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Daniel Waterland

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE HOLY TRINITY

By Daniel Waterland

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[Spelling modernized. Bible citations converted to all Arabic numerals. Footnotes moved into or near the place of citation. Those formerly in Latin or Greek include here only the bibliographic information for reference; non-English text is omitted.]

He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. John 3:18.

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Introduction.

There has appeared, very lately, a small pamphlet* a of seventy-six pages, entitled, *A Sober and Charitable Disquisition* concerning the Importance of the Doctrine of the Trinity; endeavouring to show, that “those in the different schemes should bear with each other in their different sentiments, and should not separate communions.” The treatise appears to be written in a good manner, and with a Christian spirit; on which account it deserves the more notice: and the question debated in it is undoubtedly important in every view, whether with regard to peace in this life, or happiness in the next. And as I have formerly spent some time and pains in discussing the truth of that high and holy doctrine, from Scripture, reason, and antiquity; so now I think it concerns me the more, to debate, in like manner, the importance of it: which I shall, by God’s assistance, endeavour to do, fully and fairly, with all due care and attention, and with all

becoming reverence for the subject, as well as respect towards the reader.

*[Printed for John Gray, at the Cross Keys in the Poultry, near Cheap. aide, 1732.

N. B. There were several other pieces which preceded, or soon followed it, relating to the same cause. 1. Mr. Nation's Sermon, preached Sept. 8, 1731. 2. A Letter to Mr. Nation, by P. C. 1732. 3. A Vindication of Mr. Nation's Sermon: with a Letter from Mr. Nation. 4. A Letter to the Author of the Vindication: with a Second Letter to Mr. Nation, by P. C. 5. A Reply to Mr. P. C.'s Letter. 6. A Postscript, or a Third Letter to Mr. Nation, by P. C.]

Before I enter upon the main debate, it will be proper to clear the way by some preliminary observations concerning the several sorts of persons who deny the importance of the doctrine of the Trinity, and their views in doing it; as also concerning the advocates, on the other side, who assert the importance of that sacred doctrine, and the general principles on which they proceed.

I. As to the persons who deny the importance of the doctrine, they are reducible to three kinds; being either such as disbelieve the doctrine itself, or such as are in some suspense about it; or, lastly, such as really assent to it as true doctrine. It is with this last sort only, that our present debate is properly concerned. But yet for the clearer apprehending those three different kinds of men, and their different views in joining together so far in the same cause, it will not be improper to say something severally and distinctly of each.

1. Those that disbelieve the doctrine itself, while they join with others in decrying the importance of it, are to be looked upon as a kind of artful men, who think it policy to carry on a scheme gently and leisurely, and to steal upon the unwary by soft and almost insensible degrees – a method which is indeed commonly slower in producing the effect, but is the surer for being so; as it is less shocking, and more insinuating. They are content therefore, at first, to make men cool and indifferent towards the doctrine; as thinking it a good point gained, and a promising advance made towards the laying it aside. With these views, both Socinians and Arians, who disbelieve the doctrine itself, may yet be content, for a time, to declare only against the importance of it. Deists also may join in the same thing, conceiving, that indifference, as to a prime article of Christianity, may in time draw on the same kind of indifference towards Christianity itself. They are disbelievers with respect to the doctrine of the Trinity, and with respect also to all revealed religion: and they will of course favour and encourage the denial of any part, in order to bring on the subversion of the whole. However, our present concern is not directly with Deists, nor with such as deny the doctrine of the Trinity: for our dispute now is, not about the certainty of revealed religion (which is supposed in our present question), nor about the truth of the doctrine of the Trinity (which is also supposed), but about

the importance, use, or value of it.

2. A second sort of persons, before mentioned, are such as seriously believe Christianity in the general, and do not disbelieve the doctrine of the Trinity in particular, but suspend their belief of it, and are a kind of sceptics on that head. These men deny the importance of the doctrine, because they think it doubtful whether it be a doctrine of, holy Scripture or no: and they judge very rightly in the general, that a stress ought not to be laid upon uncertainties, upon things precarious and conjectural, which cannot be proved to the satisfaction of the common reason of mankind. They are right in thesi, and wrong in hypothesi, as shall be shown in the sequel. Only I may hint, by the way, that our present debate is not directly with this kind of men: for they are rather to be referred to what has been written for the truth of the doctrine, than to what more immediately concerns the importance of it. Yet because the presumed uncertainty or doubtfulness of the doctrine, is by these men made the principal objection against the importance of it, and the author of the *Sober and Charitable Disquisition* seems to lay the main stress of the cause there, quite through his performance; it will be necessary to give that objection a place in this discourse, and to return an answer to it in the general, or so far as may be proper; not to draw the whole controversy about the truth of the doctrine into this other question concerning the importance of it.

While I am speaking of men doubtful in this article, I would be understood of serious and religious men, and not of such persons whose minds are purely secular, and who are indifferent to everything but what concerns this world: such persons are of no consideration in our present question; neither are they men proper to be reasoned with, as they have no relish at all for inquiries of this nature. But I proceed.

3. A third kind of men are those that believe the truth of the doctrine, but demur to the importance of it. And as Episcopius was, in a manner, their father or founder, and great leader, they have been frequently called after him, Episcopians. These are properly the persons whom we have here to dispute with: for they are the men who make the truth and the importance of the doctrine two distinct questions, admitting the one, and rejecting the other, or however demurring to it. The design of this middle way was to reconcile parties, if possible, and to favour the Socinians so far, as to condemn their doctrines only, without condemning the men. But this new and fruitless expedient was very much disliked by all that had any warm and hearty concern for the true and ancient faith. Such coldness and indifference, with regard to a prime article of Christianity, appeared to many, to be nothing else but an artful, specious way of betraying it, and likely to do more mischief than an open denial of it. The ablest

and soundest Divines, as well Lutheran [Buddeus, Isag. p. 422.] as Reformed, [Witsius in Symbol. Apostol. p. 76, etc.] have reclaimed strongly against it, detesting the neutrality of the remonstrant brethren, as tending to undermine the Gospel of Christ. The Divines of our Church, however otherwise supposed to be against Calvinism, and to favour Arminianism, yet smartly condemned the Remonstrants in that article. Dr. Bull, particularly, appeared against them in a very accurate and learned treatise, [Judicium Ecclesiae Catholicae de necessitate credendi] in the year 1694. And it is worth observing, how Dr. Nicholls afterwards expresses himself in the name of our whole body. “There is another Arminian doctrine, which we avoid as deadly poison, their assertion that there is no necessity of acknowledging three Persons in the divine nature, nor that Christ in particular is the eternal Son of God: this heretical notion our Church abominates and detests, as an heinous impiety, and what was never heard of in the writings of the primitive Christians.”* Thus far he, in relation to our Divines of the Church of England.

*[Nicholls’s Defence of the Church of England, part i. chap. 9. Mr. Scrivener, long before, (A.D. 1672) had passed the like censure. Scrivener. Apolog. adv. Dallaeum, in Prefat.]

As to the Divines of the separation, they are known to have been as zealous as any men could be, for the necessity of believing the doctrine of the Trinity, as the sum and kernel of the Christian religion, the basis, or foundation of the Christian faith. The testimonies of Mr. Baxter, Mr. Corbet, Dr. Manton, and Dr. Bates, to this purpose, may be seen at one view in a late writer [Mr. Eveleigh’s preface to a treatise entitled, The Deity of Christ proved fundamental.]: to those might be added Dr. Owen [Owen’s Vindiciae Evangelicae, praef. p. 64.], and Mr. Lob [Growth of Error, p. 3, 50, 69, 75, etc.]; and perhaps many more. In short, all parties and denominations of Christians, who appear to have had the truth of the doctrine at heart, or any good degree of zeal for it, have contended equally for the necessity of believing it, and have refused communion with the impugners of it.

II. I come next to observe something of the general principles upon which they build, who assert the importance of the doctrine of the Trinity, and who refuse communion with the open impugners of it.

1. They lay it down as a certain and indisputable principle that there are some Scripture doctrines of greater importance than others: and they generally make their estimate of that greater importance by the relation or connection which any doctrine is conceived to have with Christian practice or worship, or with the whole economy of man’s salvation by Christ [See Dr. Sherlock’s Vindication of the Defence of Dr. Stillingfleet, printed in 1682, ch. v. p. 256, etc.]; or by its

being plainly, frequently, or strongly inculcated in holy Scripture. Doctrines of this character are commonly styled necessities, essentials, fundamentals, prime verities, and the like. Not that I mightily like the word *necessary*, in this case, being a word of equivocal meaning, and great ambiguity, leading to mistakes, and furnishing much matter for cavils. For when we come to ask, necessary to what? or, necessary to whom? and in what degree? then arises perplexity; and there is need of a multitude of distinctions to set the matter clear, so as to serve all possible cases. A doctrine may be said to be necessary to the being of the Church, or to the salvation of some persons so and so qualified, or to the salvation of all: and many questions may arise about the precise degree of the necessity in every instance. But it is easily understood how one doctrine may be said to be more important than another; as more depends upon it, or as it more affects the vitals of Christianity, than doctrines of another kind: and we need look no further than to the nature and reason of things, and to the analogy of faith, to be able to distinguish what doctrines are thus important in the general, and what not. Yet there is no giving an exact catalogue of those important or fundamental doctrines; though it is for the most part easy to say of any particular doctrine which may be mentioned, what class it may be reasonably referred to; and whether, or how far, it may be worth contending for. We cannot give a complete catalogue of virtues, any more than of articles of faith, so as to be positive, that those particular virtues, and in such a particular degree, are necessary to all persons, or to any person that shall be named. The precise quantity of virtue (if I may so call it) absolutely necessary to salvation, is no more to be defined, than the precise quantity of faith. Yet we know, in the general, that sincere and universal obedience to what God commands (allowing for infirmities) is necessary to salvation: and in like manner, sincere and universal assent to what God reveals makes up the other part of the terms of acceptance; as faith and obedience together make up the whole.

2. They who assert the importance of the doctrine of the Trinity take it for granted, among Christians, that faith in the Gospel of Christ is necessary to the salvation of all men, who are blessed with Gospel light; and that men shall perish eternally for unbelief, for rejecting that Gospel faith, once sufficiently propounded to them: “Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature: he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” [Mark 16:15–16, compare John 3:36. Revel. 21:8.]

3. They conceive farther that as we are in duty bound to receive the Gospel faith, so are we likewise obliged, and under pain of damnation, to preserve it whole and entire, so far as in us lies; and neither to deprave it ourselves, nor to take part with them that do. It is our bounden duty to “hold fast the form of

sound words – in faith and love, which is in Christ Jesus” [2 Tim. 1:13.]: to be “sound in the faith” [Titus 1:13, 2:2.]: to “speak things which become “sound doctrine” [Titus 2:1. 1 Tim. 1:10. 2 Tim. 4:3.]: to “examine whether we be in the faith” [2 Cor. 13:6. compare Rev. 14:12.]; and in a word, to “contend earnestly for the faith once delivered unto the saints.” [Jude 3. compare 1 Tim. 4:6.] So much for the obligations we lie under, to keep the faith of Christ whole and undefiled. Next, we are to observe how dangerous a thing it is to corrupt the true faith in any heinous degree, either by adding to it, or taking away from it. One of the earliest instances of gross corruption by adding to the faith of Christ appeared in the converted Jews, or Judaizing Christians, who taught the necessity of observing circumcision and the law of Moses together with Christianity. Against those false apostles, who taught such pernicious doctrine, St. Paul drew his pen, looking upon them as subverters of the Gospel of Christ. [Gal. 1:6–7.] And he was so zealous in that matter, as to say, “Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.” [Gal. 1:8.] Where by another Gospel, he does not mean another religion substituted in the room of Christianity (for those false teachers were Christians still, not apostates); but some adulterous mixtures, tending to evacuate the Gospel law, and to frustrate the grace of God. [Gal. 2:21, 5:2.]

I shall give a second instance of gross corruption; not in adding to, but in taking from the Christian doctrine, in an article of very great importance. There was in the days of the Apostles, and after, a sect of opiniators, who (whether being ashamed of the cross of Christ, or whether thinking it impossible for God to become man [Novat. c. xxiii. p. 87. edit. Welchman.]) were pleased to deny that Christ Jesus had any real humanity, but that he was a kind of walking phantom, or apparition; had no human flesh, but imposed upon the eyes and other senses of the spectators. These men were afterwards called Docetae, and Phantasiastae; which one may well enough render Visionists, or Visionaries. We are next to take notice how St. John treated them, and what directions he gave to other Christians concerning them. He considered them as deluding teachers that subverted foundations; and he gave them the name and title of antichrists. “Every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is not of God. And this is that spirit of antichrist,” etc. [1 John 4:3.] In another place, speaking of the same men, he says, “Many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh: this is a deceiver and an antichrist.” [2 John 7.] It is manifest that he does not point his censure at the Jews, who denied that the Messiah was come; for he speaks of new men that had then lately “entered into the world,” whereas the Jews had been from the beginning: besides, that the Jews did not deny that Jesus (or the man called Christ Jesus)

had come in the flesh. Therefore, I say, St. John levelled not this censure of his against the Jews, but against some Christian heretics of that time, and those particularly that denied our Lord's humanity; in opposition to whom, he exhorts the brethren to "abide in the doctrine of Christ," [2 John 9.] and not to receive the gainsayers into their houses, nor to salute them with God speed, lest they should become thereby partakers of their evil deeds. [2 John 11.] By evil deeds I understand the overt acts of that heresy, the teaching, spreading, and inculcating it. Thus heresies, that is, the teaching or promoting of pernicious doctrines, are reckoned among the works of the flesh [Gal. 5:19–20.] by St. Paul: who also calls false teachers deceitful workers, [2 Cor. 11:13.] and evil workers [Phil. 3:2.]; because the promoting and encouraging of false and dangerous doctrines is a very ill practice, a wicked employ: which I hint, by the way, for the clearer explication of St. John's meaning in the phrase of evil deeds.

I shall mention a third Scripture instance of gross corruption in doctrine, which was the denial of a future resurrection; dangerous doctrine, subversive of Christianity. St. Paul very solemnly admonished the Corinthians, [1 Cor. 15.] to prevent their giving ear to such pernicious suggestions: and he afterwards excommunicated Hymenaeus, Philetus, and Alexander, for spreading and propagating them, delivering the men over to Satan, that they might learn not to blaspheme. [Compare 1 Tim. 1:20. 2 Tim. 2:16–18.]

From the three instances now mentioned, it may sufficiently appear, that the corrupting or maiming Christianity in its vitals, by denying or destroying its prime articles, or fundamental doctrines, is a very dangerous thing; and that we are obliged, under pain of damnation, neither to do it ourselves, nor to abet, countenance, or encourage those that do, by communicating with them.

