if he would be recognized as the person whom Israel, for so many ages, had expected.

It had been impossible for a mere

human being, without the affistance of God, to have distinguished himself by all those characteristics, which were necessary to appear in the Messiah. Add to this, the time of his birth, his genealogy, the great effects produced from causes so trivial, the prodigious success which attended his ministry, though the time was so short, and the country so despised, in which he was employed, in teaching a doctrine that spread itself into all places, and has been perpetuated through every fucceeding age.

There is nothing which fo much distinguishes the Christian religion, as its opposition to the passions and inclinations of human nature. The example of its great founder is unprecedented. Where shall we find a man, who like him, devoted his whole life to labour; preferred a state

of poverty and contempt; exposed himself to continual dangers, without expecting any other fruit, than inevitable death?

It evidently appears, then, that no human address or artifice could invest a person with the distinguishing characters of the Messiah; and even if it had been in the power of any man to have assumed them, it would have been a proof of prudence and discretion to have declined the arduous task; since it could procure him nothing but sufferings and distress.

#### LETTER VIII.

Causes and effects of the zeal and the courage of the Apostles. Nature and force of the proof of Christianity, from Miracles. The Miracles of our Saviour, not only evidences of his Divine Power, but also of his wisdom, goodness, and disinterestedness.

The wonderful effects which followed the preaching of the gospel? Must we ascribe them to chance? Was it in the power of twelve perfons, of mean condition, their minds unenlightened by science, and not conversant with the great mysteries of revelation—was it in the power of such persons to reform the world? These consequences slowed from a firm persuasion, that Jesus was the person foretold by the prophets. This well-

well-grounded conviction was the only weapon that rendered them victorious, in the dangers and perfecutions which they encountered: it was this which placed them above the corrupt defires of human nature, the love of ourfelves, and the prejudices of birth and education. The zeal which was kindled in the disciples of our Saviour, communicated itself to a great number of persons, who were soon enflamed with the same affections. But what was it which produced in them this perfect conviction, that Jesus was the Messiah? They had been witnesses to the purity of his manners, and the innocency of his life; they perceived that his doctrine was, in all respects, worthy of God; they clearly discerned in him, all the lineaments and characters of the promised Messiah; and, in short, they had

had ocular demonstration of his miracles. Without having recourse to all these considerations, which are powerful motives of belief, and of themfelves capable of producing conviction, let us consider, that these men, who were naturally timid; whose inclinations were attached to the things of this world; who were possessed neither of great natural nor acquired abilities, would hardly have formed of themselves so great an enterprize, as that of subjecting the world to a man who had been crucified. Much less would their instructions have produced fuch instantaneous effects, or operated fo powerfully upon the minds of fo many thousands of people.

Amongst the causes which wrought conviction in the minds of the apostles, I mentioned the miracles of our Saviour. It will therefore be proper,

of them, because they afford a solid proof in support of Christianity, sufficient to produce the affent of reasonable men. And I think this discussion the more necessary, as our modern free-thinkers have been pleased to say, that the doctrine of Jesus Christ is indeed worthy of respect; but that the miracles on which we would support it, are the only cause which prevents them from considering the author as a divine person.

An uninterrupted feries of events, all relating to the same object, are sufficient to persuade men, accustomed to resection; and who can trace the consequences of things. The exact resemblance which we remarked betwixt Jesus Christ and the Messiah promised by the prophets, must unavoidably produce conviction in those who

who have distinctly examined their fuccessive predictions, and compared them with the history of the life of our Saviour. But all men are not capable of making these enquiries. Those, however, who are placed in the lowest ranks of society, are as much the objects of the Almighty's paternal regard, as those who are dressed in purple, or seated on a throne, who, like the rest of mankind, are subject to mortality. I will even venture to affirm, that a truth, proved by a long train of confequences, however well connected, will not operate, with fufficient efficacy, in the enlightened minds of those who are capable of perceiving this connexion; it makes no impression on their senses; it is a light, but not a fire.

The proofs, therefore, of the di-

vine mission of our Saviour, ought to be simple and obvious; so that the more ignorant part of mankind may be sensible of their force-be convinced and perfuaded by them, though they have not the advantage of learning, or great natural penetration. Yet these grounds of belief must be so solid, so conformable to the spirit of the ancient prophecies, and fo perfectly confonant with the known attributes of God, that they must be capable of fatisfying more cultivated minds, and fuch as have been accustomed to reflection.

It rested with the Divine Goodness, to adopt such means as might not only procure the ready acquiescence of faith, but also all due respect to him, who was the minister chosen for the accomplishment of his designs. The person deputed to persorm this business,

business, was to bring with him such infallible tokens of a divine mission, as could not be produced, but by one really fent from God. And what proof is there more effectual than the power of working miracles? they operate immediately upon the fenses. In order to feel their force, there is no need of laborious investigation, or profound knowledge. The impression they make must necessarily be the same with that which is produced by the evidence of sense. If I see before my eyes an object that is red, I cannot be mistaken in regard to its colour; with no less certainty am I convinced, that a human body is actually dead, after it hath been four days in the grave, and exhaled those putrid effluvia which proceed from corruption. But when this dead body, at the command of another mani

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rises from the grave, and is endued with the same powers of motion that it poffessed before; when, to the appearances of putrefaction succeed all the ordinary figns of life; when the dead body walks about, speaks, and, in my presence, for a considerable space of time, performs all the usual functions of vitality, every man furely, who is not destitute of common sense, must infer, with the utmost confidence, that the dead body, by a vifible though a supernatural effect of the omnipotence of God, hath been restored to life.

The proof, which refults from miracles, is equally intelligible and convincing to all men. Who, that fees before his eyes the prefence of the Divinity in the operation of a miracle, can remain unmoved with admiration, or withhold that profound respect which

which is due to fo powerful a Being? This manner of perfuasion is more animated than all the demonstrations of philosophy: it infinuates itself, through the medium of the fenses, into the mind, where it begets an humble reverence of that God, who thus condescends to reveal himself to mortals. It was this divine testimony, that inclined many thousands of people, unenlightened by knowledge, to proclaim Jesus their king; who, according to their ideas, was the Messiah of whom the prophets had spoken. It was this that induced the apostles to fubmit with chearfulness to death: they faw the power of God displayed in him; they regarded his doctrine as the voice of God, who spake to them by the miracles which Jesus wrought. They placed an absolute confidence in the promises of eternal life;

life; and they judged them perfectly fure, because they were made by a man in whom God vifibly dwelt. It is to this cause we must ascribe the conversion of St. Paul, and that ardent zeal with which he was afterwards actuated-a man well versed in all the learning of the Jews, but who had been for a long time incredulous. He travelled through all the provinces of the empire, and with an unshaken intrepidity, even in chains and in death, affirmed that Jesus was the Son of God. It was not a profound study of the prophets, or an attentive comparison of the history of Christ with the ancient prophecies, that produced this change; his conversion was the fudden effect of a miracle. These very prophets, of whom we speak, have represented miracles as a fign which would characterise the true Messiah.

Messiah. - " The blind, say they, " shall see, the lame shall walk, when " the doctrine of falvation shall be " announced to the miserable." Our Saviour oftentimes appealed to these miracles, as a proof that he was fent from God. " If, fays he, you " believe me, believe the works " which I do." He declared that he should consider those men as innocent and blameless, who refused their affent to the truth of his doctrine, if they had not an opportunity of feeing those works, which no other man had done; and his disciples were not afraid to declare openly to the people, and in the great affembly of the nation, that Jesus had made himself known by his miracles.

The nature of the miracles which he was to perform, had been also foretold. His prodigies were not to

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be of that marvellous kind, which would only ferve to gratify vanity. He caused neither mountains nor temples to be removed from their places. They were neither acts of feverity nor punishment. His miracles were without oftentation, and benevolent in their effects; fuch as Isaiah had predicted for several ages past. Maladies, before incurable, disappeared at his command; the eyes of the blind were opened, the lame walked; children deprived of life, were restored to their disconfolate parents. His disciples, when angry, breathed nothing but revenge; but he would not, at their folicitation, call down fire from heaven upon a town whose inhabitants had treated him with contempt. The Pharisees and Sadducees, who were professed enemies to every religion, experienced

affifted

not the avenging power of him whom they had blasphemed. These miracles were a proof of his modesty as well as his humanity. He required no recompence for the favours he had conferred; he would scarcely permit those persons whom he had relieved from diftress, to offer him the merited tribute of thanksgiving. He refused to hear himself praised by those whom he had miraculously delivered from their infirmities; and when the people were defirous to proclaim him their king, he prevented them by a fpeedy retreat.

I have already remarked in the conduct of this divine person, that he was particularly careful to cause no division in the Jewish church. He did not place himself at the head of a sect; he observed the religious ceremonies which were then in use; he

affisted at their solemn festivals; and was present at the celebration of several of the passovers. He took care to send to the chief priests a leper whom he had healed, that he might obtain permission from them, according to the law of Moses, to enter again into society, from which his former disorder had excluded him. He enveloped, with great address, his divine lessons in the obscurity of parables, that the common people, who were his auditors, might not easily penetrate into their meaning; and he threw a shade over the brightness of those truths which he had brought from heaven to earth, at a time when they might have been the cause of much trouble and diffurbance.

That wisdom, which knew the affairs of the world, and was well acquainted with times and seasons, never availed itself of these circumstances for any temporal advantage. This conduct, therefore, has prevented the enemies of revelation from starting, as an objection, that the Redeemer of mankind acted from human or interested views.

But the miracles which he wrought, were fully fufficient to accomplish his defigns; they were numerous, and were infinitely superior to all the powers of man; in them the finger of God was evidently discovered. Many were performed in public, and before the eyes of great multitudes. Lazarus was raised from the dead, in the presence of his enemies. Jesus knew that the time of his death was approaching; he therefore made choice of this opportunity, to give an extraordinary proof of the divinity by which he acted, notwithstanding

the meanness of his appearance. For this end he purposely absented himself; he went not to Lazarus till there were fufficient demonstrations of the total extinction of life; not till four days had elapsed since he died--fufficient time for putrefaction in fo hot a climate—that there might not be the shadow of a doubt respecting the reality of his death. When he came, he found the dead body wrapped in cloaths used at interments, and his face covered. Jesus called him in the name of God his Father; and this voice restored Lazarus to life. He arose; and, it is generally thought, lived a long time after his resurrection; because the Jewish hierarchy had formed the horrid defign of putting him to death, that he might not remain a living witness of the supernatural power of Christ.

This miracle was performed in the presence of his enemies, and of many Jews, who assisted at the event, and who informed the Pharisees of the fact to which they had been eyewitnesses, and which, they confessed, exceeded the power of man. But the greatness and reality of this miraculous work was the cause of hastening the death of him who had performed it.