4. But it is farther to be observed that in slighter matters, in things not nearly affecting the vitals of Christianity, the rule is for Christians to bear with one another; not to divide or separate, but to agree among themselves; so to disagree in harmless opinions, or indifferent rites, as to unite in faith and love, and in Christian fellowship. [Rom. 14. Rom. 15. Col. 2:16–17.] Peace is a very valuable thing, and ought not to be sacrificed even to truth; unless such truth be important, and much may depend upon it. A man is not obliged, in all cases, to declare all he knows; and if he does declare his sentiments, and knows them to be true, yet he need not insist upon them with rigour, if the point contested be of a slight nature or value, in comparison to the Church's peace. Let him enjoy his own liberty in that case; and let others have theirs too; and so all will be right. Let them differ so far, by consent, and yet live together in peace and charity. But then, as to weightier matters, it concerns us carefully to observe, that rules of peace are but secondary and subordinate to those of piety or charity, and must

veil to them. Peace must be broken in this world, whenever it is necessary to do it for the securing salvation in the next for ourselves or others: and a breach of peace, in such instances, is obedience to the higher law of charity, is conforming to the primary and great commandments, the love of God, and the love of our neighbour. Therefore peace, in such cases, must be sacrificed to truth and charity, that is, to the honour of God, and the eternal interests of mankind.

These things premised, it remains now only to inquire what kind of a doctrine the doctrine of the Trinity is; whether it be of such a slight and indifferent nature as not to be worth the insisting upon at the expense of peace; or whether it be of such high value and importance, that it ought to be maintained as an essential of Christianity against all opposers. This is the great question now before us, and I shall endeavour to examine into it with due care and application.

The gentlemen who look upon it as a non-fundamental, have several things to urge, but such as may most of them be reduced to three heads, as follow. 1. That the received doctrine of the Trinity is not clear enough to be admitted for a fundamental. 2. That it is merely speculative, or however, not practical enough to be important. 3. That it is not sufficiently insisted upon in Scripture, as of necessity to salvation. Now, in return to these three considerations, I shall endeavour to show, in so many distinct chapters, that the doctrine is sufficiently clear, and also practical, and insisted upon likewise in Scripture, as much as the nature of the thing needs or requires.

Chapter I.

Showing that the Doctrine of the Trinity is sufficiently Clear to be admitted as a Fundamental Article.

Clear may be considered in two views, either with respect to the matter of the doctrine, or with respect to the proofs upon which it rests. Let us examine the thing both ways.

I. It may be suggested that the doctrine is not clear with regard to the matter of it: it is mysterious doctrine. Be it so: the tremendous Deity is all over mysterious, in his nature and in his attributes, in his works and ways. It is the property of the divine Being to be unsearchable: and if he were not so, he would not be divine. Must we therefore reject the most certain truths concerning the Deity, only because they are incomprehensible, when everything almost belonging to him must be so of course? If so, there is an end, not only of all revealed religion, but of natural religion too; and we must take our last refuge in downright Atheism. There are mysteries in the works of nature, as well as in the

word of God; and it is as easy to believe both as one. We do not mean by mysteries, positions altogether unintelligible, or that carry no idea at all with them: we do not mean unsensed characters, or empty sounds: but we mean propositions contained in general terms, which convey as general ideas, not descending to particulars. The ideas are clear, so far as they go; only they do not reach far enough to satisfy curiosity. They are ideas of intellect, for the most part; like the ideas which we form of our own souls: for spiritual substance, at least (if any substance), falls not under imagination, but must be understood, rather than imagined. The same is the case with many abstract verities, in numbers especially; which are not the less verities for being purely intellectual, and beyond all imagery. Reason contemplates them, and clearly too, though fancy can lay no hold of them, to draw their picture in the mind. Such, I say, are our ideas of the divine Being, and of a Trinity in Unity; ideas of intellect, and general; intelligible as far as the thing is revealed, and assented to so far as intelligible. We understand the general truths, concerning a Father, Son, and Holy Ghost: we understand the general nature of an union and a distinction; and what we understand we believe. As to the minute particulars relating to the manner or modus of the thing, we understand them not: our ideas reach not to them, but stop short in the generals, as our faith also does. For our faith and our ideas keep pace with each other; and we believe nothing about particulars whereof nothing is revealed,* neither expressly nor consequentially.

*[See the subject of mysteries treated of more at large, either in my First Defence, Qu. xxi. vol. i. p. 218, etc. or in Norris's Account of Reason and Faith, p. 117, 118. or in Mr. Browne's Lecture Sermons for Lady Moyer, p. 257-262.]

Such a general assent as I have mentioned is what we give to the truth of the divine perfections, necessary existence, eternity, ubiquity, prescience, and the like. [See my First Defence, Qu. xxi. vol. i. p.216, etc. Second Defence, vol. ii. Qu. xxi. p. 391.] Whatever obscurity or defect there is in our ideas of those divine attributes, we think it no good reason for denying either the general truths, or the importance of them. So then, no just objection can be made against the importance of any doctrine from its mysterious nature. The most mysterious of all are in reality the most important; not because they are mysterious, but because they relate to things divine, which must of course be mysterious to weak mortals, and perhaps to all creatures whatever. But even mysterious doctrines have a bright side, as well as a dark one; and they are clear to look upon, though too deep to be seen through.

It has been sometimes objected that however clear the doctrine may seem to be to men of parts and learning, yet certainly it cannot be so to common Christians. But why not to common Christians, as well as to others? It is as clear

to them as most other high and divine things can be. It is as clear, for instance, as the divine eternity or omnipresence. Every common Christian professing Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, to be so distinct as not to be one the other, and so united as to be one God, has as clear an idea of what he says, as when he prays, "Our Father which art in heaven;" or when he repeats after the Psalmist, "Thou art about my path, and about my bed, and spiest out all my ways." [Psalm 139:2.] And, I am persuaded, upon examination, he will be as able to give as good an account of the one, as he will of the other. The thing is plain and intelligible in either case, but in the general only, not as to the particular manner. Ask how three are one, and probably both catechumen and catechist will be perfectly at a nonplus: or ask, how God is in heaven, and how about our path, or our bed, and they will both be equally confounded. But, by the way, let it be here considered, whether common Christians may not often have clearer ideas of those things, than the bolder and more inquisitive, because they are content to rest in generals, and to stop at what they understand, without darkening it afterwards by words without knowledge. The notion of eternity, for instance, is a clear notion enough to a common Christian: but to a person that perplexes himself with nice inquiries about succession, or past duration, that very first notion which in the general was clear, may become obscure, by his blending perplexities with it. The like may be said of omnipresence: the general notion of it is competently clear: but when a man has been perplexing his thoughts with curious inquiries about a substantial or a virtual presence, about extension or non-extension, and the like; I question whether at length he may come away with so clear or just ideas of the main thing as may be found in any common Christian. So again as to divine foreknowledge and freewill, they are both of them clearly understood, as far as they need be, by every plain Christian; while many a conceited scholar, by darkening the subject with too minute inquiries, almost loses the sight of it. In like manner, to apply these Instances to our present purpose, common Christians may sometimes better preserve the true and right general notion of the doctrine of the Trinity, than the more learned inquirers: and it is observable, what Hilary of Poitiers, an honest and a knowing man of the fourth century, testifies, that the populace of that time, for the most part, kept the true and right faith in the Trinity, [Hilar. contr. Auxent. 1266. edit. Bened.] when their ministers, several of them, by prying too far into it, had the misfortune to lose it.

While I am treating of the case of common Christians, I cannot omit the mentioning an artifice much made use of by those who would depreciate the doctrine of the Trinity, as not clear enough to be an important article: they first enter into all the niceties and perplexities which subtle disputants have ever clogged the subject with, and then they ask, whether common Christians can be

supposed to see through them. No, certainly: neither need they trouble their heads about them. It is one thing to understand the doctrine, and quite another to be masters of the controversy. It is not fair dealing with us to pretend it necessary for every common Christian, if he believes in the Trinity, to form just conceptions of it in every minute particular: for, by the same argument, it might as well be pleaded, that they are not obliged to believe in God, nor indeed in anything. God is without body, parts, or passions, according to the first article of our Church. How many minute perplexing inquiries might there not be raised upon the three particulars now mentioned! And who can assure us that common Christians may not be liable to entertain some wrong conceptions in every one of them? Must we therefore say that the general doctrine of the existence of a Deity is not clear enough to be important doctrine, or that common Christians are not bound to receive it as a necessary article of their faith? See how far such objections would carry us. But since these objections ought to have no weight at all in other parallel cases, or nearly parallel, they ought certainly to be the less regarded in respect to the doctrine of the ever blessed Trinity. Let but this doctrine have as fair usage as other Christian and important doctrines are allowed to have, and then I am persuaded there will be no pretense left for saying that it is not a clear doctrine, clear in the general, clear in the main thing, to any Christian whatever. It is horrible misrepresentation of the case, to pretend as if we taught, that “the eternal interest of every plowman or mechanic hangs on his adjusting the sense of the terms, nature, person, essence, substance, subsistence, coequality, coessentiality, and the like.” No; those are technical terms, most of them, proper to divines and scholars: and not only plowmen and mechanics, but very great scholars too, lived and died in the conscientious belief of the doctrine of the Trinity, long before any of those terms came in. They are of use indeed for settling the controversy with greater accuracy among Divines, who understand such terms: but the doctrine itself is clear without them, and does not want them, but stands firm and unshaken, independent of them. Any plain man may easily conceive, that Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are properly divine, are not one the other, and yet are one God, by an intimate union; and that the Son in particular, being God and man, is one Christ. These prime verities, and whatsoever else is necessarily implied in them, may be conceived to be right; and whatsoever is contrary to them, or inconsistent with them, will of consequence be wrong. This is enough for any plain Christian to know or believe; and he is not ordinarily obliged to be more minute in his inquiries, or to understand scholastic terms. It is not to be expected that common Christians should be expert disputants in controversies of faith, any more than that they should be profound casuists in relation to practice: yet Christian practice is

necessary to salvation, and so is Christian faith too; and the obligation to obey a general precept, or to believe a general truth, is not superseded or evacuated by a man's being unacquainted with terms of art, or by his being liable to mistake in some remote or minute circumstances belonging to the doctrine itself.

To make the thing yet plainer, let us take some general rule of Christian practice; the rule, suppose, of dealing with others as we would be dealt with: a rule of such importance, that, by our Lord's account of it, it is the sum and substance of the Law and the Prophets. [Matt. 7:12.] Surely then, it is a rule designed for common Christians, and such as both deserves and requires their most careful notice. Next, let us view this rule under all its minutenesses or particularities; its distinctions, limitations, and explications, with which it is dressed out by knowing and able Divines. [See particularly Archbishop Tillotson's Sermon on Matt. 7:12 separately published in 1709. and Collier's Essay of Honesty, part iv. p. 56, etc.] Observe thereupon, what an operose business is made of this so plain and familiar rule, what pains are taken to clear it of all seeming repugnancies, to make it reasonable, to make it certain, to make it practicable, and to guard it most effectually against the many possible ways, whereby it may be misconstrued, eluded, perverted, frustrated. Are common Christians equal to all those niceties, or are they able to grasp them? I conceive, not. And yet I dare be confident that a plain unlettered man of tolerable sense, and who has not a mind to deceive himself, might be safely trusted with the naked rule, and would but seldom, if ever, either misunderstand it (so far as concerns his own case) or misapply it. He would keep the plain even road, and would scarce believe the man that should tell him that it was strewed with thorns, or that hundreds had been or might be either embarrassed in it, or bewildered by it. The same thing is true with respect to the general doctrine of the Trinity. For though there are many possible ways of mistaking it, or perverting it (as there are many crooked lines to one straight), and it concerns Divines to guard minutely against all; yet less may suffice for common Christians; ordinarily, I mean, at least. The right faith in the Trinity is short and plain; and whatever crosses upon it is wrong: *Index est rectum sui, et obliqui*: truth shows itself, and is for the most part to every honest mind a guard sufficient against the mazes of error.

I have dwelt the longer upon this article, because the objection about common Christians appears a popular and plausible one, and is often repeated in this cause, though there is really no weight in it. The author of the *Sober and Charitable Disquisition* need not be in pain for common Christians, lest they should not "have skill enough to unite the two natures in Christ without confounding them, or dividing the Person, in their apprehensions." [Sober and Charitable Disquisition, p. 22.] They will as easily conceive that God and man is one

Christ, as that soul and body is one man; and they need not look farther. Without troubling themselves at all with the names either of natures or persons, they may joyfully and thankfully remember, that he “who is over all God blessed forever,” [Rom. 9:5.] became a man for their sakes, and died for them, in order to bring them to God. What is there in all this that should either offend or perplex, or should not rather greatly edify common Christians? They may be “more accurate in their thoughts on this head than the great patriarch and abbot Nestorius and Eutyches” [See Sober and Charitable, etc. p. 22.] (for they were not both patriarchs, as this author styles them), because they will indulge their fancies less, and rest in the general truth, without drawing a false modus, or any modus upon it, either to corrupt or to obscure it: they will abide in the true doctrine, without defiling it (as those great men did) with over officious and presumptuous speculations. It may be allowed that “common Christians have but very little apprehension” [Ibid. p. 23.] of some minute or remote considerations given in by way of answer to as minute and remote objections, in order to clear the doctrine in every punctilio: and in like manner, they have but very little apprehension of several such remote considerations thrown in by Divines, in their disputes with Atheists or Deists, in order to clear the doctrine of the divine Being and attributes, or of the authority of Scripture, and to make everything at length conformable and consistent. But what then? Does it therefore follow, that common Christians may not believe in God, or in God’s word, or that such belief is not important? Common Christians believe enough, if they believe the main things under a general view, without branching them out into all the minute particulars which depend upon them, or belong to them. Let Divines see that every article of faith is clear and consistent throughout, when traversed as far as the acutest objector can carry it: but let common Christians be content with every article in its native simplicity, as laid down in Scripture for edification of the faithful, and not as it appears in controversial books, or confessions, with all its armour about it, for the conviction or confusion of gainsayers. But I am afraid I have exceeded on this head, and have overburdened the reader. Upon the whole, the doctrine of the Trinity must be allowed to be sufficiently clear, as to the matter of it.

2. The next consideration is that it is clear also, as to the proofs upon which it rests: it may be clearly proved, as well as clearly conceived. Indeed, the truth of the doctrine ought to be supposed in our present question, as previously known and admitted. Accordingly, our remonstrant brethren, who first disputed the importance of our doctrine, made no scruple of allowing the truth of it, as I have before hinted. They allowed the Scripture proofs to be so far clear, as to oblige us to admit the doctrine for a certain truth. [Episcop. Institut. lib. iv. sect. 2. cap. 32. p. 333.] Neither are we much beholden to them for this seeming courtesy,

since the proofs are so numerous and so cogent, that every ingenuous and sensible man must plainly see, that were Scripture alone to decide the question, and no false philosophy or metaphysics brought in to confound or perplex it, there could scarce be any room left for debate about it. I do not mean that many Scripture texts may not be speciously urged on the other side: but what I mean is, that upon the summing up of the evidence on both sides, and after balancing the whole account, the advantage is so plainly ours, according to all the approved rules of grammar or criticism, that there is nothing at all left on the other side, whereby to turn the scale, except it be some pretended absurdity, or absurdities, in point of reason, charged upon us, by the help of dialectical or metaphysical subtleties; which yet, after all, are mere fallacy and sophistry, and have no real strength in them. We must therefore insist upon it as certain fact that our doctrine is clear enough, with respect to the Scripture evidences produced for it. Scripture, in its plain, natural, obvious, unforced meaning, says it, and reason does not gainsay it: upon these two pillars our cause rests. Upon this bottom Bishop Bull fixes it: "The Antitrinitarians can never produce a demonstrative reason to prove that it cannot be, and divine revelation assures us that so it is." [Bull, Posth. Works, vol. iii. p. 833.] To the same purpose speaks Mr. Howe: "That there is a Trinity in the Godhead, of Father, Son (or Word), and Holy Ghost, is the plain obvious sense of so many Scriptures, that it apparently tends to frustrate the design of the whole Scripture revelation, and to make it useless, not to admit this Trinity, or otherwise to understand such Scriptures." [Howe's Calm Discourse of the Trinity in the Godhead, p. 136, 137.] In like manner Dr. Burnet of the Charter House, a noted man, and known to have had as little of a bigot in him as anyone, says thus: "We are obliged, according to that light which God hath vouchsafed to us in the dispensation of the Gospel, to believe and profess that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, and likewise God. If we mistake in this faith, the mistake is so far from being voluntary, that it is inevitable. For we follow, according to the best of our apprehension, the guides which God hath given us, St. John, and Paul the Apostle. To these sacred writers we assent and adhere, interpreting them according to the genuine force and received use of words: for neither Christ, nor the above-said writers have told us, that those sacred Oracles were written in any other style, or that they were to be "interpreted in any other manner." [Judgment of Dr. Thomas Burnet, p. 11, 12. printed for Roberts, 1732. See the original, de Fid. et Offic. cap. viii. p. 134. And compare my seventh Sermon, vol. ii. p. 166, 167, 168.]

The late learned Professor Franck, of Hall in Saxony, speaking to the Antitrinitarians, expresses himself thus: "Though you allow the Scriptures of the New Testament, you nevertheless boldly and arrogantly contradict the truth,

clearly shining before your eyes, and express testimonies proposed in such simple and plain words, that even a child may read and understand them.” [Franck’s *Christus sacra Scripturae Nucleus*, p. 181, 182. translated out of German: printed by Downing, 1732.]

I cite these testimonies, not in the way of authority, but only to give the reader a clearer idea of what the Trinitarians go upon: for they are all, so far, in the same strain, and these testimonies are offered only as samples, whereby to judge of the rest. Any indifferent bystander may easily perceive what, for the most part, has led the Christian world to contend earnestly for the doctrine of the Trinity; namely, a conscientious dread of dishonouring him whom God the Father has commanded them to honour even as himself, a profound reverence for sacred Writ, and an invincible persuasion that those Scriptures cannot, without the utmost violence, and most daring presumption, be interpreted otherwise than they interpret them. It would be tedious here to cite the particular texts which we ground our faith upon; and it would be highly improper to fetch in the whole dispute about the truth of the doctrine into this other debate, which concerns only the importance of it. Therefore referring the readers for the truth of the doctrine to other treatises lately printed, in great abundance, and well known, I shall content myself here with hinting two general arguments or considerations, such as may give the readers some notion of the irresistible force of our Scripture proofs in this cause.

1. One is, that the proofs which we insist upon cannot be evaded by any approved rules of language or criticism, but the last resort of our opposers commonly is to some philosophical principle, some pretended reason, drawn from the supposed nature of the thing, rather than from the Scripture style, or from the force of Scripture expressions. I have observed elsewhere, [Defence, Qu. xxii. vol. i. p. 231. Second Defence, Qu. xxii. vol. iii. p. 402, etc.] that such has been the method of eluding John 1:1 and several other texts, which are full and express as possible, for the real and proper divinity of our Lord. They are eluded, I say, upon this principle, that person and intelligent being are equivalent and reciprocal; or that there can be no medium between Tritheism and Sabellianism, or by something else of like kind: which is running off from the question about the Scriptural proof of the doctrine, to the natural possibility of the thing; and is not submitting to the obvious and apparent sense of sacred Writ, but is tantamount to saying that no Scriptures can prove it: an evasion which might equally serve for any texts whatever, were they ever so numerous, plain, and express. This kind of conduct on the opposite side, manifestly shows how hard they are pressed upon the foot of Scripture; when, in the last result, they remove the cause from Scripture to philosophy, from considerations of language, and

style, and propriety of expression, to a foreign consideration, the rationale of the thing. This is a plain token that the letter is against them; only they take the reason of the thing to plead so much in their favour, that it ought to overrule any force of expression. So they lay the main stress upon metaphysical subtleties [See my First Defence, vol. i. p. 232, etc. 340. Second Defence, vol. iii. p. 4, 64, 109, 397, 402, 403.]; that is to say, upon human conjectures about things naturally unsearchable, in opposition to the express declarations of the word of God: which, by the way, is first setting up a false measure of truth; and, next, is making a new rule of faith. It is a false measure of truth to make human conception the standard of it, since there may be a thousand or ten thousand verities, which we cannot account for, or explain the manner of: and it is making a new rule of faith, if we resolve to believe nothing but what we can comprehend; or if in cases where we can see no plain contradiction or absurdity, we choose to make the letter of Scripture bend to our own conceptions, rather than submit our wisdom to the wisdom of God. But this is not the point which I am now upon; and so it suffices to have briefly hinted it in passing. The use which I intended of the observation in this place, was to intimate the strength of our Scripture proofs, which drive the adversaries to such extremities.

2. Another yet more affecting and sensible argument of the same thing is, that our antagonists, in eluding the Scripture proofs of the divinity of God the Son, have scarce left themselves any for the divinity even of God the Father; indeed none but what by the same artificial way of eluding may be evaded and frustrated, as well as the other. This is a consideration of great weight, which has been pressed upon them over and over, [Defence, vol. i. p. 82. Second Defence, vol. iii. p. 230, etc. Third Defence, vol. iv. p. 55, etc. Compare Abbadie on Christ's Divinity, p. 240.] and has never yet received a satisfactory answer. So it remains as a standing evidence of the glaring force of our Scripture proofs, and will ever remain so.

Upon the whole then, the doctrine of the Trinity must be acknowledged clear enough with respect to the Scripture proofs upon which it stands; provided always that there is nothing plainly repugnant or contradictory in the notion. For, on the other hand, it must be allowed, that were the thing plainly absurd or impossible, no Scriptures could prove it; but, in such a case, we should be obliged either to deny the authority of such Scriptures (in whole, or in part), or to have recourse to trope or figure, or any possible interpretation to solve the difficulty. This is not the case here: and therefore since the doctrine cannot be proved to be impossible in the nature of the thing, it is abundantly proved from Scripture to be both possible and true. Reason never has, never can demonstrate the thing to be impossible: after repeated trials, 1400 years upwards and more, and all to no purpose, that should now be looked upon as a ruled point. [See the

state of the question, as to the possibility of the doctrine, In Second Defence, vol. iii. p. 478. and in Mr. Browne's Animadversions on two Pieces, p. 5, 6, etc.] I conclude then from what has been offered in this chapter, that the doctrine of the Trinity is clear enough to be important, both with respect to the matter of it, and the Scripture proofs upon which it stands: and therefore its pretended obscurity, or uncertainty, can be no sufficient reason for throwing it of as a slight or indifferent article, not worth contending for, or insisting upon, as an essential of faith, and a term of Christian communion.

Chapter II.

Showing, that the same Doctrine is no Speculative or Notional thing, but strictly Practical, and closely interwoven with the Principles of the Christian Life.

A right knowledge of God, and a practice conformable to it, and both in order to a more complete and blissful enjoyment, are not speculative or indifferent matters, but matters properly practical, and of infinite concernment. If religious practice in any measure depends upon a previous knowledge of God (as undoubtedly it does), then certainly, for the like reason, the perfection of that practice depends upon the perfection of such knowledge. A general and confuse notion of God may produce as general and confuse rules of demeanour towards him; while a more particular and explicit apprehension of the Deity will of course produce a more particular and explicit service. It is true, where God has not afforded such distinct knowledge, a less perfect service may and must suffice: but wherever much is given, much will be required, and from peculiar circumstances will arise peculiar obligations. If God be Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, the duties owing to God will be duties owing under that trine distinction; which must be paid accordingly: and whoever leaves out any of the three out of his idea of God, comes so far short of honouring God perfectly, and of serving him in proportion to the manifestations made of him. Supposing our doctrine true (as we are now to suppose), there will be duties proper to be paid to the Father as Father, and to the Son as Son, and to the Holy Ghost as the eternal Spirit of both; duties correspondent to their distinct offices and personalities, beside the duties common to all three, considered as one God. In short, the specification of our worship, and the right direction of it, are nearly concerned in this doctrine: and therefore, if worship be a practical matter, this doctrine also is practical, and not a point of mere speculation. [See Dr. Webster's introductory Discourses to Maimburg's History of Arianism, p. 43, etc.] That worship is a practical thing, I suppose no man of sense will dispute; or if any one does, it must be a dispute only about words, and not affecting the main thing: wherefore, it must be

altogether wrong to imagine, that the doctrine of the Trinity is purely notional, or has no connection with practice. [Witsius in Symb. Apost. p. 76.] If the doctrine be true, it is sacrilege, and great impiety, in every Christian to refuse to worship Father, Son, or Holy Ghost: but if the doctrine be false, it is polytheism and idolatry to pay religious worship to any person but the Father only. So much depends upon this single article.

The author of *Sober and Charitable Disquisition* labours this point extremely, for several pages together, [Sober and Charitable Disquisition, p. 4–23.] and has perhaps said as much and as well as the cause will admit of. He endeavours to clear the Arian worshippers of Christ from formal polytheism; and to retort the charge upon the orthodox worshippers; that so upon consideration that both parties may mean well, or in some respects may both offend, they may consent to bear with each other, and to unite in Christian fellowship together. But in my humble opinion, the thought is wide, and the project impracticable. There is no patching up any lasting or rational agreement of that kind, while the parties cannot unite so much as in the object of divine worship. He allows, that the opposers of Christ's Divinity (properly so called) can pay him no more than inferior worship, such as if tendered to God would manifestly dishonour and degrade him, would directly deny him to have divine perfections, and, instead of honouring him as God, would degrade him into somewhat that is not God. [Ibid. p. 8, 9.] Can those then who believe Christ to be God, and who honour him as such, ever think it reasonable or pious to hold communion with men who, by what they call inferior worship, do thus manifestly dishonour and degrade their God and Saviour, denying his divine perfections, degrading him into somewhat that is not God? Can the Catholic believers ever suffer or connive at such affronts offered (as they must esteem them) to God blessed forever? How can they ever justify either to God, or to the world, or to their own consciences, such a guilty neutrality in an affair of the highest consequence, in an article of the last importance? Mutual forbearance in doubtful points of speculative opinion is very becoming fallible men, in consideration of our common frailty: but it is unreasonable, and morally impracticable, to come to any composition, where the parties differ so widely, and in so material a concern, as the object of divine worship. Religious men will be zealous for the honour of their Lord God, because they know that they ought to be so; neither will they nor can they countenance any coldness or indifference in so weighty a concern. Excessive heats perhaps may sometimes arise in such cases; for so long as religion is held in esteem, and believed to be worth the contending for, there must be contests about it, which may sometimes rise too high: but it is an error on the right hand, and much to be preferred to a cold indifference; as a strong athletic constitution,

though subject sometimes to fevers, is yet vastly preferable to a constant lethargy. To return, the sum is, that the point of divine worship is a critical point, a difficulty which cannot be got over, while both sides retain their respective principles; one looking upon the Son and Holy Ghost as creatures, and the other esteeming them as one God with the Father. For supposing that both parties were to join in the same solemn acts of outward worship offered to Christ (for that he ought to be worshipped both sides allow), yet since the Catholic side conceive that those religious acts are on the other side defiled by an irreligious meaning, and amount rather to a solemn mockery of their God and Saviour, than to a respectful remembrance of him; and that they are in reality, though not intentionally, flat polytheism and idolatry; I say, while the Catholic believers are so persuaded, they cannot in prudence or in conscience, in piety to God or charity to men, consent to such known defilements of their solemn service; because it would be directly partaking in other men's sins. If it be said, that they need not judge all creature worship to be polytheism and idolatry; I answer, they cannot avoid it, while they consider either Scripture itself, or the universal suffrage of antiquity in the best and purest ages. If it be further said that they need not however think so hardly of creature worshippers as to charge them with guilt, since they may intend well; I answer that a good intention is not sufficient to warrant an ill thing: besides that, were they ever so guiltless, yet those or the contrary persuasion could not be so in countenancing by their own communion, what they cannot but look upon as great impiety and profanation. So, turn we this matter which way we will, the point of worship must be a parting point betwixt them, while they retain their opposite sentiments, with regard to the strict and proper Divinity of Christ.

I shall not here enter into the debate about creature worship, having distinctly and fully considered it elsewhere:* besides, that I may properly wave it, as it is wide and foreign to the cause now in hand. For whether such creature worship be right or wrong, those that believe in Christ as a divine Person cannot join with those who worship him under the notion of a creature, and do not worship him as divine; because, it has been before intimated, such inferior worship (whatever else we call it) is dishonouring and degrading him, and cannot but be rejected with abhorrence by all that seriously believe him to be really and strictly God.

*[Defence, vol. i. Qu. xvi. p. 163, etc. Second Defence, vol. iii. Qu. xvi. p. 346, etc. Compare Bull's *Primitiva et Apostol. Traditio*. C. vi. p. 386, etc. Bishop Smalbroke's *Idolatry charged on Arianism*. Mr. Abr. Taylor's *True Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity*, p. 69, 448, etc. Dr. Bishop's *Sermons*, p. 271–281. Archbishop Tillotson's *Sermons*, vol. i. p. 547, etc. fol. edit.]

As to what the author of *Sober and Charitable Disquisition* objects, that possibly some of our own people, who believe Christ to be God, may yet consider him merely as Man, or as Mediator, [Sober and Charitable Disquisition, p.21, 22, 23.] and not as God, in their acts of worship, it may be purely a surmise: but however the fact stands, there is no argument in it. We cannot answer for vulgar Christians, as to the notions they may possibly entertain even of God the Father in their worship of him; neither can we be certain, whether sometimes they rise higher than those of an Anthropomorphite. But I presume, if any vulgar Christians ignorantly or innocently mistake, they are very willing to be set right by their more knowing guides, or by other sensible friends: which makes their case widely different from that of those who take upon them to justify creature worship upon principle, and who separate Christ from the one Godhead in the worship of him, knowingly, and out of set purpose and design. We are not involved in guilt, merely by communicating with persons, whose errors (though perhaps great) we know nothing of, or who probably would correct them upon better instruction, or the first gentle admonition. Guilt is contracted by communicating with those who openly and resolutely corrupt the faith (knowingly or ignorantly) in very important articles. To join with such persons, is partaking in their impiety: it is not charity, but men-pleasing, and betraying a disregard for the honour of God. But this general question will come over again, and will be more fully debated in a proper place.