#### LETTER IX.

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ, the great evidence of the truth of the Christian religion. An appeal constantly made to this sact by the Apostles and first Christians. The nature, necessity, and propriety of the proof of our Saviour's divine mission, by his resurrection. The conduct of his disciples inexplicable upon human views or motives. The enthusiasm of the disciples of Mahomet, and of the martyrs of Japan accounted for and compared with the heroic courage and zeal of the Christian apostles and martyrs. The true source of the holy zeal that animated the disciples of Jesus Christ.

HE Refurrection of Christ himself, is another striking event, designed, in a more particular manner, to convince the world that he was the Son of God. The opposite characters of debasement and dignity were never found united in one perfon, but in the Redeemer of the world. Jesus of Nazareth, during the whole course of his life, appeared in a state of humiliation; and of this humiliation, his death was at once the confummation and the greatest excess. As he appeared in this humble state, so, in order to fulfill the predictions of the prophets, and to correspond exactly to the description they had given of the Messiah, it was necessary that he should appear in a state of exaltation. If he had remained in the grave, the attributes of the Divinity which were to dwell with the Messiah, could not have been recognized in him; we could not have discerned those prerogatives which were to distinguish him from other mortals; there would have been no refemblance in the portrait which the prophets had drawn

drawn of the Saviour, who was to come.

We may remark, that in all the discourses of the apostles, addressed either to the Jewish people, to the Sanhedrim, or even to the Gentiles, the refurrection of our Saviour was the great argument used by them to demonstrate the Divinity of their master. For the inhabitants of Athens, who were not much versed in matters of religion, imagined, after they had heard St. Paul use this proof, that the refurrection was the goddess, the worship of whom he wanted to introduce. Christ himself often referred the incredulous Jews to the proof which his refurrection would furnish, when they required of him a fign from Heaven to confirm his divine mission. Nay farther, the promise

mise which he had made of his refurrection, was accommodated afterwards not without some violence to their prejudices.

Every man who would establish his faith upon reasonable foundations, ought to weigh this proof with attention; and I would earnestly recommend to him the confideration of it. Truth loses nothing by being closely examined. The proof which we have adduced, will ferve to confirm the divinity of our Saviour. The Jewish priests had used all imaginable precaution to prevent the body of Jesus from being stolen; for they were well acquainted with the promise which he had made in fuch express and pofitive terms, that he would rife again. It is well known, that the Roman discipline was very severe and exact. A detachment of foldiers of that nation,

tion, were appointed to watch the door of the sepulchre, where the dead body was laid, wrapped in funeral cloaths, according to the custom of the Jews, with a preparation of aromatic spices, to prevent the disagreeable effects of the cadaverous effluvia. At the entrance was placed a large stone, and to this stone was affixed the seal of the magistrate. In spite of all these precautions, the dead body was gone. We can frame no other excuse for the guards than this, that they slept, and that the disciples of Jesus, attentive to every thing which passed, took that opportunity of carrying the dead body away. This apology exposed the foldiers to a fevere punishment; but they were flattered with the hopes that the martial law would, in their case, be disarmed of its rigour, by the presents which should

should be made to those whose duty it was to carry it into execution.

Four days after the refurrection of our Saviour, the disciples being asfembled together, were fummoned to appear before the Sanhedrim. They spoke also to the people in the temple. Their first and constant defence was this-That Jesus, whom they had crucified through their blindness and obstinacy, was risen from the dead. So extraordinary a miracle defeated all the defigns of the Jewish council, and rendered their efforts of no avail. This defence, therefore, of the apoftles, it was their interest to discredit; for if Christ was rifen, they could no longer consider his death as an event which must annihilate his new doctrines; this would rather be alledged as a convincing proof of the divinity of his mission; it would be one of

the characteristics by which he would be known; and his refurrection would be another. The Messiah could not be more distinguishable, than by these circumstances—that after he had fuffered for our offences, he rose again, and was raised by God to partake of his eternal glory. But the means employed by the council, (who were by no means destitute of sagacity) were but badly calculated to accomplish the ends they proposed: none of their actions seemed to be dictated by common prudence. They did not publicly and folemnly accuse the apostles of propagating a falshood; they did not examine closely and judicially the depositions of the soldiers; they did not invite the people to fee the dead body of Jesus; which, if risen, must have appeared with a countenance more than human, but if he was an impostor, must have been still

in the grave. The council perceived the boldness and intrepidity of the apostles; they saw the attachment of the people to them; and that the number of those who acknowledged him for the Messiah, was much greater than when he was alive, and displayed his miracles amongst them. Their honour also was at stake; they, therefore, used every method in their power, to exculpate themselves from the accusation that they had put to death an innocent man. For if they could not disprove the reality of the refurrection, it was no longer one of the common people whom they had unjustly accused, but it was the Son of God, and the Saviour of Ifrael, whom they had murdered.

The principal men amongst the Jews could not but see, that the new converts to Christianity, whose num-

bers daily increased, had abandoned the religion of the murderers of a master, whom they had esteemed and honoured as a divine person; and had formed themselves into a powerful sect, who despised their dignity, and despoiled them of the privileges which they had enjoyed, and of the title they had assumed, of heads and rulers of the church.

It would have been an eafy matter for them to have justified themselves, if the resurrection of our Saviour had not been real. There were living witnesses, to whom they might have appealed in respect to the part they bore in the transaction; as they were present, and were able to have given an accurate and unsophisticated relation of what they saw. The large stone which had been rolled to the door of the sepulchre, must have been sufficient

fufficient to have secured the dead body in the place where it had been laid. There were also witnesses of the actions of Jesus then living, to whom they might have appealed for information; and if the miracles reported of him had been false, they might easily have been detected.

None of these prudential precautions, however, were taken. The chief priests enjoined the apostles silence; this was the only means of justification adopted by the council. But the apostles chose rather to obey God than man. They continued to preach, and to affirm, that God had raised from the dead that Jesus whom they had crucisied, and had taken him up into heaven.

Whence were the apostles animated with so great courage? They who had before discovered such marks of M 2 timidity.

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timidity, as to betake themselves to a shameful flight when the enemies of their master came to apprehend him? -when the most resolute amongst them, at the approach of danger, had the weakness to deny that he knew this Galilean? In this time of peril, they betrayed a cowardice which can hardly be excused; they forfook that master whose miracles they had seen, whose doctrine, having for a long time heard, they esteemed as divine, and whose power, so superior to the laws of nature, they had fo often admired.

After his death, his disciples would have denied him, if that death had not been followed by a resurrection. Without this last circumstance, no credit would have been given to what he had said. His disciples would no longer have cherished the hopes of a second

fecond and glorious appearance of their master. They would no longer have expected a part, either of his kingdom, or of the falvation he was to procure for his people, or of those bleffings which he was to dispense. They must have been obliged, with forrow and confusion, to confess, that they had been deceived, and to return to their former occupation of fishing. Such is the conduct which they must have been determined to follow, by the common dispositions and feelings of human nature. And by this conduct they might naturally hope to escape that punishment they had reafon to apprehend, for conceiving the horrid design of publishing a falshood, which they perfectly knew to be fuch. For what could be more abfurd or contrary to common fense, than to expose one's life, in order to persuade the M 3

God, whose death witnessed the contrary?—who usurped the title of Messiah, and suffered himself to be honoured as such, though it must be necessarily known that he was not the promised Saviour?

The mortification alone of being fo cruelly duped, must have been sufficient to have caused in the minds of the apostles, a detestation of the memory of him whom they had regarded as the Son of God-who had imposed himself on them as the promised Messiah, but who was not the person he pretended to be. They had, besides, other more urgent motives to induce them to withdraw themselves from him, or to deny that they had been his disciples. Their master was delivered up to the Jewish council without making any resistance-was reduced

reduced to the lowest state of ignominy, and fuffered a shameful death. What could the disciples expect, but cruel persecutions—the hatred of those whom their master could not oppose, and, in a word, misery and misfortunes of the worst kind? It appears, that in the whole course of their life, they fought no temporal recompence: and how could they expect it, when they persevered in their defign of supporting an imposture? The fecular arm was against them; and they must have been convinced in their own conscience, that they were labouring for the glory of a man, whom the world knew, and they themselves could not but confess, was not he who was promised. By what means could they have gained profelytes to a man, who fo little merited efteem and respect?

M 4

Certain

Certain it is, that their actions were different from the ordinary conduct of mankind; neither did they feem to be directed by those passions and inclinations which have reigned in all hearts, in all times, and in all countries .-This Jesus, whom you have crucified, is the Son of David, the anointed of the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel. This they boldly dared to affert, in the midst of priests armed with church authority—in the midst of a multitude of people who had feen Jesus expire, and who believed as a certain truth, for which they had the testimony of their own eyes, that he was only mere man. Whence proceeded that heroic firmness which never abandoned the ministers of our Saviour, and which, in the midst of a shower of stones, shone with triumphant brightness in the countenance of St. Stephen? Whence that undaunted intrepidity, which the first preachers of the gospel carried with them before the tribunal of emperors, before kings, amongst the most enlightened nations, and in all parts of the world? which spirit of fortitude they preserved, without diminution, for many years, even to the end of their ministry.

I am aware, that, in all times, men of a warm temperament, and zealously attached to any favourite doctrine, have maintained it with invincible courage, and have laid down their lives in support of it, though the doctrine was, in fact, erroneous. This idea occurred to me, from considering the conduct of the followers of Mahomet; who, inflamed with zeal, have spread his doctrine from place to place, not intimidated

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timidated by the prospect of death, to which they were exposed in the accomplishment of their grand design.

To these I might add the martyrs of Japan, who suffered death with great resolution, for a kind of Christianity that they professed, which, at least amongst the greatest part of them, may be called prejudice or infatuation; because none of those numerous believers knew the scriptures, though they seemed to die in defence of a doctrine which was there taught.

This enthusiasm, I must confess, is no proof of the truth of those dogmas, for which their advocates are inspired with such ardent zeal. Though it must be allowed, that the doctrines for which the martyrs already mentioned so earnestly contended, were not unmixed with truth; and it was principally these truths which kindled

that zeal which rendered so conspicuous the disciples of Mahomet, as well as the inhabitants of Japan. The former acknowledged the unity of God, in opposition to the polytheism of the heathens; and though the doctrines they received were human, they had, however, the effect of disposing them to reverence the true Saviour.