Enough has been said to show that Christian worship is very nearly concerned in the question about the Trinity; and therefore the doctrine is strictly practical, and has a close connection with the Christian life. I declined entering into the main debate about creature worship, for the reasons above hinted. Yet because the author of *Sober and Charitable Disquisition* has advanced some things upon that article, which every reader may not know how to answer, I shall suggest a few considerations here by the way, to serve as hints or heads of solution to the difficulties objected. 1. If that gentleman means to say that the outward acts of civil homage and religious worship are so equivocal and ambiguous, that there is no way left to distinguish them, it is disputing against fact, and amounts to telling us, that no one can distinguish in a case where no one can easily mistake, or ever has been mistaken. Civil homage is distinguishable from religious worship, by the circumstances [See Stillingfleet's Defence of the Discourse concerning Idolatry in Works, vol. v. p. 344, 357.] always, and often by the nature of the acts themselves. That burning incense to Daniel [Dan.2:46.] was merely civil respect will not be easily proved: neither will the example of an idolatrous king, who would have done as much to an image, be sufficient to justify it; though the author speaks of it, [Sober and Charitable

Disquisition, p. 6.] as if both these points were indisputable. 2. Those outward acts, so and so circumstantiated, as to become religious worship, are what God has appropriated to the Jehovah, to the true God, in the holy Scriptures of the Old Testament, as exterior and visible acknowledgments of the divine sovereignty over all creatures, and of the dependence which creatures have upon their Creator: for the reasons which God insists upon, why he, and he only, is to be worshipped, are such as exclude all creatures whatever, viz. his being Jehovah, Creator, Sustainer, Preserver of all things. [Isa. 40, 45:5–7. 2 Kings 19:15. Jer. 10:10–12. Compare my Sermons, vol. ii. p. 18, 19.] 3. To pay these exterior services, once so appropriated to God, to any creature, is idolizing the creature, or deifying the creature, and is both idolatry and polytheism. 4. Therefore the paying such exterior religious services to Christ, considered as a creature, must, according to the whole tenor of the Old Testament, be plain idolatry and polytheism. 5. The same rule for religious worship obtains under the New Testament, as before under the Old: which appears, as from several other places, so particularly from our Lord's answer to Satan, [Matt. 4:10.] and from the angel's admonitions to St. John in the Revelations. [Rev. 19:10, 22:9. See those texts fully explained in Bishop Bull's *Primitiva et Apostolica Traditio*, c. vi. p. 388.]

The author of *Sober and Charitable, etc.* asks, why the paying worship to an invisible Being must imply its having divine perfections, and therefore must be divine worship? [Sober and Charitable Disquisition, p. 8.] The reason is, because God has appropriated all such addresses, so and so circumstantiated, to the one Lord Jehovah; thereby making them (if they were not in their own nature before) a virtual recognition of divine perfections [See preface to my Sermons, vol. ii.]; and therefore they interpretatively amount to divine worship. He adds, that “this is proving the point, by taking it for granted, that none but God is to be worshipped.” No, but it is proving the point in the best manner, and by the strongest evidences, namely, express Scripture evidences, all the way from Genesis down to the Revelations, of such appropriation as hath been mentioned. In short then, God has so appropriated religious worship, as to exclude all creatures from any share in it: therefore all religious worship is divine worship; and therefore to worship Christ, under the notion of a creature, is idolatry and polytheism. So stands this matter, which I have but briefly hinted, to take off this author's exceptions; referring the reader, as above, to other treatises, where the subject is considered at large. Now I return to the point I was upon, the practical nature of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Besides the influence which this doctrine has upon worship, it may be considered farther in a more general view, as tending to form within our minds dispositions proper for such state and circumstances as we are to expect

hereafter. It is an allowed truth that the good dispositions which men contract in this life are their qualifications for the happiness of the life to come; and that the more refined and raised such their good dispositions are, the more fitly qualified they are for the higher degrees of blessedness in heaven. Put the case then that the three Persons of the Trinity are equally divine, and that a man has been trained up to esteem them accordingly, it cannot be doubted but that he goes out of the world more fitly disposed, in that respect, to be taken into their friendship, and best qualified (other circumstances being equal) for the beatific enjoyment. Consequently, the belief of the doctrine of the Trinity (supposing it true) is no slight or insignificant theory, no barren notion or speculation; since it has a direct influence upon the dispositions of our minds here, and upon our happiness hereafter. I make not this an argument of the truth of the doctrine (for that is not the point I am now upon), but of the importance of it, after admitting it for a sacred truth: and I add, that if it may have such influence upon us, in creating proper dispositions, that comes to the same as to say, that it raises and improves our virtues, and all virtue is practical.

A further consideration of like kind may be drawn from the influence which the same doctrine has upon the motives to Christian practice. There are no two motives more affecting or more endearing, or more apt to work upon ingenuous minds, than the love of God the Father in sending his beloved Son to redeem us, and the love and condescension of our blessed Lord, in submitting to be so sent. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, etc." [John 3:16.] In this was manifested the love "of God towards us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him." [John 4:9.] We see here what a stress and emphasis is laid, not merely upon this, that life, eternal life, is the benefit bestowed, but that it is conveyed in such a manner, and by such endearing means, by the only begotten Son. The Socinians, when pressed upon this article, do nothing but trifle and shuffle with us: they fall to magnifying the love of God; in giving us so high, so inestimable a blessing as life eternal. Very true; but does not Scripture, besides that, lay a particular emphasis upon the means made use of in conveying the grant? And how is this emphasis made out upon their hypothesis, that Christ is a mere man? But suppose him a creature, and the very first and highest of all creatures, before he came down from heaven; yet neither does that supposition sufficiently answer the purpose. For, considering how honourable the service was, and how unconceivably vast and large the reward for it, it might more properly be said, that God so loved his Son, that he sent him into the world, in order to prefer him to a kind of rivalry with himself, to advance him to divine honours, to make the whole creation bow before him, and pay him homage and obeisance [Phil. 2:10.

Rev. 5:11–13, 7:10.]: and all this as the reward of his sufferings of a few years; great indeed, but not apparently greater than many of his disciples, suffered after him, nor “worthy to be compared with the glory” [Rom. 8:18.] that shall accrue to every good Christian, much less with that immense, that incredible glory which, was to accrue to him. [Bull. Judic. Eccl. Cathol. cap. v. p. 313.] Now to me it seems, that the supposing Christ a mere creature, is a thought which mightily lessens the force of the Scripture expressions representing God’s sending his Son as an act of stupendous love to man, upon account of the dignity of the Person by whom that salvation was to be wrought: so that the denying the Divinity of Christ robs us in part of one of the most endearing and affecting motives to the Christian life. Wherefore in this view also, the doctrine of the Trinity, if true, is both important and practical, as it raises the motives upon which Christian practice is built. I do not say, there would be no force in the motive considered in an Arian view, and supposing Christ to have been a most excellent creature: but the force of it would be considerably less upon that supposition; and therefore, if the doctrine be a truth, it is a truth of some moment in a view to practice, as raising and enforcing the motives beyond what the other hypothesis does.

So again, the love of Christ towards mankind appears in a much clearer and stronger light upon the Trinitarian principles, than upon the Antitrinitarian. For if Christ was in the form of God, equal with God, and very God, it was then an act of infinite love and condescension in him to become man, and die for us: but if he was no more than a creature, it was no surprising condescension to embark in a work so glorious, such as being the Saviour of mankind, and such as would advance him to be Lord and Judge of the world, to be admired, revered, and adored both by men and angels, God himself also glorifying him, and sounding forth his praises through the utmost limits of the universe. Where is the condescension of a creature’s submitting to be thus highly honoured? Or what creature could there be that could modestly aspire to it, or might not think it much above his pretensions or highest ambition? [Bull. Judic. Eccl. cap. v. p. 311.] In short, “to become man, to suffer and die for the redemption of the world, and to be made the Lord and Judge both of the quick and of the dead, can be an act of condescending love and goodness only in God. So that to deny the Divinity of Christ alters the very foundations of Christianity, and destroys all the powerful arguments of the love, humility, and condescension of our Lord, which are the peculiar motives of the Gospel.” [Sherlock’s Vindication of the Defence of Stillingfleet, chap. v. p. 268.] If either the work of redemption was too big for a creature to engage in, or if the honours attending it were too high for a creature to aspire after [Bull. Judic. Eccl. Cath. cap. 1. p. 291, 292.] then certainly the very notion of condescension is sunk and lost, upon every hypothesis which does

not make Christ truly and properly God, God eternal. I am very sensible, that while I am arguing for the importance of the doctrine, I may seem at the same time to be pleading for the truth of it, and so to run unawares into the other question. But the two questions are so nearly allied, that I know not sometimes how to avoid it. The same considerations generally which prove one, must of course obliquely glance at the other also: and every Scripture argument, which intimates the use and importance of the doctrine, must at least tacitly suppose and insinuate the truth of it, and so in effect prove both in one. If Scripture has laid down motives which are not naturally or reasonably accounted for, or understood, but upon the supposition of the truth of such a doctrine, then both the doctrine itself and the practical nature of it are at the same time insinuated: which I mention here once for all, to prevent confusion, and now proceed to what remains.

The satisfaction or propitiation for the sins of the world, made by Christ, is of great importance to the Christian life, and seems also to have a close connection with the doctrine of the Trinity. The truth of the satisfaction, and the necessity there was for it, may be substantially proved a posteriori from Scripture itself, [See a late rational and judicious discourse upon the subject, entitled, *Jesus Christ the Mediator between God and Man*, printed for J. Noon, 1732.] independence of the doctrine of the Trinity. But after proceeding so far, it will be difficult to clear and extricate that Scripture doctrine, without admitting this other also: because it is not reasonable to think that any creature could do more than was his bounden duty to do upon God's requiring it; or that he could by any services or sufferings attain to such a degree of merit, as should atone for a world of sinners; or that he should be entrusted with such an office (supposing him otherwise equal to it) as would of course draw after it the adoration and homage both of men and angels. The question properly here, is not, whether anything less than God could pay an infinite satisfaction, but whether a creature could pay any, or could merit at all. If it be said, that God might accept it as he pleased, it may be said likewise, upon the same principle, that he might accept the blood of bulls or of goats. Yet the Apostle tells us, that "it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins" [Hebrews 10:4.]: which words appear to resolve the satisfaction not merely into God's free acceptance, but into the intrinsic value of the sacrifice. And while we rest it upon that foot, I do not see why we may not say, that it is not possible for the blood of any creature to take away the sins of the world, since no creature can do more than his duty, nor can have any stock of merit to spare for other creatures. In this light, the Scripture doctrine of the satisfaction infers the Divinity of him that made it: and hence it is, that those who have denied our Lord's proper Divinity have commonly gone on to deny

any proper satisfaction also; or while they have admitted it in words or in name, (as they admit also Christ's Divinity), they have denied the thing. Scripture itself seems to resolve the satisfaction into the Divinity of the Person suffering. It was Jehovah that was pierced. [Zech. 12:10 compared with John 19:37.] It was God that purchased the Church with his own blood [Acts 20:28. For the reading, consult Mills in loc.]: it was ο δεσπότης, the high Lord that bought us [2 Peter 2:1. See Taylor's True Scripture Doctrine, p. 391, etc.]: it was the Lord of glory that was crucified. [1 Cor. 2:8.] And indeed it is unintelligible, how the blood of a creature should make any proper atonement or expiation for sin, as before intimated. This again is another of those arguments, or considerations, which at once insinuate both the truth of our doctrine and the importance of it. However, if Scripture otherwise testifies that Christ is properly God, and if the same Scriptures elsewhere, independently of our present argument, declare that Christ has atoned for us; then from these two propositions put together results this third, that a divine Person has satisfied for us consequently, whosoever destroys the Divinity of Christ, justly so called; does at the same time destroy the true notion of the satisfaction made by him. Hence it appears, at the lowest, that the doctrine of the Trinity involves several other important doctrines of Christianity with it, and gives another kind of turn and significance to them, than what they would have without it: and therefore, most undoubtedly; it is no barren speculation, no indifferent or slight matter; but a doctrine of the foundation, nearly affecting the very vitals of Christianity and the Christian life.

The author of *Sober and Charitable Disquisition* has spent several pages, [Sober and Charitable Disquisition p. 24–35.] to invalidate the argument drawn from the common doctrine of the satisfaction; and so I must stop for a while to examine what he says. He thinks it cannot be proved, that “none but God could make such satisfaction.” [Ibid. p. 24.] But I conceive, it may be proved from the nature of the thing that no creature could merit; and from Scripture, that he who made the satisfaction is God, is Jehovah: and these two considerations taken together do amount to what we pretend to. He himself allows the truth of our doctrine once proved, as to God's being sacrificed, the consequence to be indisputable, that it “was some way or other necessary.” [Sober and Charitable Disquisition, p. 25.] This indeed is not the whole of what we are able to prove, as may appear from what hath been said: but even this is sufficient to our present purpose; namely, that if our doctrine is true, it must be important, because of the other important doctrines which hang upon it. Therefore the doctrine of the Trinity is no speculative opinion of slight value or significance. If it be true, it is worth contending for, and earnestly too.

He asks, whether we are sure “that no being inferior to God could make

full amends to divine justice?" [Ibid. p. 25.] We conceive, with very good reason, that no creature could merit with God, or do works of supererogation. I pass over what he observes about infinite satisfaction, [Ibid. p. 25, 26, 27.] not affecting the question as here by me stated. He asks, how we can be sure, that God "cannot accept of the sacrifice of the best and most excellent of created beings?" I say not, what God can or cannot accept: I know nothing a priori about it. But Scripture, as before observed, rests not this matter upon the foot of divine acceptance, but upon the intrinsic value of the sacrifice: and when we consider the thing in that view, we say, that a creature's services or sufferings carry no proper intrinsic merit in them. And we add further that God has accepted no sacrifice less than a divine sacrifice, because we prove from other topics, that Christ our Passover was strictly God, and he was sacrificed for us. In short, the question is not what God might have accepted, if he had so pleased, but whether, when he has chosen the way of expiation, and the Scriptures lay a particular stress and emphasis upon it, as carrying intrinsic merit in it, both real and great, whether this can be justly accounted for, on the supposition that our Lord was no more than a creature. [Bull. Harrison. Apostol. Dissert. ii. c. 12. p. 490.]