But there is an effential difference betwixt this kind of martyrs and those who, at the price of their blood, rendered themselves a testimony of the divinity of Christ. The Japanese suffered for a system which was taught him, but of the truth of which he had no other proof, than the considence which he placed in his instructors; who were not, however, witnesses of the sacts which they maintained. His death hath not proved

proved that Jesus Christ was crucified, more than a thousand years before, in Palestine, and that he was truly the Saviour of the world. The Japanese had been only informed of these things; he had not feen them; he had not compared the writings of the prophets with those of the apostles, neither had he weighed the fact refulting from it, that Jesus was of a truth the Saviour of men. This he had been fimply told, and upon no other evidence he believed it; and as it is the custom of that people never to temporize on account of any violence employed against them, this but the more confirmed him in his persuasion; because his persecutors, instead of endeavouring to convince him by argument, attempted to terrify him by menaces and punishments.

The Japanese might be a man of honour,

honour, though his faith might be erroneous.-With respect to the apostles of our Saviour, one of these two things must be admitted; either that their testimony is true, or that they were remarkable impostors. If the miracles attributed to Jesus were not really done; if it is not true that he rose again; if, however, the apostles affirmed these two things, they must then be regarded as deceivers and false teachers, who spoke of facts which they affirm to have feen, though they were not susceptible of illusion, nor were their fenses liable to be imposed upon. They declared, that they had feen a dead man raifed from the grave; had converfed with their master several days after he was risen; had feen him many times after he had been three days in the sepulchre; had touched him, had heard him speak,

had received his orders and instructions, and were with him at the very time when he ascended into heaven. All these circumstances were subject to the examination of the senses; they could therefore judge of them with certainty. If then the apostles had not feen these things, or any resemblance of them, they cannot be confidered as enthusiasts actuated with a good design. They were, I again repeat it, detestable impostors, who deserve the contempt of mankind, for prefuming to affert as a truth, what they were well convinced was false.

But to return to the question, which I have already proposed. Whence proceeded that heroic courage, which stimulated men so timorous, so much attached to the present life and its advantages, to announce Jesus as the Saviour of the world; and even in

the presence of his murderers, after that his death had positively decided this point fo much to his difadvantage, and had feemingly removed every appearance of doubt? We can assign no other reason but this-They had actually feen him before his death perform many miracles, and after his death rife again. The power of God, which extends even to the dead, shone so conspicuously in Christ, that they could not but perceive in him all the traces of the promised Messiah. His apostles were perfectly satisfied, from the testimony of their own senses, and the conviction of their own minds, that Jesus was the Son of God. They could not therefore disavow it, or deny what they were well perfuaded was true. This it was which made them feek death with a kind of impatience, that they might

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might meet their benevolent master, and receive from him the recompense of their labours. Neither the hatred which they incurred, the persecution which they suffered, nor death itself, could separate them from him whom they esteemed as divine.

The frequent conversations which they had with him, after his refurrection, diffipated all their doubts, and wrought in the minds of the apostles, a persuasion so perfect and entire, that Thomas addressed himfelf in terms which none of the rest had yet employed -My Lord and my God! This would have been faying too much to a man, if he had not triumphed over death. But Christ suffered him to make use of this language, even praised him for it, and considered it as an instance of his faith, that he had called him not only God, but

his

his God. This remark will ferve as an answer to the inference drawn by those persons, who have collected from the gospel, all the passages where Jesus Christ, during the time of his humiliation, appears to be inferior to the Father.

At present there is evidently a perfect connexion in the history which the apostles have given of Christ. They announce to the world the glory and elevation of the promifed Messiah, whom they had seen from the beginning, and in every stage of his life. He was not only a teacher fent from God, but one who performed fuch works as were contrary to the ordinary course of nature. These two circumstances had no other effect upon the apostles at first, than to convince them that he was the prophet which God had promifed to

his people. But at the time of his fufferings, and of his death, their faith was strangely staggered. "We " hoped, faid they, forrowfully, that " this was He who should have re-" established the kingdom of Israel." -At this moment of fear and apprehension, Christ appeared again alive. This refurrection removed every doubt. They faw in him the glory of an uncreated being; they acknowledged him to be their God; they lived for him, and for him they confented to die. This conviction, which God, who had appeared to them, and whom they had feen, had operated in their minds; this irreliftible conviction, I fay, conduced also to the conversion of the world.

The Jews, who, by their feditious humours, had obliged the judge to pass sentence of condemnation against Jesus—

Jesus-those Jews, who, at the time of his death, infulted the apostles with the bitterest railleries, fell at his feet a few days afterwards, and at the feet of those men whom they had so much despised. They entreated the disciples to make known to them the way of eternal life. - " Men and " brethren, faid they, what shall we " do to be faved?"-The important instructions they received on this occasion, were not delivered from the feat of Moses; nor by men authorized to teach, as being the fuccessors of the prophets; nor by a Gamaliel, highly respected and esteemed as the oracle of the people; but by the obfcure followers of Christ, who had attended him the whole time of his ministry, had learned his doctrines, and been enlightened by his divine leffons.

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Here then is displayed the power of that conviction, which, according to the promise of our Saviour, inspired a small number of laymen whose minds had never been cultivated by education, with the most exalted fortitude. It was this which gave them fo eminent a superiority over the philosophers and great personages of that age; and at last confounded and put to filence every effort of human wisdom. This same spirit appeared afterwards, in a most remarkable manner in St. Paul. The zeal with which he was enflamed enabled him to make some impression upon a Pagan king, of a debauched and vicious life; who, when he had heard him, and was moved by the thunder of his eloquence, ascribed it to a deprivation of reason.

It was this conviction which pro-

duced in the disciples of Jesus, a contempt of death; and, under the daily expectation of martyrdom, enabled them to contemplate their approaching end with chearfulnefs and joy. This effect may be also ascribed to the longing hope and defire they entertained of being with Christ, whose fanctity they had feen, and whose miracles they had admired. If the greatness which they attributed to him, was an imposition, or the consequence of a disordered imagination, what could be their expectations from men in dying for him? Would not the dread of punishment have induced them to put off the mask? Could they, in the midst of that astonishment and repentance which now filled their troubled minds, have beheld, without fear, the preparations for a death which they justly merited,

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by prefuming to publish false miracles, in order to impose on the world? Yet their writings breathe nothing but constancy, resolution, and tranquility, at the very time when they were surrounded by the horrors of death. They spoke of their departure, and of other circumstances relative to their approaching end, with a calmness and serenity of soul, not to be changed by any impending danger; they triumphed in the midst of the severest tortures.

### LETTER X.

The truth of Christianity proved by miracles. That the apostles possessed the power of working miracles, admitted by free-thinkers, and even by Middleton himself. The absurdity of the contrary Supposition demonstrated from the epistles of the apostles to the first Christians. The reformation of religion, in these latter ages, from the errors of Superstition.

I N order to strengthen the faith of the apostles, and give a sanction to these first preachers of the gospel, God enabled them to perform miracles but in the name of Jesus. They cured diseases; and though they possessed neither filver nor gold, yet they commanded the lame to walk, and they did walk; the dead to be raised, and they were restored to life; which miraculous power has not been dif-N 4 puted puted to this day. Even Middleton, who professed himself a free-thinker, and disputed the power of the church in the first ages to work miracles, hath nevertheless acknowledged it in the apostles.

St. Paul, the most active of all the apostles, has expressed his fentiments upon this subject with such simplicity, and with fo great confidence in the goodness of his cause, that they appear to be a proof too evident to be wantonly attacked.-" There are, fays he, "diversities of gifts, but " the same spirit. And there are di-" versities of operations, but it is the " fame God, which worketh all in " all. For to one is given by the " spirit the word of wisdom; to an-" other the gifts of healing; to an-" other the working of miracles, to another prophecy; to another dicc vers

" vers kind of tongues; to another " the interpretation of tongues. All " are members of the same body; so " that one member ought not to " despise another. All these gifts " have their particular uses; the eye " and ear are both necessary organs " to the body; the members there-" fore are mutually serviceable to each " other. Thus God hath fet some " in the Church; first apostles; se-" condly, prophets; thirdly, teachers; " after these, miracles; then gifts of " healing; and afterwards diversities " of tongues (this the apostle hath put in the last place). " All, added he, " are not apostles; all are not " workers of miracles; all do not " fpeak with tongues; these gifts are " divided; but without charity, the " gift of prophecy, and the knowledge " of languages, acquired not by study,

" but by the communication of the " holy spirit, are but as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal."-I love rather, fays he, in his letter to the Corinthians, " to fee you invested with the " gift of prophecy, than to speak in " unknown tongues; for a prophecy, " and a knowledge of the fecrets of " the heart, produceth a more cer-" tain conviction in the minds of your " auditors." - The power of reasoning was much esteemed by this holy apostle, on account of its utility, and the effects it was capable of producing; though he possessed, in an eminent degree, a supernatural knowledge of languages. Upon this principle, he advises the Corinthians in what manner they should employ their several gifts in their public assemblies; he directs, that one should give place to another, for the exercise of the talent

lent peculiar to each, in order thereby to promote the edification of all.

We will suppose, my daughter, for a moment, with the incredulous of the age, that miracles are things impossible to be done; that the Christians of the first ages had no supernatural gifts; that they performed no miraculous cures; that the power of speaking languages was a mere chimera, as well as that of difcerning spirits, or difcovering the fentiments of other men; how great then must have been the temerity as well as extravagance of St. Paul, in prefuming to impose upon the Corinthians-men of ingenious, penetrating, and irritable minds, whom the smallest dissension would easily provoke-a number of fabulous and ridiculous stories, for real facts, though they all knew them to be false, or, at least, might have fully fatisfied fatisfied themselves in this particular! Would not these Greeks, who were much addicted to raillery, have replied in some such insulting manner—" What does this frantic prater mean by his extraordinary gifts, who has not so much as made his appearance amongst us?"

These Greeks, however, whose talent for ridicule and criticism was hereditary, read, with patience, the letter of St. Paul; and humbly fubmitted to his remonstrances, as to a servant of God. They excommunicated an offender upon his representation, and deprived him of all communion with them, until they were affured of his repentance; they adopted fuch regulations as he proposed, and bore his reproofs with fubmission; being perfectly perfuaded, that he was endued with divine gifts, and that the Secises. leffons

lessons they received from him, with respect to their conduct, were wise

and prudent.

We must here remark, that the apostles of Christ did not exercise the gifts with which they were endued, in private, nor in the presence of a small number of witnesses, who might have been procured by collusion; but publicly. Peter and John healed a lame man in the temple, about the ninth hour of the day, or, according to our method of computing time, about three hours after noon, which was the hour of public prayer, when there was a great concourse of people in the temple. Paul and Barnabas had as many witnesses, when they healed a great number of persons at Iconia. It is an easy matter to work miracles among fuperstitious people, blinded with zeal; especially when force is employed to ftop

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stop the mouth of the first spectator, who doubts the reality of them: but oftentimes the presence only of another Christian, whose persuasion is different, is sufficient to stop the performance of a miracle. - But in the prefent case miracles were wrought in the midst of the most inveterate enemies to the name of Christ, and under the inspection of a people who had at their disposal the secular arm, and the power of punishing; and in whom it was a point of honour to difcover any defect, or even suspicion, in every miracle that was done in that name which was fo odious to them.

The most learned amongst the disciples of Moses, spared no pains in their researches and examinations; but it was not with the light of truth that they endeavoured to expose what

they judged erroneous in the doctrine of Christ. Their only expedient was to silence those by compulsion, who maintained a different opinion a conduct which betrayed an extreme littleness of mind.

These miracles were not done, as I observed before, in secret; nor near the bed of the fick person, surrounded by his family, who, in fuch cases, would consider every favourable change that might happen in the disease, according to its natural course, as a particular mark of the kind interpolition of Providence: but they were done publicly, in the presence of thousands of witnesses; their effect was sudden and their operation instantaneous, which; in the ordinary progression of nature, would have been flow and tedious. These cures were made without the assistance of any visible means; no **fuperstitious**  fuperstitious remedies were applied; no amulets or consecrated talismen were employed; they were performed through the invocation of that God who hath established the laws of nature, and who hath the power of suspending their action in such circumstances, as his dispensations for the benefit of mankind may require.

God, however, did not work miracles in a profuse manner, and without any design. He savoured the world with those prodigies, in order to confirm or introduce some great truths, which men were not disposed to receive. Miracles were performed when Moses endeavoured to select a race of people from the rest of mankind, that they might be preserved in the profession and belief of a pure religion, which was repugnant to their natural inclinations.—Miracles were wrought

wrought in the times of the idolatrous kings of Ifrael, when the true worship began to be corrupted, and idolatry to be instituted in its room; God being defirous to preserve amongst them, a knowledge of the truth, and the expectation of a Messiah that was to be born of that people. Jesus and the apostles were endued with the same supernatural power, in order to establish the true religion, which had in a manner disappeared from the face of the earth; and to inform men, that pardon for fins was not to be procured either by money, or the performance of simple ceremonies; that God required, as a necessary preliminary, purity of heart, and an entire reformation of manners; and that the expiation of fins could be made by no other means, than by the fatisfaction of a mediator. God, out of compassion to mankind, hath judged these truths on which eternity depends, important and interesting enough to deferve a display of his absolute power over nature, that he might thereby establish them. When the doctrine of Jesus had made a sufficient progress amongst men, and was deeply rooted in their minds, there was then a ceffation of these miraculous gifts, as being no longer necessary: and we have no instances, at least fuch as are well attested, that God, in latter times, hath conferred on any individual these supernatural talents.

God was pleased, at a subsequent period, to reform the corruptions which had crept into the Christian doctrine in the course of ages, and to bring to light those important truths which had been long forgotten; amongst which was, in particular, that

finful man could not be reconciled to God by any means, which fuffered the depravity of his heart to remain unreformed. He did not establish this truth in any other way, than by enabling men to compare the ordinances and precepts of the prevailing religion with those of the immediate followers of Christ, which ought to be a rule of faith, and a model for all ages; and by placing them in a condition to oppose to the establishments then fubfifting in the church, those of the primitive times, whose authors were the disciples of Jesus.

# LETTER XI.

The evidence of Christianity, though not of the nature of mathematical demonstration, sufficient to convince every candid mind. Sublime representation of the Supreme Being. Divinity of Jesus Christ asserted in opposition to Socinians. Mysteries no objection to Christianity. This truth illustrated by several philosophical observations. Observations on the word Person, improperly, in the author's judgment, applied to the Deity. Necessity of a divine mediator and instructor.

I BELIEVE,—nay, I know for a certainty, that Jesus was a just man; that he wrought miracles; and that he was really the person foretold by the ancient prophets. We find in him, all those characteristics which were to distinguish the messenger sent from God. It is but a mere evasion to assert, by way of justifying our incredulity,

dulity, that those truths, from whence we ought to derive our only consolation, are not mathematically demonstrated. The united testimony of so many witnesses who were never fuspected for a combination, and who never retracted what they had faid; the proofs which preceded the coming of our Saviour; those which accompanied it, and those which followed, I mean the miracles of the apostles, are so many concurrent testimonies of truth, that it is impossible they should all have met exactly at the same period, and formed, as it were, a mass of evidence, for no other purpose but to give to falsehood the appearance of truth. No man who speaks with sincerity, will entertain any doubt of the existence, the victories, or the murder of Julius Cæfar.

If then there are proofs sufficient for

us to believe that Jesus was a teacher fent from God—we must necessarily believe all that he faid. If he hath neither himself deceived the world, nor been the agent of any impostor, ought we not to conclude that his word is truth? I am fully convinced, my daughter, of the absolute infinity of the Supreme Being. Though our capacities are limited, we have a certain rule whereby to judge of the greatness of God, which is circumscribed within no bounds. The universe, of itself immeasurable in its extent, where the laws of nature are infinitely progreffive, and not to be limited by human reason—this universe, in which are placed thousands of suns, more resplendent than this lower system, one of the smallest planets of which we inhabit, where are placed millions of men and animals-this universe, I say, whether we consider it in a comprehensive view, or analyze but the minutest part of it, evidently displays a wife and almighty Being, the common creator of all things. The most perfect and ingenious performances of man, will not bear a comparison with any of the works of God. His duration also, will give us some faint idea of his infinite greatness. This duration, is without beginning; the same today as yesterday. It surpasses, it is true, our comprehension; we are finite beings, and therefore our existence had a beginning; fo that we cannot conceive in our minds, a Being who hath always existed. And when we extend this idea to eternity, that is, a duration without end, it is an abyss, where reason is lost and confounded. We see, however, in very intelligible characters, that God is the eternal and invariable

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invariable Sun, placed, as it were, in the center of this immense system, to enlighten and support it.

Men are apt to form too humiliating an idea of the great Governor of the world; they represent him too much like themselves, and confine his power to this small terrestrial spot. They have even circumscribed his protection to one nation alone, amongst the many upon the face of this earth. The knowledge I have of nature, has inspired me with other ideas of the omnipotence and greatness of God, before whom our globe is but as a grain of fand. On this account, when I speak of a man to whom the divine nature is united, I confess that this incomprehensible mystery astonishes me. Such a thought could not of itself have entered into the mind of man, neither could he have expected to fee

an infinite Being united with one that was finite. No mortal could have prefumed to look for fuch an excess of goodness on the part of an infinite and eternal Being, if this mystery which surpasses human imagination had not been revealed.

But he, who can neither lie nor deceive, hath expressly informed us, that Jesus of Nazareth was a man, the fon of David, born of Mary, brought up as another man; subject to the infirmities of human nature, fuch as hunger, thirst, grief; that he sensibly felt the weight of his sufferings, that he was even affected by the anticipation of them; and that at last he, concluded the course of his life by a shameful death. In his human state, he acknowledged the superior power of his father; he humbled himself before him, and even invoked

his name; he represented himself as the way which was to conduct us to the father; he called himself the envoy and minister of his father; and it was through his name that he performed miracles.

We should betray the cause of truth, and act in repugnance to our own conscience, were we to affert, that we could fee nothing in Jesus, but a descendant of David, and a mere man. I am often aftonished at the inconfistency with which we may charge a very numerous fect, who admit of revelation, and yet deny the divinity of Christ. They seem to me to act with less candour and integrity than those who reject it altogether;because receiving as true the express testimonies which have been given of the extraordinary qualities of Jesus, they believe, upon that principle, the truths which he has established.

Christ spake of himself, in terms which evidently discovered a dignity more than human-" Before Abraham " was I am; I came down from hea-" ven, where I dwelt with my father; " I came from him; I return to him, " where I was before, and where he " loved me from the foundation of " the world. I am the way, the truth " and the life; he that believeth on " me, hath everlasting life; the Fa-" ther hath put all things into my " hands; I will draw all men to me; " he is in me and I in him. He who " hath seen me, hath seen the Father; " I and my Father are one; all that " is his is mine; I will fend you the " comforter from my Father; all " men shall appear before the throne of my glory; these I will receive " into everlasting felicity, but those " shall go away into everlasting dark-" ness;

" ness. Baptize ye in the name of " the Father and the Son."-He, who was far removed from all human vanity, who, in the time of his humility, would not accept of the epithet of good, because it belonged to God alone, and because he who addressed him did not acknowledge him for God-he, who had thus voluntarily humbled himself, suffered without any reluctance Thomas, one of his apoftles, after he was convinced of the reality of his refurrection, to call him his Lord and his God. His disciples worshipped him when he ascended into heaven. And as he had faid himfelf, that before the creation he was with God, fo his beloved apostle, John, faid, likewise, that the word was with God, and the word was God .- Salutation, bonour and glory to our God, who is seated on the throne, and to the lamb

lamb who was put to death for the sins of the world.—All things, says St. Paul, were made by him; thrones and dominions are his workmanship.

I see no alternative; if Jesus is true, and if he came from God, he is superior both to men and angels; he, who is from all eternity, is divine, adorable, and is united to God by the most intimate connexion.

We cannot form any idea of this union of the eternal Being with a mortal man, who, in this state lived about three-and-thirty years;—but can we conceive, with more accuracy, the connexion of the soul and body? For we are composed of two substances. The one thinks, perceives, judges; though it is without parts and without extension: the other, on the contrary, possesses these properties. These substances so different are, however, united.

united. Every human creature is formed in part of gross particles of earth; but quite contrary is the effence of my soul. I perceive the shock which my body receives, and I observe that it moves at the volition of the soul. This union is incomprehensible, but it is not the less real; our own sensations confirm it daily. In like manner, there are things of a more important nature, of which we have the same imperfect ideas.

We cannot understand, for instance, the nature of motion; how it passes from one body to another; how it leaves one to agitate another, without suffering any alterations in itself, or permitting us to discern whether it is any thing extended, corporeal, or that may be measured. Therefore of all the objections proposed by

unbelievers, there are none more contemptible than those, which are drawn from the difficulty of comprehending the manner in which things exist; or that which, in the language of the schools, is termed their essence.

When God commanded the laws of nature to suspend their operation; when he invested Jesus with a power of raising the dead; when he commisfioned him to explain this great mystery-how the fins of men could be pardoned; it was easy to foresee, and very reasonable to conjecture, that this divine messenger would inform us of many things, which are incomprehenfible by the human mind, and which no language could clearly express or develope. When he talks of the properties and attributes of the Supreme Being, is there not as much cause for aftonishment,

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aftonishment, as if he had spoken of things incomprehensible?