The author goes on to raise difficulties, and to advance divers subtleties to perplex the notion of a compound person: most of them, I conceive, run beyond the mark, and might as soon prove that soul and body make not one person, or man, as that God and man make not the one Person of Christ. For example; he pleads that a person compounded of God and man "must be inferior in dignity to a Person wholly and only divine." [Sober and Charitable Disquisition, p. 29.] By the same argument, a man, being partly spirit and partly body, is inferior in dignity to the separate soul, which is wholly and only spirit: and if there be any force in the argument, I know not how far it may affect the doctrine of a future resurrection. Now, we say, that the divine nature loses nothing of its dignity by assuming the human; but retains all the dignity it before had; and therefore the whole Person becomes not inferior. He further pleads, that "it is not God that dies, but God-man." Allowed; but still that Person, that Christ, who is God, dies: as when a man dies, that Person (who is soul, as well as body) dies. We never suppose that the Godhead dies, any more than we imagine that the soul dies. He says further, that "the Person which makes the satisfaction is not a divine Person." [Ibid. p. 30.] How so, when the Person is both God and man (as he had before allowed) in our scheme? Do we make two Persons? He argues next against the humanity becoming part of the Person of Christ. "Nothing can really be this who, but must be the what this who is, at the same time." He might as justly argue, that Peter's body cannot be part of Peter, or of the person of Peter, together with his soul; because nothing can really be this who (Peter's soul) but

must be what this who is, at the same time. Now taking for granted that Peter's soul is the whole person, the argument is good: and so it is likewise in the other case, taking it for granted, that the Logos in union is still the whole Person; but this is going upon false suppositions: and he might as soon prove that Peter's body cannot be part of Peter, unless it be his soul, as that Christ's humanity cannot be part of Christ, unless it be the Logos. I can hardly conjecture what the author means, when he says, "That human substance we call John, is really the "Person, and nothing else." [Sober and Charitable Disquisition, p. 31.] I thought that John, or John's person, was made up of two substances, spiritual and bodily: and John, the person of John, dies, though one substance survives. In like manner, Christ the God-man dies, though the Godhead dies not. He adds, much like to what he had said before, that the "human nature can never be really he, unless he be also the divine nature." Does he mean by he, part of the person, or the whole person? If he means part, then it amounts to this; the body can never be really a part of Peter's person, unless it be Peter's soul: or if he means the whole, then it comes to this, that the body can never be the whole person, unless it be the soul. One of the propositions is manifestly against truth, and the other is not sense: so little can be effected in this way of reasoning. Indeed, all the confusion arises from the want of knowing or considering what the true notion of a person, simple or compound, is, of which I have elsewhere treated at large, [Second Defence, Query xv. vol. iii. p. 338–341.] and thither I take leave to refer the reader. In the meanwhile, I cannot but heartily lament and grieve, to find that serious and sensible men can give their minds to oppose a Scriptural and venerable doctrine, which has stood the test of ages, by such fine-spun subtleties: Zeno's arguments against motion might appear weighty in comparison.

But we have more of the same kind still, which I shall reply to very briefly. "The dying humanity can have no such dignity." [Sober and Charitable, etc. p.32.] True, but the dying Christ might, and that suffices. "The human nature should really and " truly be that divine Person." No: part of the Person is sufficient: the human nature constitutes one compound Person with the divine nature. "The Logos could not really be man." Why? Was not the Word made flesh? that is, the Word became incarnate, assumed humanity. "Humanity could not be assumed into a real communion of his Person, without being assumed into what that Person is." [Ibid. p. 33.] He must mean, I presume, without being converted into Godhead. But why not, if bodies at the general resurrection may be assumed into a personal union with souls, without ceasing to be bodies, or being converted into spirits? "For the same thing (Person) to be God and man at once, that is, really and truly so, is surely as impossible as transubstantiation." [Ibid. p. 34.] And yet surely it is not more impossible than for the same human

being (call him Peter or John) to be both soul and body at once, really and truly so; which a man may firmly believe as a certain truth, without admitting transubstantiation, a palpable absurdity. “That man should really, and strictly speaking be a divine Person, or a divine Person man, to me seems utterly impossible.” [Id. *ibid.*] If he means that the divine nature is not the human, nor the human divine, he says right, and has no opposer but if he means, that divine substance and human substance together, may not make one Person, or one Christ, let him show why it is more impossible than for a spiritual substance and a corporeal substance to make one person, or one man. He adds, or repeats, that “the death of the man is not the death of God.” [Sober and Charitable Disquisition, p. 34.] But it is the death of Christ, who is God and man. So the death of the body is not the death of the soul; but it is the death of the man, who is both soul and body. Such is the nature of a personal union, and such the manner of speaking of it; and it is so obvious and common a case, that none but philosophers would mistake it.

The author closes his discourse on this head with observing, that our opposers may carry the point of satisfaction as high as we do, and account as handsomely for it. As how? By supposing the Logos to be in as close an union with God, as we suppose Christ’s humanity to be with the Logos. [Ibid. p. 35.] Well then, it must be a personal union, so as to make the Father and the Logos one Person. How then? Then “the sufferings of the Logos will be as much the sufferings of God, and as much an “atonement for sin, as the death of Christ’s human nature in the other scheme.” [Ibid. p. 34, 35.] True: but then the sufferings of the Logos will be the sufferings of the Father (which is the ancient heresy of the Patripassians), and the same Person both pays and accepts the ransom, makes an atonement to himself; which is not consonant to Scripture, nor to common sense.

The author concludes his account of this matter with this inference, that the men whom he has been pleading for “do not seem so deeply culpable, nor so dangerously mistaken,” [Ibid. p. 35.] as is commonly represented. To me it appears quite the contrary; and from this very representation of his, whereby he intended to favour them. They are deeply culpable, 1. For making God the Son a creature, against the whole tenor of Scripture. 2. For running into Patripassianism, to help out Arianism; heaping error upon error, heresy upon heresy. 3. For doing it upon the strength only of a few dialectical or metaphysical subtleties, scarce worthy to be offered, or so much as named, in so momentous a cause as this is. 4. For making use of such topics against the personal union of God and man, as might with equal force be urged against the personal union of any two substances whatever, and prove (if they prove

anything) that an human person it not made up of soul and body. 5. For condemning their opposers as void of charity, only for their pious, faithful; and extremely charitable endeavours to preserve their flocks from being led aside after Satan, from imbibing sentiments subversive of the Gospel of Christ. But I shall have more to say upon the head of charity in another chapter. I hope my reader will excuse my digressing thus far (if it may be called a digression) upon the article of satisfaction, to attend the author who gave the occasion. Now I return.

I have been representing the practical nature and important uses of the doctrine of the Trinity, with respect to worship, in which all the three Persons are interested; and I have more particularly pressed the importance of the doctrine of our Lord's Divinity, from special considerations relating to the Gospel motives, and the nature of the atonement made for sins. I ought not here to omit the like special considerations concerning the Holy Spirit, and the necessity of believing his Divinity likewise. I shall choose here to express myself in the excellent words of a celebrated writer, whom I have before quoted more than once. "Our salvation by Christ does not only consist in the expiation of our sins, etc. – but in the communication of divine grace and power to renew and sanctify us: and this is everywhere in Scripture attributed to the Holy Spirit, as his peculiar office in the economy of man's salvation. And it must make a fundamental change in the doctrine of divine grace and assistance, to deny the Divinity of the Holy Spirit. For can a creature be the universal spring and fountain of divine grace and life? Can a finite creature be a kind of universal soul to the whole Christian Church, and to every sincere member of it Can a creature make such close application to our minds, know our thoughts, set bounds to our passions, inspire us with new affections and desires, and be more intimate to us than we are to ourselves? If a creature be the only instrument and principle of grace, we shall soon be tempted, either to deny the grace of God, or to make it only an external thing, and entertain very mean conceits of it. All these miraculous gifts, which were bestowed on the Apostles and primitive Christians, for the edification of the Church, all the graces of the Christian life, are the fruits of the Spirit. The divine Spirit is the principle of immortality in us, which first gives life to our souls, and will at the last day raise our dead bodies out of the dust; works which sufficiently proclaim him to be God, and which we cannot heartily believe, in the Gospel notion, if he be not." [Sherlock's Vindication of the Defence of Stillingfleet, p. 270, etc.]

What this excellent writer has here said appears all to be very right and just; and his observation of the doctrine of divine grace being likely to suffer much by a denial of the Divinity of the Holy Spirit has been too sadly verified in

the event. How jejune, how sparingly, have the abettors of the new schemes insisted upon the doctrine of grace, and of the invisible workings of the Holy Spirit, though Scripture is full of the subject? So that, besides the danger of losing the salutary doctrine of a proper satisfaction and expiation, we are further in danger of losing the true Scripture notion of grace, by the opposition made to the doctrine of the Trinity. I believe I might appeal to the consciences of those gentlemen, whether their gratitude to Christ, for what he has done and suffered for us, be not in a manner lost, and swallowed up in their regards to the Father for commanding and accepting it; and whether the notion of the grace of the Holy Spirit be not entirely absorbed in the thought of the superior assistance of God. The effect is natural, and I judge in this case by what I should find in myself. Upon their hypothesis, “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost,” [2 Cor. 13:14.] will amount only to the love of the Father thrice told; which supersedes both the other. And when it is said that the Father and Son will make their abode with us, [John 14:23.] and in the same chapter, that the Holy Ghost also will abide with us forever, [John 14:16.] the two creatures superadded to the Creator will appear but as ciphers that add nothing to the sum, while in one we have all, and there is nothing but that one to be at all depended upon. His presence alone will supply everything, and his luster will so far eclipse both the other Persons, that it will be hard to say (upon the hypothesis I am mentioning) what occasion there would be for them, or what comfort in them. Such is the appearing change made in the very form and essence of Christianity by these new doctrines, that it seems to lose the very life and soul of it, and by degrees to degenerate into little else but a better kind of Judaism, retaining still the name of Christianity, but giving up the main things.

While we consider the doctrine of the Trinity as interwoven with the very frame and texture of the Christian religion, it appears to me natural to conceive that the whole scheme and economy of man’s redemption was laid with a principal view to it, in order to bring mankind gradually into an acquaintance with the three divine Persons, one God blessed forever. I would speak with all due modesty, caution, and reverence, as becomes us always in what concerns the unsearchable counsels of Heaven: but I say, there appears to me none so natural or so probable an account of the divine dispensations, from first to last, as what I have just mentioned; namely, that such a redemption was provided, such an expiation for sins required, such a method of sanctification appointed, and then revealed that so men might know that there are three divine Persons, might be apprised how infinitely the world is obliged to them, and might accordingly be both instructed and incited to love, honour, and adore them here, because that must be a considerable part of their employment and happiness hereafter. I urge

not this as an argument of the truth of the doctrine, but as a consideration of great weight, supposing the doctrine true, for the recommending it to our affections, and for the raising our ideas of it. The divine dispensations appear both rational and amiable, considered in this light: and if it be not too bold to offer any rationale of them, I would humbly presume to say, that there is none so satisfactory as what I have now mentioned. I can see no probable reason why the Church of God should be, as it were, first put under the immediate conduct of the Father, then under the Son, and last of all, under the Holy Ghost; nor why the honour of creating should be principally ascribed to the first, and the honour of redemption, as considerable as creation, to the second, and the honour of illumination, sanctification, and miraculous gifts, as considerable as anything before, to the third: I say, I can see no probable reason for these things (when the Father, as it should seem, might as well have had the sole honour of all) but upon the hypothesis which I have hinted. [Bull. Primitiva Tradit. c. vi. p. 399.]

But however that be, or whatever other reasons divine wisdom, to us unsearchable, might proceed upon in every dispensation towards mankind, certain it is, that the doctrine of the Trinity, if true (as we here suppose), runs through every part of Christian theology, and gives, as it were, a new force and spirit to it.

I have been proving, from several topics, that this doctrine is important and practical, no slight, no speculative opinion. I shall add but one consideration more, and that a general one, applicable to all other articles of faith, and proving them to be practical in a large sense of the word, but a just sense too, and well deserving our notice. As we are commanded to believe whatever God reveals, belief itself is an instance of obedience; and unbelief, much more disbelief, is disobedience to the commands of God. Consequently, unless obedience and disobedience are points of mere speculation, there is no room left for any pretense of that kind in the case now before us. Let the matter of the belief be otherwise ever so speculative (though it is not the case here), yet to believe Scripture verities, prime verities especially, is under precept, is express duty; and all duty is practical in a large sense, as it is paying obedience to God's commandments. St. Paul therefore, more than once, speaks of the obedience of faith, [Rom. 1:5, 15:18, 16:19, 26. Conf. Acts 6:7. Vid. Wolfi Curae Philolog. et Criticae ad Rom. 16:19.] and with great propriety, since believing is obeying the will of God, and is entitled to a reward. It is true, faith and obedience (taking obedience in a more restrained sense) are often contradistinguished: but interpreting obedience in its fullest and most comprehensive meaning; faith is properly a species of it, another kind of obedience. Faith is a virtue, both a moral and a Christian virtue, as a very ingenious and acute writer observes. "As to the nature of faith, it is

plain that it is a moral virtue, as being that natural homage which the understanding, or will (for I need not here dispute which [See that point fully discussed in Fiddes's Body of Divinity, vol. i. p. 393, etc.]) pays to God, in receiving and assenting to what he reveals, upon his bare word, or authority: it is an humiliation of ourselves, and a glorification of God. And as it is a moral, so it is also a Christian virtue, as being a duty commanded in the Gospel, and an act of Christian humility." [Norris's Christian Prudence,? 259.] If it be objected, that faith depends entirely upon evidence, and therefore is no matter of choice, and therefore is no virtue, nor can properly fall under precept; I deny that faith depends entirely upon evidence, though it ought to do so. There are motives to assent or dissent, as well as rational grounds; and those motives often bias and determine the judgment, either without reason or against it: not that men can always believe what they will, but inclination frequently has a great hand in their persuasions. Men can lean, and will lean to the side which they happen to favour, upon motives of education, habit, authority, or example; or of interest, vanity, pride, passion, resentment, and the like: and when they so lean to a side, they can be partial in examining, rash in judging, or precipitate in resolving; so that the will may much influence belief. And as to unbelief, or disbelief, the influence is still more apparent: for, excepting such glaring facts as force assent, by obtruding themselves upon the senses, all other things almost may be slighted, and set aside. A man may refuse to attend to the clearest demonstration, or may industriously perplex it, and never let in the light which might convince him of its truth: and what he may do in that case, he may much more easily do in others, where the evidence is not so bright, or strong, or comes not up to perfect demonstration. These things considered, it must be allowed, that faith has at least a great dependence upon the will, if it be not itself an act of the will, as appears most probable. Diligence in looking out for evidence, patience and perseverance in attending to it, honesty in considering, comparing, balancing, and then determining on the side of truth, these are all matters of choice, depending on the will; and therefore a right faith is a submission of our wills in that instance to God. Seeing therefore that faith in general is virtue and duty, and therefore practical, it follows most evidently, that faith in the doctrine of the Trinity (supposing the doctrine true) is practical in its nature, is both moral and Christian duty.

Now to sum up briefly what has been done in this chapter; it has been shown, that the doctrine of the Trinity is of prime consideration for directing and determining our worship, and that it influences Christian practice many ways, as forming proper dispositions, as raising and strengthening the Gospel motives, and as enforcing the doctrines of satisfaction made by Christ, and of illumination

and sanctification by the Holy Spirit; on all which accounts it appears to be strictly practical, and highly important: and it has been further intimated, that all duty is practical, and that faith is duty; and therefore this faith, as well as any other, and because of its important nature, more than many other. I conclude therefore from the premises laid down in this chapter, that the doctrine of the Trinity is practical enough to be a fundamental article of Christianity.

I must own, there is a narrow kind of sense, and very improper, of the word practical, which I have observed in some writers, according to which the doctrine of the Trinity would not be a practical doctrine: for they mean by practical, what concerns practice between man and man, and nothing else. Such persons would not scruple to say, that worship itself is no practical matter: and it must be allowed it is not in that sense; it is not a duty of the second table, but of the first. It may deserve considering, whether that narrow sense of the word practical might not first give rise to the objection, that the doctrine of the Trinity is not practical, but speculative; conceiving everything to be speculative, excepting the common offices of life which we owe one towards another. Now indeed, according to such interpretation of the words practical and speculative, we should never affirm, that this doctrine is practical, or deny that it is speculative: for the duties depending upon it are branches of the first and great commandment, the love of God, and not of the second, viz. the love of our neighbour. But what would all this amount to, more than to a dispute about words or names? For we should still insist upon it, that our doctrine is practical, as much as any' duties of the first table are practical; which suffices: and so at length in a just and proper sense of the word, the doctrine of the Trinity is practical enough to be a fundamental, if the love of God may be justly called a fundamental.

But when we speak of the doctrine, we mean it of the general doctrine itself, not of the minute circumstances, or appendages of it, which are either of a doubtful nature, or of slighter consideration. For "though it is necessary and essential to the Christian faith, to acknowledge Father, Son, and Holy Ghost to be one eternal God, yet there are a great many little subtleties started by over curious and busy heads, which are not fundamental doctrines, and ought not to be thought so. God forbid that all the nice distinctions and definitions of the Schools, about essence, subsistence, personality, about eternal generation and procession, the difference between filiation and spiration, etc. should be reckoned among fundamentals of our faith. For though we understood nothing of these matters (as indeed we do not, and it had been happy the Church had never heard of them), yet if we believe the Divinity of each Person, we believe enough to understand the doctrine of salvation. And though that fatal dispute between

the Greek and Latin Church, about the Filioque, be of more importance than such scholastic subtleties, yet I cannot see that it concerns the foundation of our faith. For the Greek Church did firmly believe the Holy Spirit to be true God, though they would not own that he proceeded from the Father and the Son, but from the Father only. And though we must acknowledge this to be a mistake, yet it is not a fundamental mistake: for the doctrine of salvation is secured by believing the Holy Spirit to be true God, without defining the manner of his procession.” [Sherlock’s Vindication of the Defence of Stillingfleet, p. 273, 274.] I may just take notice by the way, that the doctrine of the Trinity hath been but little befriended by the Schoolmen; rather hurt by them, [See Dr. Berriman’s History of the Trin. Controversy, p. 378, etc.] though they did not design it. For, 1. By bringing up all the difficulties and perplexities they could themselves invent, or elsewhere meet with, they furnished out matter for the enemies of the faith to lay hold on; and it was from thence chiefly that the Socinians afterwards borrowed their materials to work with. 2. In the next place, by overlarding a plain doctrine with distinctions and subtleties in great abundance, they disguised and obscured it, that it was not easy to see through the mist they had raised. 3. Further, by thus perplexing and diluting it, they really weakened it: for it is much easier to oppose has it stands tricked up in that scholastic form, than as it stands in Scripture, and in the ancient Fathers. 4. They brought a kind of scandal and disgrace upon the doctrine, as if it subsisted chiefly upon scholastic subtleties; an imputation which the adversaries to the Christian faith have eagerly laid hold on, and often invidiously charged upon the Trinitarians at large; though nothing can be more false or injurious. The truth is, the very distinguishing character of the Trinitarians, in the days of the Fathers, was their resting their cause wholly upon Scripture and tradition; as the distinguishing character of the Antitrinitarians was their building mostly upon logical or metaphysical quirks and subtleties. [See Socrat. E. H. lib. v. c. 10. Hieron. contr. Lucifer. tom. iv. par. 2. col. 296. ed. Bened.] What a string of those wanton levities have we in Aetius, preserved and answered by Epiphany, [Epiphany. Hawes. lxxvi. p. 924, etc.] enough to fright any common reader, or to nauseate any man of good sense. The like we have again in Eunomius, answered by Basil, and by Gregor. Nyssen. The Catholics scarce ever ran out into metaphysical notions, or expressions, excepting in two cases, and both in the way of self-defense. One was, when they were attacked with false metaphysics, they then laboured to answer them with true, lest the adversaries should triumph on that head, and seduce the populace. The other was, when the scriptural and customary expressions, which were used to convey a good sense, and could justly bear no other, were perverted to a bad one by equivocation and wile; the Church could then have no so effectual security

against false doctrines and false teachers creeping in among them, to corrupt the faith, and to beguile the unwary, as by adopting some new terms, and chosen expressions, for the supporting old truths. [See Dr. Berriman's History of the Trinitarian Controversy, p. 174–179.] This latter case is so naturally represented by a modern writer, that I shall take the freedom to borrow his words, for the sake of laying it in the most lively manner before the reader. “Let me suppose an Arian standing before you, and submitting himself to your examination, you ask him, whether he believes Christ to be God? He answers in the affirmative. You again inquire, what kind of God he supposes him to be? He replies, such a God as the Bible makes him. This, you will complain, is collusive language; however, you request him to satisfy you, whether he believes the Son to be truly and properly God? To this he saith, Yes, consistently enough with his own notion of God, though not with yours. But you farther ask, does he believe him to be one with the Father? To this he likewise replies in the affirmative. You then press him with another question, How is he one with the Father, is he of the same essence with the Father? To this the Arian answers, by asking you what you mean by essence? If you comply with his desire, and explain your notion of the term, you are unavoidably drawn into metaphysical points.” [Reply to Mr. P. C.'s Letter, p.11, 12.] Thus we see metaphysical terms may be sometimes used by the orthodox side, when it is unavoidable; that is, when it is necessary to guard against equivocation and disguise, for the preserving the true faith, and for the excluding such ministers as would corrupt the Gospel truths, and mislead the people committed to their care. But then it is wrong to blame those honest and conscientious guides for making use of the only remedy which is left them, and which nothing but the utmost necessity, brought upon them by the prevarication of others, would ever make them choose. It is plain by this and the like instances, that they are not fond of metaphysics, not so much as of the terms: nor would there be any occasion for new words, or any use of them, if many had not learned to undermine the ancient faith, by affixing new and wrong ideas to the ancient forms. The very nature of the thing speaks itself: and the like methods have been used in most other forms and tests, as daily experience has shown the necessity of it. Thus, to instance in the common case of oaths to a government, they are usually worded in as full and expressive terms as can be devised: and yet that sometimes is not thought sufficient, unless it be further added, without any equivocation, or mental reservation, or something of like kind. I ask my reader's pardon for digressing a while from the particular point I was upon: but these reflections came naturally in my way, and may perhaps be of use as to the main thing: and now I pass on to a new chapter.

Chapter III.

Showing that the Doctrine of the Trinity is sufficiently insisted upon in Scripture to be deemed an Article of prime Importance.

Our dispute must here be with the Dutch Remonstrants. The most celebrated men amongst them were Episcopius and Limborch. I shall consider them both with care; that it may be seen by the things wherein they agree, what is it that both aim at, and by the points wherein they differ, how both of them were at a loss for any sound principle of reason to proceed upon: and the conclusion which perhaps may naturally result from all will be this; that they had some motives, or specious colours, for the persuasion which they jointly entertained, but no rational grounds for it.

I. I begin with the learned Episcopius, as the principal man. The sum of what his sentiments on this head amount to is, that the doctrine of the Trinity, as to the main substance of it, is certain and clear, but yet not necessary to be believed in order to salvation, nor important enough to justify an anathema against the impugners of it, or for the rejecting their communion.

First, I say, he admits our main doctrine as true and certain, being plainly taught in Scripture: this appears from the Confession of the Remonstrants, where the doctrine is taught in full and strong terms, [Remonstrant. Confes. c. 3. apud Episcop. Op. vol. ii. p. 78.] as likewise from other places in Episcopius's works. [Episcop. *ibid.*] Next, I observe, that in his discussion of the question of the perspicuity of Scripture against Bellarmine, he declares the doctrine of the Trinity (such no doubt he must mean as the Remonstrant's Confession, and his own other writings contain) is clear, perspicuous, and easy to be understood. [Episcop. Instit. lib. iv. c. 18. p. 269.]

Notwithstanding all this, the same Episcopius was pleased to deny the necessity of believing the eternal generation of the Son (which with him appears to be the same with denying his eternal existence), and consequently, the necessity of believing the received doctrine of the Trinity. And he denied the necessity of so believing, as for several other reasons, so principally for this, because the Scripture had neither directly nor indirectly declared the necessity of the doctrine, though it had taught the truth of it. [Episcop. Opp. vol. ii. p. 295.]

But then again I must observe of him that he seems to me, not so properly to have denied the necessity of believing that doctrine (in our sense of necessity), as the necessity of pronouncing an anathema upon the impugners, which he conceived must follow upon the other, and which he interpreted to such a rigid sense, as to mean sentencing the men directly to hellfire, or to everlasting damnation. This last particular was what he chiefly, or solely hesitated upon,

when he came to explain: or he would be thought, at least, to mean no more; as appears from his own words in his answer to the Leyden Divines [Episcop. Respons. ad Specim. Calumn. p. 295.]; as also from his manner of wording the question in his Institutions, [Episcop. Institut. lib. iv. c. 34. p. 338.] and elsewhere. [Apolog. pro Confess. Remonstrant. p. 136.]

But that Episcopus did not deal fairly and uprightly in this matter may be made appear from several considerations; as, 1. Because he aggravated the business of an anathema beyond what he had reason for; which makes it look like pretense. 2. Because he was not consistent with himself, either in his doctrine or conduct. 3. Because he has laid down a very fallacious rule for judging of necessities. 4. Because he has done the like in other instances also, and with as little reason, only to afford shelter for the Socinians.

1. I say, first, he has aggravated the matter of an anathema beyond what he had reason for. When St. Paul delivered over to Satan, the design of it was kind and salutary, that “the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.” [1 Cor. 5:5.] If men must not have warning given them of their evil ways, all friendly reproof is at an end; and it will be unlawful to tell them, however just or necessary the occasion be, that they are in a dangerous state, and upon the verge of destruction. The declaring such a case publicly, if it be right and true, is an eminent act of charity both to them and to the world.

But further; every anathema upon a doctrine is not an anathema, in Episcopus’s sense, upon the persons teaching it. [Alphons. Turretin. de Articulis Fundamentalibus. p. 39.] The doctrine may be censured as pernicious and detestable, and yet the patrons of it believed to be in a salvable state, on account of invincible ignorance, or prejudices, or some unhappy warmth of temper, or enthusiastic disorder of mind. It is no certain consequence, that we must therefore condemn the men to hell fire, or presume to erase them in our opinion out of the Book of Life, only because we pronounce their doctrines false, or wicked, or subversive of the Gospel. [Alphons. Turretin. de Articulis Fundamentalibus. p. 5.]

Farther, merely renouncing, or refusing communion with some persons may sometimes not amount to any judicial censure at all, but may be only taking due care of our own salvation, and conscientiously providing that we be not found partakers in other men’s sins.

These things considered, it is plain that Episcopus’s so tragical exclamations against denouncing an anathema upon the Socinian doctrines, or against renouncing communion with the men, were carried too far, and aggravated beyond reason. He might have condemned their doctrines as pernicious or dangerous; and he might have declared the doctrine of the Trinity highly important, or generally necessary to salvation, without passing any such

terrible sentence upon particular men: which yet if he had, might reasonably have been construed as no more than a friendly warning, and a declaration of his sense.

2. I observe farther that he was not very consistent with himself, either in his doctrine or his conduct, so far as concerns our present article. It appears from the public Confession of himself and friends, and from what I have cited besides, that he held the doctrine of the Trinity, as commonly received, to be true, certain, and clear: and yet when he comes to justify himself in his refusing to condemn the Socinians, or their doctrines, there he falls to talking of the obscurity of those articles which the Socinians rejected, such as few besides the learned were able to understand, scarcely they, and fewer could believe. [See the last quotation from the Apology etc.] Now one would be glad to know of what kind of things he is there speaking. If he intends his reflection upon the appendages to the main doctrine, or upon scholastic subtleties (some true and some false), those were not the things, or however not the only things, which any one could blame the Socinians for rejecting; so that this kind of excuse is entirely wide and foreign, and the making use of it is playing upon his readers: but if he means the main doctrine of the Trinity, for the rejecting whereof the Socinians highly deserve censure, why does he here represent it as obscure, or scarce credible, when at other times he admits it as a clear and a certain truth? I see no way of reconciling Episcopius to Episcopius in things so contradictory and inconsistent.

As to his conduct, there was a farther inconsistency in his condemning the Calvinistic doctrines of absolute predestination etc. as impiety and blasphemy, and that publicly, and yet refusing to do the like by the Socinian tenets, which certainly had no more claim to favour than the other. And how far was such a censure short of denouncing an anathema against the Calvinists for holding them; though at the same time he professed not to pronounce any anathema where God had not pronounced one? Where could he find any Scripture anathema against absolute predestination (though I must own I dislike the doctrine as well as he), or where could he find it said in terms, or by plain consequence, that it is necessary to salvation to believe it conditional, more than he might find for the belief of the doctrine of the Trinity also, if he pleased? His conduct therefore appears, in that instance, to have been inconsistent, and not of a piece with itself. It was objected to the Remonstrants [Vid. Apolog. pro Confess. Remonstr. p. 135.] that they made blasphemers of the Calvinists, but easily passed over the Socinians without such censure: and all the excuse made for it was, that the Calvinistic doctrines were very notorious, and the Calvinists had been very severe, cruel, and inhuman in their way of supporting them. [Apolog. pro Confess. p. 135. 136.] But surely the Socinian blasphemies were as notorious as any could

be: and how could the Calvinistic doctrines (supposing them bad) be ever the worse, or amount to blasphemy or impiety ever the more, for the cruelty of their patrons and abettors? There is no just or consistent account to be given of this unequal conduct, except it be this; that blasphemies of adversaries (supposing them such) are real blasphemies, and deserve an anathema; but blasphemies of friends, or of brethren in affliction, are innocent, and deserve no anathema at all. When the Remonstrants have said all they can, they will not be able to persuade the Christian world that those Calvinistic doctrines (though I take them to be wrong) are worse than the Socinian; or that a charge of horrid impiety, blasphemy, pest, poison, and heresy, is justifiable in one case, and not in the other: so that upon the whole, it might be very easy to retort upon the Remonstrants their own tragical exclamations against denouncing an anathema: for let them but have the direction of it, and they discover no great aversion to it upon weighty occasions, as to them appear; and in doctrines which they judge to be of great importance, they could be very smart and severe in their censures.