We find, however, no contradiction in these mysteries; and though we cannot understand their manner, yet it is not impossible for us to see the sitness of the means for accomplishing the ends designed. In this point we cannot be deceived.

God hath joined the foul to the body, the divine to the human nature; a being indivisible, simple, immeasurable, without extent, without any corporeal property, to a body infinitely inferior to it; this is a truth of which we are absolutely convinced. Though a disquisition of this nature falls not within my present design, yet I have used the consideration only by way of example.

That a Being, incorporeal and indivisible, governs the world; and that all motion is derived from him, though the operation is invisible, are truths universally believed; Why then may he not act upon spirits, immaterial and indivisible like himself? Why is it impossible, that the Divine Attributes, such as wisdom, goodness, justice, the power of working miracles, should be intimately united with a created spirit, and displayed in him, though after a particular manner?

I am no theologian, and therefore do not employ those terms of art which have been invented by the disputants, on the incarnation of our Saviour, and the union of God with Christ. I must, however, remark, that the word person is improperly used; since it implies, as every one knows, a thing different from every other thing, which thinks, wills and acts for itself only. Now we cannot

suppose any such distinction in the Divinity. I think, however, that the words of our Saviour himself, oblige me to believe, and with a full acquiescence of faith, that Jesus was not a fimple man, nor even a mere angelic being; but that the Author and Creator of all things, hath united himself, in an incomprehensible manner, to beings which are not pure spirits, to the human foul of Christ, that in this foul were visibly manifested divine qualities and perfections; and that this union of the Divine with human nature, was in Jesus so intimate and perfect, that he both thought and acted as God thinks and acts-and that it was with justice, therefore, that divine honours were paid him, and that he was called God.

This mystery appears to me the less strange, as I clearly discern the reasons fons which induced the Supreme Being, who is infinitely merciful, to unite the Divine and the human nature.

When we fay, that the Divinity, which fo infinitely furpasses our conceptions, departs, on certain occasions, from the ordinary method of governing the universe; that it hath wrought miracles; that out of many millions of human fouls, it felected one in order to be joined with it; I can conceive that some great advantages must result from fuch an extraordinary and unexampled effusion of grace and beneficence; and that the wisdom of God hath not adopted this plan, without having some important ends in view.

It was necessary that the person chosen to execute this scheme, should be of eminent dignity; since he was to come into the world, to reveal the

truth-to persuade men of the certainty of another life, and a future judgment-to establish such a system of morality as might fanctify us, render us acceptable to God, reform the human heart, incline us to despise the things of this world, or at least to hold them in no greater estimation than they deserve. Experience hath often demonstrated, and indeed the nature of things will not permit it to be otherwise, that a man subject to error and to fin, is not a fit instrument to fucceed in an enterprize of this kind. He who is polluted with vice, deprives himself of all that authority and respect which is necessary to command the minds of others, and subjugate the human passions. who is obnoxious to error, may be mistaken in his endeavours to distinguish good from evil; he may err in his

his judgment of what is true and what is false, and may therefore ground his precepts on wrong principles; he may exact from those he instructs, too much or too little. A flave to his fenses, and to whatever flatters them, can he hope, that his doctrine will gain much credit, when he recommends the pursuit of those things which are above, rather than these which are on earth?-Those which are eternal, rather than these which are but temporal; the preference of futurity to the present moment? Or, when he describes the purposes and attributes of God, will his discourses be much attended to? He might reafon, I confess, and draw such inferences as reason would approve of; but his pieces would be imperfect, and his fystems deficient in the most essential part: upon so weak a foundation,

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he would not establish a religion, capable of influencing our practice, or directing our conduct.

It was not enough, that Socrates professed so pure a morality; or that the eloquent Epictetus possessed all those talents which distinguished the Greeks from other nations. Those imperfections which are inseparable from human nature; the defects, which we discover in Marcus Aurelius, and in Socrates, whom we have already mentioned-the virtue of the former being principally calculated to shine upon the stage; and the mind of the other not being exempt from a propenfity to voluptuous pleasuresthese circumstances could not fail to deprive their doctrine of that ascendency which it ought to have had over the hearts of men. Epictetus was but a feeble light in the midst of a

few friends; he could not, like the fun, illuminate whole nations, cause the seeds of virtue to germinate, or insuse into them a vivisying principle. Consucius also wanted a greater degree of servency; his doctrine was capable of rendering the people obedient to the laws of emperors, but not to those of God; it might make them citizens, but not truly pious; it might give to its disciples the appearance of virtue or wisdom, but could not render them really good.

To Jesus was committed the charge of reforming mankind, of impressing sentiments of duty upon whole nations, and of rendering those impressions permanent, in order to their attainment of eternal happiness. This commission he hath executed; neither was any other person qualified for so important an office. For eighteen P 4

centuries we have reaped the fruits of his coming into the world; our notions of the Deity are more perfect than were those of the heathens; we know what we ought to do to please him; we have the firm assurance of a future life, and have received a system of morality, pure and compleat.

To accomplish this grand defign, it was necessary that the Mediator should be exempt from evil, nor should even be accused of any; that he should have a perfect knowledge of the divine Being, and of eternity; and that in all difficult cases which might arise in the exercise of his important commission, a wisdom, free from error and incapable of being deceived, should dictate to him how he should speak, and should so direct him in all his actions, that he should neither fear the ingenious malice of men, nor the farcastical sophisms of a Julian; but should be able to defeat all the efforts of Jewish obstinacy, nor should be in the least affected with the fatyrical reflections of incredulous men. The power of working miracles, which was either to be exercised or suspended, according as circumstances offered, ought not, by an effect of vanity so inseparable from the human heart, to be displayed, on the one hand, with too much pomp, or on the other, with any appearance of ambiguity; that the Jews might have no room to discover that malevolence so inherent in their nation. Such a Mediator must not be liable to any furprize of the senses; no criminal pleasure, no passion of whatever kind, must tarnish the purity of his conduct; he must be void of every inclination to anger; neither must

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must the fear of death allay his zeal, or weaken his efforts to accomplish the glorious ends for which he was to come into the world.

In a word, fuch a Redeemer must be more than mere man; because a man is always exposed to error and to vice. But the Divinity with which Jesus was invested, rendered his wisdom compleat; banished every pasfion; directed his miraculous powers; spoke through him in a manner not to be imitated by all the eloquence of man; conducted him constantly in a right course of action, without deviating from the great defign which was the object of his heavenly mission. This Jesus, who from the beginning had been with God, who was come from God, was alone capable of revealing his counsels to men. He to whom the Father had committed all judgment,

judgment, could alone inform men what the Divine Justice had prepared against the workers of iniquity. This union of God with Christ was doubtless a mark of goodness worthy of our admiration, without which the coming of Jesus into the world had been of no effect.

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# LETTER XII.

That Jesus Christ was a sacrifice for the Satisfaction of Divine Justice, proved from the writings of the prophets; from those of the apostles; and from the declarations of our Saviour himself. Inconsistency of those who admit the Divine inspiration of the scriptures, yet deny the doctrine of the satisfaction made for sin by Jesus Christ.

THE embassy of Jesus Christ had other objects in view, more important still, if that be possible, than what we have already mentioned; for the attainment of which, it was not sufficient that he should be a mere man.

The defign he had formed, was not only to instruct men in the truth, but principally to reconcile them to God. I have faid, in a preceding letter, that

the means of this reconciliation was a mystery, which mankind have endeavoured in vain to discover; which the greatest sages have examined with much eagerness and assiduity; but which it has been impossible for man to unravel.

All nations have had some confused ideas of it, some faint representation, which they had derived from a tradition that had been handed down from the first of men. They thought, that atonement might be made for fin by facrifice, or by shedding the blood of some animal. Moses, who was commissioned by God to institute a ceremonial worship, as being best adapted to the genius of the people amongst whom he established it, because they were not susceptible of other impressions than those of the fenses, retained and fanctified these facrifices.

facrifices. But it was easy to perceive -God had very intelligibly explained himself upon this subject-that the blood of animals could not effect a reconciliation with him; and that the fins which reigned in the corrupt hearts of men, were not to be obliterated by fuch kind of fines or ranfoms. The defign of these ceremonies, was only to remind them of their fubjection and dependance on that fovereign Being, who was the difpenser of all temporal bleffings-to inform them that they were finners, and that they could expect the pardon of their fins from his grace alone.

In the mean time the means of reconciliation had been revealed by God, and that upon an early and important occasion, when fallen man, conscious of guilt, stood trembling We find some outlines of these means in the Psalms, which speak of a suffering Saviour; and those Psalms were more ancient than Homer. But Isaiah, who lived before the time of Consucius, the philosopher of China, hath clearly unfolded this mystery. I will not repeat the texts which have been already quoted, I will only cite a remarkable passage of this most eloquent of the prophets.—" He was "wounded for our transgressions, he

" was bruifed for our iniquities."

"He is come who must execute

" all the promises of God; he fore-

" warned his disciples that he must

" fuffer, but that his fufferings would

" be to their advantage; and that he

" should voluntarily lay down his

" life \*. He died for men, and gave

<sup>\*</sup> Matt. xxii. 28. John v. 18.

" his foul a ranfom for many. He

" ordered his disciples to solemnize

" the remembrance of his death,

" which was to be observed in after-

" ages, by the fymbols of bread

" and wine; the former being broken

" was to reprefent his body offered

" to God for the falvation of men;

" and the latter was to fignify, that

" his blood was shed for the pardon

" of fins \*. He declared before his

" death, that to drink his blood and

" to eat his flesh, were the indispensa-

" ble means of obtaining remission

" of fins †. He faid, that he should

" lay down his life for his sheep t.

"That greater love hath no man

"than this, that a man lay down

<sup>\*</sup> Matt. xxvi. 16. 27.

<sup>†</sup> Mark xiv. 22. et seq. Luke xxii. 11. 19. et seq. 1 Cor. xi. 24.

I John x. 15.

" his life for his friends; that is, for

" those who keep his command-

" ments \*. That God fo loved the

" world, that he gave his only be-

" gotten Son, that whofoever be-

" lieveth in him should not perish,

" but have everlasting life †."

After his refurrection, he said to his disciples—" Ought not Christ," (i. e. according to the ancient prophecies) " to have suffered these things, " and to enter into his glory ‡?" It is this point of doctrine that Philip the apostle explained to the chamberlain of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians §.

The disciples of our Saviour were more explicit upon the sufferings of

Q their

<sup>\*</sup> John xv. 13. 1 Luke xxiv. 26.