3. But the most material thing of all is to examine Episcopius's rule for determining necessities, which seems to be very fallacious. He would have a thing declared necessary in Scripture, either expressly, or by plain consequence. Here I know not what he would call a plain consequence: otherwise indeed, the rule may be very just. I take it, if the truth of a doctrine be fully and plainly taught in Scripture, and it appears from the nature and quality of the doctrine itself, that it is important, and that much depends upon it, that then Scripture has by plain consequence declared the necessity of believing such doctrine, by declaring its truth. If the rule be thus interpreted, then by the same rule the doctrine of the Trinity is important in a Scripture view, and ought to be reckoned among the necessities. By Episcopius's own account of it (as before observed) it is true, it is certain, it is clear, as proved from Scripture; and by many arguments recounted in the last chapter, it has been shown that it influences our worship, and bears a considerable part in what concerns the Christian life: therefore Scripture, in making known this doctrine, has by plain consequence taught us the necessity of believing it, and the danger of rejecting it. If men have the use of their rational faculties, and are able to argue and infer, they need not be expressly told that such a doctrine as that is, is important and weighty, and worth the contending for: let but Scripture once ascertain its truth, and every man's common sense will supply the rest.

When St. Paul was minded to convince the Corinthians of the necessity of believing the resurrection of the dead, he thought it sufficient to show the connection which that doctrine had with Christianity itself; to intimate that their other faith was vain without that, and all preaching vain [1 Cor. 15:14, 17.]; and

that the denying that doctrine was, in effect, denying the whole Christian religion. Therefore that doctrine was necessary in the highest degree, as common sense must conclude: the very nature of the doctrine, and its connection with the whole frame and body of revealed religion declared it. The like I say of the doctrine of the Trinity; not that it is necessary in the same degree with the doctrine of the resurrection, but in proportion, while much depends upon it, though not so much as does upon the other. Indeed neither of them are so necessary but that natural religion might subsist without them, upon a belief of the immortality of the soul:* but both are very highly necessary in a Christian light, and in a Scripture view, as both, in their several ways and degrees, support the fabric of Christianity, and the body of revealed religion. If a right knowledge of God, if dispositions suitable to the heavenly state we expect, if the regulation and specification of our worship, if the due and proper force of Gospel motives, if just ideas of the economy of man's redemption and salvation, and of the doctrine of grace; if these and other the like momentous concerns hang upon the true notion of the ever blessed Trinity, can we after that want any particular text or texts, to declare to us the necessity of our believing it? Not but that particular texts may be found which are explicit enough upon that head, as I may show hereafter: but in the meanwhile, I observe, that our cause does not need that additional strength, does not depend upon it.

*[Some very learned men have been of opinion that the same persons who in that time denied the resurrection, denied also any future state; which they infer from some reasonings which St. Paul made use of against them. (Vitringa. Observ. Sac. lib. iv. c. ix. p. 924. Buddeus, Bed. Apostol. p. 299.) But I much question whether they argue justly on that head, or whether St. Paul reasoned upon their hypothesis, or upon some other principles. It seems to me that all St. Paul's reasonings in that chapter may be accounted for upon this postulation, that if there be so resurrection, the separate soul, being under the sentence and dominion of death, cannot emerge and rise up to life and happiness, but must inevitably perish under such state of punishment, having no deliverer. But I offer this only as a conjecture, appearing to me not improbable.]

Besides, I would remark by the way, that a distinction might be properly enough made between a necessity of believing a Scripture doctrine, and a necessity of not denying, or not opposing it: for certainly, a man may be under a stricter obligation not to deny or oppose a Scripture verity, than positively to believe it; and it is a greater sin, publicly to deny and oppose a sacred truth, than it is merely not to admit it. Yet the Socinians, whom Episcopius was inclined to screen, did not only forbear giving assent to the doctrine, but they dissented, and publicly opposed it with all possible vigour; nay, and with more wiles and artifices than became plain honest men. Now I take it, that though an explicit knowledge or belief of many inferior Scripture truths is not ordinarily required,

yet it may be required, and strictly too, not to deny or oppose even them, supposing them plain; because it is, in effect, denying the veracity of God, or the inspiration of Scripture. I know of no dispensation there is for denying and opposing any one plain Scripture truth, contriving artificial elusions for it, any more than there is for disobeying a plain precept, in like manner eluding it; nor how a partial faith, in such a case, is at all more justifiable than a partial obedience: for indeed disbelief is disobedience, as I observed above. But the observation is much stronger when we find that the truth denied and opposed is a very material truth, one that has much depending upon it, one that lies near the foundation. How Episcopius could own it to be a truth, and yet think it no crime, or none deserving a public censure, to deny and oppose it, is unaccountable. We do not want to have it said in Scripture, that it was necessary in particular, explicitly to know and believe it: but certainly, if it be a truth revealed by God, as he allows, and not of the slightest kind neither, it was necessary not to deny or oppose it, and the man would deserve the public censure of the Church, that should presume so to do. Therefore the learned Episcopius has, in this instance, imposed a false rule of judging upon us, and such as he himself did not allow of in other cases. For how could he attempt to charge impiety, blasphemy, and the worst of heresies (as he pretends) upon the Calvinists? Was it by citing any Scripture texts which declare the necessity of believing the distinguishing doctrines on his side? No; but he endeavoured to show that the Calvinist doctrine remotely concluded in impiety, blasphemy, heresy; and that consideration he supposed sufficient to found his severe charge against the Calvinists upon; though in points more perplexed and obscure, and less agreed in among Christians ancient and modern, than the doctrine of the Trinity. So natural is it for men of the greatest pretended moderation to confine it chiefly to their own friends, or party, and to exclude their adversaries from the benefit of it. Faults of this kind will often happen on both sides, while men are men: and the foundation of all is, that men will not agree about necessaries, while they agree that there ought to be unity so far, and no farther. Many reconcilers have thought of various expedients, and different degrees of latitude: the worst that could be invented is indifference to all religions; which is like giving up an inheritance and consenting to starve, for the saving of trouble and contest about it. But I pass on.

4. A further fault I observed in the learned Episcopius was, that he extended the same fallacious rule to other doctrines of moment, beside this of the Trinity; and, as it seems, in order to contrive a shelter for his favourite Socinians. He denied the necessity of believing the divine prescience, as to future contingents, [Episcop. Institut. lib. iv, c. 18. p. 302.] though at the same time he

admitted the truth of the doctrine, in consideration of the Scripture prophecies. [Episcop. *ibid.* c. 17. p. 299, etc.] Indeed, as to the question taken in the precise terms as he has stated it, “whether it be strictly necessary to salvation to know and believe it,” and “whether a man shall forfeit his salvation for not believing, or not knowing it;” I say, in this precise view, it is hard to know how to answer, since it seems to proceed upon a wrong supposition of a certain quantity of faith, or of explicit knowledge, as necessary to the salvation of every person; about which we can determine nothing. But put the question, whether the doctrine be not highly important, and richly worth contending for, or whether the impugnors of it be not very much to blame, deserving public censure here, and punishment hereafter, for such pernicious doctrine; and then the answer is easy and certain: it is a very important doctrine, and the denial of it, especially if open and obstinate, highly criminal. Episcopius himself allows that it is necessary to salvation to believe and know that God foresees whatever he has determined to bring to pass; because God himself strongly insists upon it, as a mark of distinction, whereby he will be proved to be the true God, in opposition to all rival deities. [Episcop. *Institut.* lib. iv. c. 18. p. 303.] But, with submission, may there not be thousands of illiterate Christians, who have not the explicit knowledge of that matter, or may never consider it? Why then is this more necessary to salvation (in that strict sense of the phrase) than the other? In truth, neither of them are so, in that rigorous sense: but both are highly important, and, I conceive, equally so; because one implies the other, and they stand or fall together. God must foreknow future contingents, if he forms decrees long beforehand about them. If he decreed and foretold long before that Judas should be permitted voluntarily to betray Christ; he must have foreseen likewise that Judas would voluntarily do it, and how he would do it. There is no accounting for numerous prophecies, without the supposition of God’s foreknowing future contingents; and since God makes this the distinguishing character of the true God; it is in effect disowning the trial: of Scripture, and denying the true God,* to deny the divine prescience. How then can the Socinians be excused in that matter, especially considering how presumptuous they are in it, going upon this proud principle, that they are able to search the Almighty to perfection; or that nothing is to be believed but what they can comprehend? Let but the modus of the divine knowledge be admitted as inscrutable to weak mortals, and then all difficulties are over with us at once: the infinite perfections of the divine Mind ought in this case to silence all objections. But if men will think too meanly of God, and too highly of themselves, and from thence proceed to teach such doctrines as undermine the Scripture prophecies, and the divine perfections, and sap the foundations both of natural and revealed religion; can there be any just excuse made for such a

wanton abuse of liberty, and such unwarrantable conduct in affairs of the last consequence to the salvation of mankind? But enough hath been said to show, that Episcopius's famed rule for judging of necessities, is fallacious and wrong, and such as he himself did not proceed by in condemning the Calvinists; though he was disposed to make use of it for favouring the Socinians. The importance of any doctrine is not to be judged of merely from the declarations of Scripture concerning its necessity, but from the nature and quality of the doctrine itself, and the relation it bears to the other parts of revealed religion, and from the mischief's likely to follow upon opposing it.

*[Mr. Lobb, in few words, well represents the case as follows: "From this notion of theirs, revealed religion receives a wound: for if God doth not know future contingents, how can he foretell them? And if he cannot foretell them, of what use is the prophetic part of the holy Scriptures? And if they must be rejected as useless, will not the Deists be abundantly gratified? Or if it be yielded that God doth not foreknow future contingents, it will necessarily follow, that his knowledge is not infinite, and he cannot be God." Growth of Error, p. 188.]

II. From Episcopius, the chief leader, I pass on to his kinsman and follower, the learned Limborch; of whose principles in this cause I shall treat the more briefly, because they are the same in the main with what have been mentioned under the preceding article. His acknowledgment of the truth of the common doctrine of the Trinity may be inferred from his admitting the common Confession of the Remonstrants, and from what he has asserted in his own works [Limborch. Theol. Christ. lib. ii. c. xvii. p. 97, 98, 99 102.]: wherein he sufficiently expresses the main doctrine (if we are to judge him an honest man), and proves it too, though not to advantage. It is true, he afterwards drops a suspicious expression, [p. 102.] which requires a candid interpretation to make it bear; and he meanly talks of Petavius's ingenuously confessing [p. 102.] that some of the Ante-Nicene Fathers disowned the coeternity and coequality of the Son. He did not understand the subtlety of the Jesuit, nor consider that probably it was not so much ingenuous confession of that great man, as a disingenuous misrepresentation of his to serve the interest of the modern Church of Rome. [See preface to my Second Defence, vol. iii. Bull. Proem. sect. viii. p. 6. Grab. Praefat. ad Bulli Opp. Nelson's Life of Bull, p. 287.] His pretenses have been abundantly confuted by Bishop Bull, and several other learned hands.

However, as I said, Limborch has sufficiently expressed the main doctrine, and asserted its truth: we are next to observe what he thought of the necessity of believing it, or of the importance of it. He begins with declaring his scruples against asserting the necessity of believing the eternal filiation and Divinity of God the Son, [Limborch, lib. v. cap. 9. p. 413.]* while he admits the truth. He

conceives it not so necessary, as the owning Jesus to be the Messiah. Supposing it be not, yet it may be necessary notwithstanding. But if it can be proved that the Messiah predicted in the Old Testament, is there described under such characters as can belong only to God (as certainly it may), then it will be as necessary to believe him to be God, as to believe him to be the Messiah, because he cannot be the Messiah, unless he be also God. [Vid. Bulli Judic. Eccl. Cathol. cap. vii. sect. 5. and Second Letter to Mr. Nation, by P. C. p. 9.] However, as I before said, admitting that one of these doctrines is more necessary or more important than the other (though they are in just consequence inseparable), yet both may be fundamentals notwithstanding. He goes on to speak of the obscurity of the doctrine, which is abusing it; because though the thing is mysterious, and the manner obscure, yet the main doctrine is as clear as can be desired, as clear as any doctrines concerning the divine nature or attributes; clear in the general, clear so far as we are bound to believe. See above. He was aware of this answer; and therefore he endeavours next to evade the force of it. He owns the plea, with respect to some other fundamental doctrines, that the main substance of them may be clear, while the circumstantials only are obscure: and he instances in that of the resurrection of the dead, which he says is clear, and necessary to be believed; but whether the bodies will be numerically the same, he thinks is not clear, nor a necessary article of faith. This is a point which I need not here debate; we may admit the instance for argument sake, and now let us apply it, and see how far the same reasoning will bear. We receive the doctrine of the resurrection, considered in a general indeterminate view; we define not the precise manner; and we admit the eternal Divinity of God the Son, and the union of all three in one Godhead, not defining the manner of the union or distinction: so far the cases appear parallel: only indeed the resurrection is a matter that falls under imagination, the other belongs only to pure intellect. But now comes on the stress of the question: he asserts that the obscurity lies not in the circumstantials of the doctrine of the Trinity, but in the very substance of it. That we deny; and Episcopius himself denied it (unless he greatly prevaricated), as observed above. And how will the assertion be proved? The Professor attempts it by throwing our main doctrine into scholastic terms, [Limborch, lib. v. cap. 9. p. 414.] that so it may instantly carry the face of obscurity in the very words: this is not dealing fairly with us. He does not choose to express it so himself in other places, where he admits the verity of the doctrine, and where he declares his own faith; neither did Episcopius, or the common Confession of the Remonstrants so express it. Why then must they choose one way of expression for declaring the truth of the doctrine, and another for rejecting the necessity of it, except it be to serve a turn? The learned Professor, instead of saying one Jehovah, or one God, or one Godhead, here

chooses the phrase of one numerical essence: which is a late scholastic phrase, and faulty more ways than one: first, because the terms themselves are technical terms, and no way necessary to the Christian faith; and next, because they carry an equivocation in them; and the proposition can neither be admitted nor rejected, till it be carefully distinguished. Numerical essence in a Sabellian sense is heresy: in another sense, it is a truth darkly expressed. That the Persons are one God, one Jehovah, is of the substance of the doctrine; but that' they should be denominated one numerical essence; is not. For, first, it is a question whether the divine Unity ought to be brought under our distinctions about numerical. and specific, contrived for expressing things finite: and if it should, it is still another question, in what precise sense of the word numerical (which is an equivocal term) the proposition can be allowed. Both these questions are circumstantial, and furnishing matter for strife about words and names, not at all affecting the main thing [See my Second Defence, vol. iii. Qu. xxiii. p. 411, etc.]: and the obscurity here complained of lies not in the doctrine itself, but in the unfair manner of expressing it, to give some colour for the complaint: if any person, instead of such a plain expression, as God's presence everywhere, should call it, the infinite expansion or diffusion of the divine essence, it would be unfair and wrong in two views; first, as the terms are scholastic, when plainer words would better serve the purposes of truth; and next, as it is running the reader into an obscure speculation about expansion, what it means, and in what sense it may be admitted. Any doctrines whatever may thus be involved in obscurities, by clothing them in dark and equivocal terms, or by so contriving them as to bring in something of the modus into the main doctrine, when it ought to be entirely left out, either as unknown, or as not material. [Alphons. Turret. de Fundament. p. 20.] I am sensible that the phrase of numerical essence has long obtained in the Schools, and is capable of a good sense: but yet essence of essence (ever since that term came in) was always Catholic doctrine, as God of God; and numerical essence., a more modern phrase, must be so explained as to agree with the other, and to exclude a Sabellian sense. Otherwise it is no doctrine of ours, but an ancient heresy. But enough has been said to show, that the learned Limborch has used a little too much art, in representing our doctrine as obscure, only by the clouds raised from an obscure expression. The doctrine itself is otherwise clear enough, as I have before manifested at large: and every plain Christian will understand as clearly what he means when he says, the "three divine Persons are one God," as when he says, there will be "a resurrection of the dead". [Lib. v. cap. 9. p. 414.] Both the expressions are large and indefinite, wrapped up in generals; not descending to the minute circumstances belonging to this and that, but abstracting from them, and leaving them undetermined.