<sup>†</sup> John iii. 16. § Acts viii. 30.

their divine master, and upon the happy consequences of them. John fays\*, "And he is the propitiation " for our fins; and not for our fins " only, but also for the sins of the " whole world.-He faw the Lamb, " which was flain, and hath redeemed " us to God by his blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and " people, and nation †. - Peter adored " the Deliverer, who hath borne our " fins in his body upon the cross, " that we being dead unto fin, might " live unto righteousness; by whose " wounds we are healed."

St. Paul, whose zeal much contributed to the progress of the gospel, describes, in a particular manner, the advantages of this doctrine. "Be-

<sup>\* 1</sup> Epist. ii. 2. † Apoc. v. 9.

" ing justified freely by his grace,

" through the redemption that is in

" Jesus Christ; whom God hath set

" forth to be a propitiation, through

" faith in his blood, to declare his

" righteousness for the remission of

" fins."-In another place he fays,

" But God commendeth his love to-

" wards us, in that, while we were yet

" finners, Christ died for us. For

" if when we were enemies, we were

" reconciled to God by the death

" of his Son, much more being re-

" conciled, we shall be faved by his

" life.—He was delivered for our of-

" fences, and was raifed again for

" our justification. Christ died for us,

" according to the Scriptures .- One

" hath died for us, to the end that

" we might all live for him who

" died, and is raised again, for us.

" -God hath been reconciled to us

" in Jesus.-He, who knew no sin, " was made fin for us, that we might " be made the righteousness of God " in him.-Christ hath redeemed us " from the curse of the law, being " made a curse for us; for it is writ-" ten-Cursed is every one that hangeth " on a tree. - In him, and by his " blood, we have the redemption " and pardon of fins.-Christ hath " fo loved us, as to give himself " for us, an offering and a facri-" fice to God, for a sweet-smelling " favour.—He gave himself a ransom " for all, that he might redeem us " from all iniquity."

These texts may serve as a foundation to a great number of others, in all which there is a frequent repetition of this great truth—" This is " life eternal, that they might know the only true God, and Jesus Christ, " whom " whom thou hast fent \*."-That

" there is no other name under hea-

" ven, which hath been given to

men, by which they can be faved."

I would therefore, my dear child, recommend to you, as a thing very necessary to read, without any prejudice, these expressions which I have extracted from the facred writings; and to consider what is their proper and literal fense. We are not yet arrived to so great a pitch of infidelity, as to deny the existence of a God; every work of creation loudly confutes this hypothesis: but there are many who cannot digest the doctrine of a Saviour suffering for mankind, the merits of whose death are imputed to them; they love rather to distort the meaning of scripture, and to explain it contrary to the rules of

\* John xvii. 3.

found criticism; they had rather reject the whole, than agree to the opinion, that man stood in need of a ranfom. We should have less reason to expostulate with these men, than with the atheists, if it was not proved, that the doctrines revealed are the word of God and of truth. But to acknowledge the divine origin of the Christian religion, and refuse to believe that Jesus died for us, and that he hath reconciled us to God, is an inexcusable contradiction, as well of itself, as of the truth which is admitted. It was not possible to express in terms more clear than revelation hath expressed them, these important doctrines-That men, by their fins, had forfeited the favour of God; but that God, out of his infinite love, had promised them, by his prophets, that he would fend his

only Son into the world; that he accordingly came at the appointed time, and, in conformity to the prophecies, fuffered and was put to death; that his fufferings have fatisfied the Divine Justice; that he hath purchased the pardon of sins to all those who believe in him, and hath rendered them capable of inheriting eternal life; and lastly, that there is no other way to appeale the justice of God, than by faith in his Son. I have here only described this doctrine, as we find it in the scriptures; I have not yet attempted to prove the truth of it .- I have observed, and with concern, that Christians, when speaking of these matters, have often employed very unbecoming expressions, such as, God is born, God is dead; they seem, indeed, justifiable; but, at first fight, convey to the Q 4 mind,

mind, an idea at which it revolts; because the Supreme Being is necesfarily eternal and infinite, never ceased to be, and therefore was not born in time; much less could he be subject to fufferings, to forrow, or to death. Jesus, indeed, hath suffered; he hath endured inexpressible forrows; his will, though absolutely resigned to that of his Father, could not, however, withstand the feelings of human nature, infomuch that he prayed to his Father, that the bitter cup might pass from him. The extreme anguish of his foul, caused drops of blood to fall from his eyes; and fo much was he depressed, that he had required the consolations of an angel. None but created beings are susceptible of pain; but we apply the common modes of speech to objects of an incorporeal nature, without perceiving the abuse

of them. No man, who knows God, that is, who has suitable ideas of his nature, will affert that he has suffered.

But this is not the only difficulty. Modern philosophers will not acknowledge that mankind could be fo corrupt as to excite in the Deity any defire of punishing them .- They will not allow, that one being could be condemned to fuffer for another; or that the righteousness of a just man, could be of any avail to a finner. But they do not consider, that the Divine Justice required a sacrifice which was necessary to effect a reconciliation with God. This denial of the necessity of the merits of Christ's fufferings, is an opinion very prevalent at present, and which threatens the total ruin of Christianity. For to give up this essential doctrine of the necessity

necessity of a fatisfaction, what is it but to renounce our faith in Jesus Christ, who died for our fins, and rose again for our justification? At present, I am arguing with fuch persons as believe in divine revelation. As to those who do not; I have already, if I am not mistaken, evinced, that the scriptures are indeed the word of God, by proofs and arguments fufficient to impress every unprejudiced and candid mind with the fullest conviction. With regard to those who are perfuaded that the scriptures are the word of God; I flatter myself that it will be no difficult matter to bring the question in dispute to a short issue. -The scripture is true-the sufferings of Christ, or the merits which we ascribe to them, are so clearly taught, that they appear to be the grand defign, or the very spirit, as

it were, of this scheme of redemption; which truth if you admit, you must then acknowledge the merit of the fufferings or the death of Christ .-They certainly do not act with candour and fincerity, who attack fome certain truth, which forms a part of a body of doctrine, that we admit to be true and unexceptionable. Can we esteem the integrity of those, who having embraced as holy and divine, a compleat fystem of doctrine, permit themselves afterwards to reject, openly or fecretly, the most essential parts, as contrary to found reafon?

Truth fears not the severest examination. I will therefore offer those reasons, which induced me to consider the scheme of redemption, not only as a revealed truth, but as a reasonable doctrine, and consonant to the

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the ideas which I have of the justice and goodness of God.

I will not, however, go fo far as to fay, that this manner of punishing and of pardoning, was the only poffible way which God, in his infinite wisdom, could adopt. God is Lord of many thousand worlds, which, reafoning from analogy, may be inhabited by other thinking beings. We know that there are beings superior to man, amongst whom sin hath introduced itself; and that this superior order of intelligences, is employed by God, as his instruments in the government of the world. In what manner does he there punish faults? Or how does he reclaim delinquents if they offend? Here I have not even a conjecture to offer .- The only example we have in scripture of the punishment of angels, gives us room to conclude,

clude, that God hath employed quite different means, in order to demonstrate the hatred which he hath to evil. We are there informed, that those superior beings, actuated by malice and envy, revolted against God, and were therefore punished with great severity. It is sufficient for us to know, what is our duty towards God, and what is his manner of proceeding in regard to us.

### LETTER XIII.

Depravity of human nature. Divine wisdom and goodness in recovering mankind from a state of sin and misery. Of the duration of that punishment which follows vice, as its natural or judicial consequence in any order of intelligent beings. The conduct of Divine Grace justified in the eye of reason. General sketch of the Christian religion. Its suitableness to the condition of sinful and wretched men. Its wisible effects on the least cultivated minds; and in the lower ranks of life. Desperate folly of rejecting a revelation from God, because we cannot raise our minds to a conception of all the Divine ideas, nor comprehend every part of the plan of redemption.

THE object which I have had in view, in the preceding part of this work, and that to which I have confined myself, has been to shew, that human nature is in a state of the deepest depravity and corruption; that

that God cannot look upon sin but with abhorrence and indignation; that he regards it as an object utterly unworthy of his countenance and favour; that he considers vice as a thing which. is subversive of the good order of the world; that it became the righteous Governor of the universe, to stigmatize and to punish it by certain visible marks of his displeasure: but that, on the other hand, virtue is to the Supreme Being, an object of complacency and delight. These things then I shall take for granted; nor shall I add or repeat any thing in order to support their truth or justice.

An universal degeneracy had overspread the world; that reverence and worship which dependent creatures owe to the Author and Preserver of their being, had vanished from hearts enslaved by every guilty passion

and impure desire. Eternity was forgotten: the threatening aspect of this dreadful object, no longer disturbed the repose of mortals; every action of man was an infringement of the laws of God. And though the fins of men could not disturb the felicity of the Divine Nature, which is infinitely above the reach of human malignity, yet they were a direct violation of the Divine laws-Laws founded in the very nature of things, and which fix the merit or demerit of every action and every thought with unerring juftice.

The greatest part of mankind were reduced to such a state, that the purity and holiness of God could not but disapprove their actions, and render them undeserving the Divine favour.

—Had it been better for God to have abandoned them entirely to the evil

consequences of their vicious inclinations, and totally have withdrawn his patronage? The Divine Goodness judged otherwise; he made a trial of this defolate and abandoned condition in beings of a superior order-in intelligences more perfect; who, though immaterial, and therefore not dependant on the body, or subject to the fenses, withdrew their obedience from him, though they were not under any invincible necessity of yielding to temptation.

God had a paternal tenderness for man; but how was he to deliver him? To fuffer so great depravity to remain unpunished, would have been acting in repugnance to the Divine Nature, to which the love of good is effential, and, on the contrary, the disapprobation of evil. But the indignation of God is hell: and if he had permitted a guilty R

a guilty world to continue in the commission of crimes; if he had abandoned finful men here below, and to all eternity, to this miserable condition, without discovering his hatred of fin, he had been no longer Judge of the world: his reasonable creatures would have had no recompence to hope for, from their attachment to virtue; and no punishment to fear from their indulgence in vice: they would have lost all respect for that justice which is essential to his nature, nor have fubmitted to those laws, whose violation was attended with no prejudice. All order would have been confounded; and the natural connexion that there is betwixt the good actions of intelligent beings and happiness, betwixt their bad ones and unhappiness, would have been dissolved.

But do men always become better by chastisements? Do these compel them to be good?—Let us reflect on the condition of the fallen angels; we have no reason to think that their punishment, the natural effect of their malice, hath wrought any change in their tempers. And when we take a view of those men who have groaned under the weight of God's displeasure, we shall find, that his chastisements have feldom made any durable impressions, or produced any reformation of the will: and if we extend our refearches to Christians, who enjoy the comfortable hope of a Deliverer; we may observe, that malefactors during their captivity, have very rarely made atonement for the crimes which they had committed against society, but have rather been the more confirmed in their wickedness: despair has often encreased their malice. Sickness, accompanied with pious exhortations, have sometimes produced virtuous resolutions; but they have vanished, as soon as the patient has been restored to his health.

Punishments, it has been said, ought not to be eternal; because they must tend to the reformation of men. But will the punishments of a limited time, as a few years for instance, or even for ages, produce in man an eternal obedience; fince, in comparison of eternity, any duration which we may affign to these pains, will be but infinitely short? Would that impatience, that murmuring, that restlessness under the judgments of God, which these limited fufferings produce, be removed by new afflictions? and from this mode of reasoning, would there not be required

quired a prolongation of chastifements? The knowledge, which we have of the human heart, will not permit us to hope, that through the means of punishment, vice will be changed into virtue. And God, who perfectly knows us, knows also, that this limited punishment must in the end terminate in that which is eternal.

In answer to this it hath been said

May not the grace of God act
immediately upon the deprayed and
uninformed mind, to enlighten and
to fanctify it; to inspire it with wisdom and virtue, and transform it into
a new creature? But according to this
opinion, no satisfaction will be made
to the Divine Justice. Intelligent beings, after having transgressed the
laws of their sovereign Master, would
obtain the greatest rewards without
seeling the least effect of the indigR 3 nation

nation of God, or, in other words, of his abhorrence of evil. Besides, the inseparable connexion which there is betwixt bad actions and the natural consequences of the disapprobation of God, would be broken. God treats us as reasonable beings, endowed with the liberty of acting: his grace furnishes us with means which are compatible with this free will; as, exhortations, counsels, and powerful incentives; but, at the same time, hath left us the power of resistance. Without this liberty, we should be absurd and contradictory beings, having the faculty of reasoning, but controuled by the influence of some exterior agent, which would impose as unavoidable a restraint upon our wills, as if we were wholly destitute of the exalted faculties of liberty and understanding. Our actions would not be

our own; besides, there must be this alternative-either man would be a mere machine, wholly directed by fome supernatural impressions, without the power of acting; or else there would remain in the hearts of men, even those improved by grace, a number of imperfections which could not render us acceptable to God, or exempt us from punishment. The Deity does not act like the kings of the earth, who pardon many errors, and even crimes-who can esteem fubjects which are useful to them; whom they can also recompence, though, in some respects they are reprehensible; because they perceive that there is no person, however capable of serving and pleasing them, that is absolutely exempt from faults. They raise to honour and preferment, those in whom good qualities predominate R 4

dominate over bad, and who have faithfully acquitted themselves of the employments in which they were entrusted. In God, all is order, and that in the greatest perfection; his weights and his measures are therefore perfect. No evil thought that enters into the heart of man-no criminal desire can there meet with indulgence. In proportion to their turpitude, God will regard them with disapprobation and abhorrence. He weighs all tranfgressions in the scale of equity; he enters them in the books, which will be opened at the great day of accounts: and if they are inscribed in the register of human iniquities, they will also be found in the book of punishments, which are destined to every man according to his works. The best of men, by reason of their imperfections, will be, by turns, the objects

jects of God's favour and displeasure—will be alternately obnoxious to punishment, and in a condition which will entitle them to reward.

In the times in which we live, I may be thought, perhaps, too fevere; but I fpeak from the authority of scripture. Man, in this life, cannot attain to perfect virtue, even though God should condescend to direct him by his grace. The justice of mortals is far from being immaculate; this imperfection may, perhaps, be a prefervative from greater evil. Many of the fins to which we are subject, remain buried with us in the grave. The love of voluptuousness follows us not to eternity, any more than avarice. The first of these vices has no means of gratification when the foul is feparated from the body, which was so necessary to the enjoyment of this kind

of fatisfaction; the other will be deprived of its object in a place, where the metal it was fo fond of amassing, will not be found. -But there is another vice much more odious, which hath a powerful influence over the foul, and which may follow it into the world of spirits. This vice infected the feraphims, and was productive of much vexation in the habitations of the just. The vice I mean, is pride. Human virtue, imperfect as it is, is often tarnished with this fault-a fault more odious to God than any other, and which may even render us unhappy in heaven itself. Pride is that internal satisfaction, or that complacency, with which we consider our own perfections. It presumes to call God to an account, and prevents us from acknowledging our obligations to him. We may observe in the works

of Seneca, the pride with which the men of that age, because of some virtues that rendered them beneficial to their country, exalted themselves above the Divine Nature: and even amongst true Christians, in that church which calls itself the reformed, this vice hath blended itself with their virtues.

Are not the imperfections of men the most effectual, though at the same time the most mortifying means of repressing this pride? God would not remove from St. Paul every moral defect, though this apostle so often requested it by earnest prayer: it was necessary for him to be imperfect, that he might perceive how much he stood in need of grace. It is, indeed, impossible that man should of himself attain to a degree of rectitude absolutely free from fault. And God, perhaps,

perhaps, may defign by this, to cherish in the hearts of men, sentiments of humility. This faultless perfection will never be confirmed by the seal of God, till they have been justified at the great judgment, and shall enjoy the inestable light of God's presence, before whom there is no darkness.

The fufferings of a Mediator was another of the means chosen by God, of reconciling us to himself; this should likewise create in us an humble disposition. God was inclined to save mankind, not from the righteoufness of man himself, or from any merit of his own, but only through the redemption which is in Christ. It is by faith that he is justified, and not by the accomplishment of the law. This is the invariable doctrine of revelation, as preached both by St. Paul and by our Saviour himself .-" Without

Without me ye can do nothing .-

This is life eternal, that they be-

" lieve in him whom God hath fent.

" Man, justified by the grace which

is in another, hath no cause for

or pride or vanity."

The plan of redemption adopted by God, is perfectly confonant to the inclinations most prevalent in the heart of man. It operates both on his hopes and fears; without hope, malice would carry itself to the last extremities; without fear, the passions would know no bounds. Fear is excited by the feverity with which the Mediator of men hath felt the effects of the hatred that God hath for fin. It has been already mentioned, and I take this opportunity of repeating it -that Jesus, in the last hours of his life-in that dreadful night which he passed in the Mount of Olivesfunk

nation which God hath to fin; his foul was forrowful even unto death; in the midst of the pains which he suffered upon the cross, he complained, that God had forsaken him. What then must be those sufferings which could make such an impression upon a soul like our Saviour's; who, knowing beforehand all that he must suffer, did not voluntarily expose himself to it?

These terrible effects of the hatred of God to sin, must justify the Divine purity in the eyes of all intelligent beings; they sufficiently prove the abhorrence of the just Judge of the universe, of evil, and that he could not pardon the sinner without chastisement. This proceeding was likewise necessary to reconcile the rights of justice with those of mercy—that

the one might be fatisfied without prejudice to the other. The minds of men must be seized with a rational fear, when they perceive, that the punishment of their faults was inevitable, and that it fell with so great violence upon him who had devoted himself a facrifice for them-who. though fortified by the divinity that was within him, felt, nevertheless, so great inquietude for the fins of others. Must they not tremble to fall into the hands of the living God, who, in respect to sin, is a fire which devours and which confumes, and who spared not the fins of men, in the person of his beloved Son?

And indeed, since the reconciliation which hath been established betwixt God and sinful man, the impression that the sufferings of our Saviour must naturally make on our minds, continues

continues to display the efficacy of them. But yet without faith and obedience we cannot enjoy that pardon which is the fruit of the fatisfaction made to the justice of God. When we are remiss in the performance of these conditions-when we neglect to appropriate to ourselves the promised pardon, by an active and operating faith; when, by a fresh revolt, we act in opposition to those eternal laws which prohibit vice, but which require the practice of virtue, we lose all pretentions to the redemption which Jesus hath acquired for us, and we again incur the indignation of God, whose severity is so apparent in the fufferings of Christ.

But the effect of this fear is rendered still more efficacious, by the hopes which the same object creates in our soul; God is appeased; he considers fin as blotted out; his grace displays in us those happy influences, which all those experience who do not voluntarily reject them. The Saviour himself, who hath discharged our debt, and paid our ranfom, promifes us his affistance. He is gone up into heaven, where he has prepared manfions for those who follow him. The defigns of God towards us have been revealed; the way which will conduct us to happiness is known; conditions have been proposed; and the means of conforming ourfelves to the ordinances of God, have been communicated. This is that conformity which will render us acceptable to him; and his favour is true happiness.

We know the importance of eternity; we are well convinced, from the indubitable testimony of him who hath been sent to us from the eternity where

where he dwelt, that we are called to life everlasting; and that unchangeable happiness will be the rewards of those who are faithful in this short space of probation.

We are not ignorant of the strict justice of God, from the sorrowful instance of our Mediator who suffered for us: the condition of men who difpleafe him will be miserable, as it will be glorious to those who are objects of his grace; this is a truth, which no reasonable man will doubt. Two ways are open before us; the one, though mortifying to our fenses, will nevertheless become more agreeable, through his grace, and will in the end conduct us to unalterable felicity:-the other, though it may gratify our inclinations for a short time, will at last plunge us into an abyss of endless wretchedness. There are

no persons so well instructed in the motives for an holy life, as the professors of Christianity. They are perfectly known even to persons of a common understanding; and in comparison of the certainty of their perfuafion, the conjectures and reasonings of the ancient philosophers were like shadows which were too transient and inefficacious to make any impressions. Every Christian can consult the oracles of revelation, and by the favour of this divine light, can penetrate into those mysteries, which were unknown to the world before the coming of the Mediator sent by God. Amongst the most illiterate, those who are constantly occupied by manual labour, in providing for their daily wants, we may, nevertheless, discover some sentiments of religion, not unmixed with zeal; and also a contentment both in

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life and in death, which is unknown to those whose hearts are not illuminated by the light of the doctrine of Christ.

This world is only a place of trial, where the weakness of man is strengthened by the power of grace communicated by God. Before the coming of our Saviour, men were bewildered in error; were led aftray by the violence of their passions, and wandered about like lost sheep. But when the great Shepherd appeared, he called together the scattered flock-he went before them, and conducted them into the way which leads to heaven: his country is ours; he hath paid for us those debts which we were not able to discharge; we are born again; the re-establishment of our primitive innocence begins with this new life.

The justice of God is satisfied by

the fufferings of our Redeemer; grace hath established its empire over man, who is now reconciled. These, according to my ideas, are the great motives which have engaged the Mafter and Judge of the universe, to give us a Redeemer, to the end that he might make our peace by his fufferings. I may possibly be mistaken in fome of my conjectures; it is very difficult for mortals to judge rightly of divine things: these are, however, incontestable truths, that it hath pleafed God to fend into the world, at the time appointed, the Mediator which he had promifed and announced by the prophets; to whom the Divinity was united in an incomprehenfible manner; andwho, during the time that he fojourned upon earth, not only instructed men in the truth, but also communicated

of God concerning our falvation—that his justice hath been satisfied by the voluntary sufferings of the Saviour; and that he hath opened a way to the throne of grace, where we may be received as unpolluted beings.

This is a short view of revelation. From what has been faid, it is eafy to perceive, that it was necessary for us to have for a mediator, or for a propitiator, (for fo the scripture calls him) fome person who was holy, innocent, and without fault. A finful man might have fuffered for himself only; though I fee no reason to believe that his sufferings would have been sufficient even for himself; but it is without a doubt, that they could not have made atonement for the fins of another, because he would himself have been an object of the indignation of God; there would have been wanting some other means, foreign to himself, to have procured his own pardon.

But the wisdom and goodness of God hath executed what was beyond the abilities of man. The Divinity, which dwelt in the person of the Mediator, hath highly exalted him; the fuccours which it afforded, rendered him absolutely just and incapable of fin; the voluntary facrifice which he hath offered for the fins of the world, was free from all blemish, and hath been accepted by the perfect justice of God; who, in the person of him, whose innocence was immaculate, hath fully discovered what are the wages of fin, and that his eyes are too pure to behold iniquity. Without this instance of benevolence in God,

creatures to have escaped the punishment they had incurred; but the demands of his justice, which sees every action in its true light, have been fully satisfied; he hath accepted the sufferings of a Mediator, whom he hath dignissed by an union with himself, as a satisfaction which it was not in the power of man to make.

I shall not, in this place, examine the great variety of objections, which have been offered by those who refuse to acknowledge the necessity of a Mediator, and who pretend, that we cannot be justified by the righteousness of another. I see, in part, the reasons which induced the Supreme Being to accept of a vicarious sacrifice, and also the great advantages which result from this plan of reconciliation.

ciliation. But though we should not clearly discern those things, yet we ought not to be too hasty in judging of the designs of God, by our ideas, or by our manner of thinking.

It appears, then, that we are too apt to confound things which are very different from each other. A finner cannot be acceptable to God; neither can he procure his approbation, on account of the death of a Mediator, as long as he continues in fin. The immediate effect of this death confifts in rendering a man, though finful, capable of receiving the Divine favour, when, by using the means which are furnished by grace, he renounces the flavery of fin to ferve and obey God; the infirmities, which are inseparable from human nature, will no longer be imputed to him-

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him. By this plan of redemption, man is reformed; a renovation of life fucceeds; and he is placed in fuch a state, that the Divine compassion may receive him into grace and favour.

#### LETTER XIV.

Recapitulation, with some farther illustrations, of the foregoing remarks and reasoning. Peroration; and exhortation of the author to his daughter.

ET us, then, my daughter, embrace with gratitude, this general pardon; let us offer our tribute of praise to him, who, out of his infinite love, found out a ranfom for us; let us, with confidence, walk in that way in which Christ hath gone before us; let us endure with chearfulness, the transient sufferings of this life, nor view with horror the approaches of another. The consolation which must support us in life and death, is now found; by the help of this, we can, without fear, and in perfect

perfect tranquility of mind, contemplate the progressive advances of our diffolution, and boldly enter into

eternity.

We perceive our depravity, and, if we would speak ingenuously, we must confess that we are slaves to our wills, and that it is with reluctance we fubmit our conduct to the divine precepts of the Christian religion. The inclinations of the flesh are strong and vigorous; they attach us to the present life-they acquire a domination over all our faculties, and banish from the will every thought of futurity. The love of our Saviour, who redeemed us, is cold and languid; and we have but a fervile fear of God; who, in our imagination, is too holy. These sentiments are deeply rooted in the dark recesses of our hearts; every thing conspires to remind us of our weakness,

weakness, and to convince us, that humility is a disposition which becomes, in the highest degree, creatures so corrupt and imperfect.

These are disagreeable truths; and the confession which we are obliged to make of them, must be very mortifying to human pride; but it is useful and falutary to prefent them to the mind. When we reflect, on the one hand, upon our incapacity of delivering ourselves from this corruption; and when we consider, on the other, the greatness and purity of our Judge, who must be displeased at our depraved condition, and whose displeasure is the worst of evils; when, I say, we reflect on these things, they must fink us into despair. But God hath manifested his charitable designs towards us; he hath given us the greatest and the noblest hopes. We have it in

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our power to be for ever happy; and though this corruption will always adhere to us, and is never radically removed, yet it will be no obstacle to our felicity. The Divine Goodness hath accepted a satisfaction for these impersections, which are inherent in our nature.

I shall not here take notice of those abstruse questions, which have been started, about the liberty of man: it is an impenetrable mystery. The philosophers of our days think they have good reasons for banishing all liberty from the world. "We are governed by necessity, they say; all the resolutions which we form, or all the actions of our will, have their cause in something which happened the preceding moment."—But the internal conviction of my own mind, rejects these subtleties; I perceive

in myself, a self-determining power; I observe, that if we, in a great meafure, depend upon our fenses, and upon the passions which they excite, it is not, however, impossible for us to refift them. I fpeak from experience; none of the passions are unconquerable; the idea of an immense God, who is always present with us, and the recourse we may have to him by prayer, are sufficient means to bring them into subjection. We have the power of removing from our minds, the thoughts of eternity, if disagreeable to us; we have also the power of reflecting upon its importance: the capacity which we have of becoming virtuous, consists in our choice of giving or refusing our attention, to whatever agrees or difagrees with our favourite pursuits.

Let us employ the time present; eternity

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eternity will be our reward if we make a good use of it. Let us always have before our eyes, the nature and consequences of sin; let us remember, that it will deprive us of the favour of God, and expose us to his indignation. Let us reflect on the value of eternity; and on that life and that immortality, which Christ hath brought to light by the gospel. The smallest satisfactions of this present short life, which are but puerile amusements, must disappear, when placed in competition with the greatness and durability of the glory which is hereafter.

Let us never forget, that we were born for eternity, and that an affair of so great importance should be the principal occupation of our lives. Let us follow the light that will conduct us thither—the precepts of

our Saviour plainly point out the way. How insensible then must we be, to suffer ourselves to be directed by any other?

We acknowledge the corruption of our nature; we confess, that it terminates in death; we are persuaded, that Jesus hath the words of eternal life. Let us then study them with attention, apply them with sincerity to ourselves; continually inculcate them on our minds, and seek the assistance of that light which was brought from heaven to earth.

We are ignorant of a great number of things. We know not, in particular, the operations of the grace of God; nor how it enlightens the mind. No person can sincerely devote himself to the Supreme Being, without perceiving the emotions of his grace,

—" If a man keep my command
" ments,

"ments, fays our Saviour, he will "perceive, that I am come from God."—It is the influence of his grace, which excites in us good defires; which reprefents to us our own unworthiness, and which animates our fouls with an ardent defire of procuring the favour of God. These are fentiments, which every wise and rational man is capable of experiencing.

I am well perfuaded, that we have in this grace, a powerful fuccour to liberate us from fin, and make us afpire after that condition which is more worthy of man.

I must confess, that the manner of the co-operation of grace, is an inexplicable mystery; it is, however, a revealed truth. The mode of its acting is too obscure for us to comprehend. We know not the laws of the actions of spirits. We know not the manner

manner by which one body moves another. How then shall we discern the method, by which one spirit acts upon another spirit? Perhaps, if we too clearly perceived the operation of grace upon our minds, it might be an obstacle to the exercise of our liberty. -The advice of our Saviour is a fufficient direction to us in this matter. -" Search the scriptures-believe in " me-keep my commandments, for "they are eafy."-God will do the reft. These commandments will be eafy to us, when once we are convinced of the importance of eternity; for what can the present life offer, which can be compared with what we may either hope for, or fear, during this eternity?

We are restored from the lowest state of abasement and dejection. We are animated with the most comfortable promises. We now walk with confidence in that road, which hath been marked out for us with fo much wifdom; and which fo well correfponds with our inclinations and abilities. We leave behind us those vices which tended to estrange us from God and happiness; before us is a benevolent Being, who offers, to the victorious, incorruptible crowns, as the recompence of victory; which victory he also helps us to gain. We may now rest satisfied with respect to our future condition, without perplexing ourselves about the trials which we shall have to undergo, and which are yet at a distance. Let us only employ to advantage the prefent hour. The means of falvation, the facred writings, the precepts of our Saviour, are in our hands; we infenfibly draw near to the defired harbour;

harbour; the approaches of dissolution become less formidable, the nearer we arrive to the happy mansions of eternity, where error and vice will be disarmed, and have no more power over us.

Those persons, who have been so happily fituated as to be able to devote a great part of their time to the study of these most important of all truths, and to make it the principal employment of their lives, will be better qualified to exhibit them to your view, in a more animating and affecting manner, and fo as to make a greater impression upon your mind. Receive them, however, my daughter, from the mouth of a father, who confiders himself on the verge of life; they are the most precious marks of tenderness which he can give you. Thefe

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These instructions would have been more perfect, if his capacity had been more extensive. They are, however, the refult of his reflections, and of the researches which he has made after truth; they are also the effect of his internal conviction. Your father, who now addresses you, hath had his doubts; he hath fometimes been mistaken; and hath wished, in those moments, that the consequences of fin were not so grievous. He hath not been exempt from falling; but the victorious grace of God hath kindly come to his relief. He can now behold, without fear, his approaching death. Beyond this period, he sees objects of joy, and subjects of hope; all which invite him to press forwards to that eternity, where death will be vanished, and where sin will have no access. Your heart, which

is so little corrupted with vicious sentiments, will find less difficulty in the way that leads to life. After having finished your race, you will meet your father in those glorious and peaceful habitations, where the thoughts of our corruption will no more be productive of inquietude and shame, nor the sufferings of the present time fill any longer our eyes with tears.

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TO HIS DINORTER. . 279

to to linde corrupted with vicious for course, will find less distinculty to story your that less distinculty to story your that the line is After has first failing dyour race, your will meet your fail this in thate glerious and proced find bablantions, where the thoughts for the proceduct of the first inquietude and thank, and the fail that the failteings of the prefer time and that the failteings of the prefer time and that the failteings of the prefer time

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