I meet with nothing more in Limborch deserving any particular answer. He has indeed some additional considerations in the same place, but such as amount only to mere assertions without proofs, viz. that it is sufficient to believe in Jesus as the Messiah, and that our faith respects the office, not the Person; that it is enough to consider him as Mediator, and the like; all precarious assertions taking for granted the matter in question, not to mention that the ancient and true notion of Christ as Mediator implies his Divinity, and supposes him to be both truly God and truly man. [See my Second Defence, vol. iii. Qu. xvi. p. 347.] Strange that a person of his great abilities could persuade himself that the believing in Christ as to his several offices of Prophet, Priest, and King, should be necessary, [Limb. lib. v. cap. 9. p. 415.] and yet that believing in him as a divine Prophet, a divine Priest and a divine King (though the fact be true that he is so) should be of little or no significance. One might as easily believe that the soul is of no consideration to the body, as that our Lord's Divinity, which runs through all his offices, and must enliven and invigorate every part, should be of no consideration, or slight, to a Christian's faith in these offices. But this great man, as well as his greater predecessor; had his prejudices and both of them had imbibed a very false notion of the ancient churches, as if they had not constantly insisted upon the necessity of believing the doctrine of the Trinity, or had not condemned the contrary opinions as heretical. That was Episcopius's firm persuasion, and he insisted much upon it, [Episcop. Inst. lib. iv. cap. 34. p. 339, 340. Respons. ad Specim. Calumn, p. 295.] having taken up the opinion too hastily from misrepresentations made of the Fathers, by some moderns, not being himself acquainted, to any degree of perfection, with that kind of learning. [Vid. Bull. Praemonit, ad Lector. de necesitat. credend.] And the like may be justly suspected of Limborch also, who trusted to Petavius in that matter, as I have already intimated. Had their surmise in that particular been just, I could not so much have blamed them for the rest. For to make anything necessary at this time of day, which anciently was not so, or to conceive that the most pure and primitive churches failed in necessities, is too bold and shocking a thought for any candid considerate man to entertain. But both Episcopius and his disciple were much deceived in that affair, as hath been abundantly shown by Bishop Bull; and as I shall endeavour also to make plain to the English reader before I have done. And then it will the more easily be admitted, that the necessity of the doctrine is sufficiently inculcated in Scripture, when it appears that the ancient churches collected such necessity from the same Scripture.

I have not yet mentioned any particular texts declaring such necessity, nor do I think it needful, because the truth of such a doctrine infers its necessity to as many as the doctrine is revealed to. But yet I may observe that the institution of

baptism in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, carries with it a very sensible and affecting argument of the importance of the doctrine. It is indeed, when considered in all its views, a strong proof of the truth of the doctrine, as might be shown at large, and often has been:* but supposing the truth proved sufficiently from other texts, then there cannot be a more convincing argument of the importance of it than this; that our blessed Lord himself has recommended it as the prime and leading doctrine, without the explicit mention whereof a man cannot be made a Christian; that he has conveyed it to us in that solemn form, that most distinguished manner to every disciple of Christ, as the first thing proper for him to be acquainted with, deserving and requiring his most early thoughts and care, and also his constant and most tender devotion ever after. On this foundation was the Church itself erected, and stands to this day. What stronger or more effectual method could have been devised to proclaim the necessity and high importance of this great article? A consideration which may receive yet farther light and strength, by looking into antiquity, and there observing what a stress was laid upon the interrogatories in baptism, and how this article made up the principal part, if not the whole of the first Creed, and what particular care was taken to instruct the candidates in this important doctrine previously to baptism: but what relates to antiquity will more properly come in under a distinct chapter designed for that purpose. I forbear likewise to insist upon another Scripture argument of great force, which St. John's writings afford me; because that also may more conveniently be reserved for another place in these papers.

*[See my Sermons at St. Paul's, Serm. viii. vol. ii. p. 173, etc. Bishop Stillingfleet's Vindication of the Trinity, p. 177, etc. 299, etc. Vitringa, Obaervat. Sac. tom. ii. cap. 22. p. 813–826. Dr. Trapp's Lecture Sermon, p. 100–104. Mr. Abraham Taylor's True Script. Doct. p. 91, etc. to which may be added, Basil, de Spiritu Sancto, cap. ix–xv.]

I have now run through the three several heads of debate, which I undertook; showing in so many distinct chapters, that the received doctrine of the Trinity is both clear and practical, and sufficiently inculcated in Scripture to be esteemed an article of high importance, an essential of Christianity, a fundamental doctrine of the Gospel, diffusing itself through the whole of our religion, and being, as it were, the very life and spirit of it. It remains now to be inquired, how we ought to behave towards those who openly reject or impugn it, or take part with them that do.

Chapter IV.

Showing, that Communion ought not to be held with men that openly reject the

fundamental Doctrines of Christianity, and persist in so doing.

This may be argued two ways; first, from express Scripture texts; and next, from the very nature and reason of the thing considered upon Scripture principles.

I. I begin with Scripture texts. St. Paul's instructions to the Romans in such cases is: "Mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them: for they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple." [Rom. 16:17–18.] The offenders here pointed at, were most probably [See Grotius, and Whitby, and Wolfius, upon the place: and Vitringa, *Observat. Sacr. lib. iv. cap. 9. Buddaei Eccles. Apostol. p. 121*] the Judaizing false teachers, those that preach up circumcision and the observance of the law as necessary to salvation; a doctrine subversive of the grace of the Gospel, as observed above. The Apostle therefore exhorts his Christian converts to mark them, that is, to beware of them, in order to avoid them, and to preserve themselves from the infection of their pernicious doctrine. And as he wrote by the Spirit of God, and had the gift of discerning the spirits of men, he could tell his converts, with a certain and well-grounded assurance, the insides of the men; that they were men of carnal minds and profligate consciences, using fair and plausible speeches to beguile others, for their own humour, or pleasure, or interest, or vanity. Such indeed is the general character of heresiarchs of all kinds: but yet without very clear and sufficient grounds appearing in overt acts, men ought not to take upon them the liberty of an Apostle, in pronouncing upon the inward motives which heretics are led by: it is sufficient to pass sentence upon the quality of the doctrine, and to condemn it as subversive of the Gospel (if it really be so), and to renounce communion with its open favourers and abettors; so much at least is manifestly implied in the advice given to avoid them, or turn from them. Receive them not as ministers of Christ, nor own them as brethren: for they serve not the Lord Jesus Christ; but their fair speeches and false colourings are fitted to deceive unwary souls. Therefore avoid them, shun them, discountenance them, and that openly: for so they which are approved, will be made manifest, [1 Cor. 11:19.] and not otherwise.

The same Apostle pointing to the same heretics elsewhere says, "There be some that trouble you, and would pervert [subvert] the Gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other Gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed." [Gal. 1:7–9.] How strongly here does the Apostle guard against admitting new doctrines (subversive of the old), through a

common weakness incident to mankind, having men's persons in admiration, on account of their parts or learning, or their appearing goodness, sanctity, sobriety. Though "we or an angel from heaven" should presume to do any such wicked thing, "let him be accursed;" words very expressive and poignant, in order to correct the weakness before mentioned; and another also near akin to it, the natural fondness many have for novelties. And I may further observe, that in such cases we have no concern at all with the virtues or good qualities of false teachers, be they ever so real or great: if they corrupt the faith in any gross instance, that is reason sufficient for refusing communion with them, though they were otherwise bright as angels. A consideration worth the noting, for the obviating some popular pretenses on this head. I need not here enter into the dispute, whether the words *ανάθεμα εστω* amount to a solemn curse, or are only a form of excommunication. [See Buddaeus, *Eccles. Apostol.* p. 808, 809.] If we take it in the first and most rigorous sense, it seems proper only to an Apostle or Prophet, thus solemnly to curse or bless in the name of the Lord. But as the Christian Church afterwards [See Suicer. *Thesaurus in voc. ανάθεμα.* Bingham's *Antiq. of the Christian Church*, lib. xvi. cap. 2, 8, 16, 17.] often used the same form in their excommunications, the milder sense appears most probable. However that be, this solemn sentence of the Apostle amounts at least to a strict injunction or warning to all Christians, that they should not communicate with persons who corrupt the faith (either by adding to it, or taking from it) in any gross manner, which may be justly interpreted a subversion of the Gospel of Christ. Such attempts are to be held in the utmost abhorrence, and the authors of them shunned as seducers and false Apostles. It cannot well be supposed, that less than this is implied in the words of the Apostle.

He goes on to say, speaking of the same persons in the same Epistle, "he that troubleth you shall bear his judgment, whosoever he be." [Gal. 5:10.] "I would they were even cut off that trouble you." [Gal. 5:12.] Which last words, I understand, with many judicious interpreters, of excommunication; and it is confirmed by what is said in the same place, "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" [Gal. 5:9, compare 1 Cor. 5:6-7.]; intimating the reason why the Apostle wished to have those false teachers cut off from the communion of Christians, viz. to prevent the contagion spreading farther. I am aware that some very learned men [Elsner in loc. p. 196. Buddaeus, *Eccles. Apostol.* p. 808. Wolfius, *Curae Philog. et Crit.* vol. ii. p. 772.] dislike the interpretation I have mentioned, but upon a very slender reason, as to me appears. They think the Apostle would not have wished for it only, but would have commanded it in virtue of his apostolical authority. It is true, he might have done it: but who knows for how many, or for what prudential reasons, he might forbear for a time, and be content at that

juncture only to throw out a wish, in order to prepare the Galatians for it, and to incline them by slow and gentle methods to concur the more readily with it, when it should be absolutely necessary. It is not to be presumed that excommunication, or a formal renouncing of communion, are things to be precipitated at all adventures, or that there may not often be good reasons for delay, that so an affair of the highest consequence may be conducted with the utmost prudence. I am of opinion, that besides the mischievous nature of the heresy itself, several other circumstances of time, place, and persons, ought to have their weight in consultations relating to Church discipline upon offenders. But I pass on.

St. Paul gives advice to Timothy, in the words here following; “These things teach and exhort. If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; he is proud, etc. from such withdraw thyself.” [1 Tim. 6:2–5.] Perhaps the rendering and the sense would run better thus: [Vid. Vitringa, *Observat. Sacr.* tom. i. p. 220.] if any man teach otherwise, and consent not to the wholesome words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness, if he is puffed up, knowing nothing, but doating about questions, etc. from such withdraw thyself. It is a disputable point, what particular sect or set of false teachers the Apostle here refers to, whether Judaizers or Gnostics, or others distinct from both. But one thing is plain, which is sufficient to our present purpose, that the Apostle exhorts Timothy to withdraw from them, and that in order either to discountenance their false doctrines, or to preserve himself and others from receiving contagion by them. To the same purpose is what the Apostle again says to Timothy:

“Shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some.” [2 Tim. 2:16–18.] The heads and patrons of the heresy here mentioned, the Apostle had excommunicated before, delivering them over unto Satan, to stop their blaspheming. [1 Tim. 1:20.] They appear to have been persons who believed the Scriptures of the Old Testament, but misinterpreted them, allegorizing away the doctrine of the resurrection, resolving it all into figure and metaphor. [Vid. Vitringa, *Observ. Sacr.* lib. iv. cap. 9. p. 925. Buddaeus *Eccles. Apostol.* p. 300.] The delivering over unto Satan seems to have been a form of excommunication, declaring the person reduced to the state of an heathen: and in the apostolic age, it was accompanied with supernatural or miraculous effects upon the bodies of the persons so delivered [1 Cor. 5: 5. see commentators.]: though it may be supposed that such effects might last beyond the

apostolic age, because other miraculous gifts certainly did so. I am well aware of the disputes which have been among persons of the best learning, [A summary account of them may be seen in Woffius's *Curae Philolog. et Crit. ad 1 Cor. 5:5.* p. 367. or in Bingham's *Eccles. Antiq. b. xvi. cap. 2. sect. 15.*] about the precise meaning of the phrase, whether it signified excommunication, or an appendage to it. I have chosen that interpretation which appears most probable. [See Bishop Potter's *Church Government*, p. 371, etc. Dr. Rogers's *Review of a Discourse of the Visible etc.* p. 392.] I must own, there is a notion which appears to run through the debates of several learned men on this head, and which I cannot well understand. They seem to take it for granted, that excommunication is a punishment of the soul. I easily conceive it to be a spiritual punishment, as not being a corporal one, and as inflicted by a spiritual, that is, ecclesiastical authority: but how it is properly a punishment of the soul, I apprehend not. Its design is salutary, and the effect also often salutary; so that it is rather medicinal than penal, with respect to the soul: but this by the way only. It would be too large a digression here, to consider that point in such a manner as it deserves to be considered.

I go on to other texts and shall take one by the way, which though not precisely to the point I am upon, yet is not altogether foreign. "There are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake – rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith." [Titus 1:10–11, 13.] We may here observe the ardent zeal of the Apostle against false teachers, who corrupted the faith, and how great a stress he lays upon being sound in principles. But he does not give orders for excommunicating those deceivers directly, but to admonish them first, and that with some sharpness, in order to shame them, and silence them, and bring them back to the true faith. From all which one may collect these following considerations, which may be of some use to us: 1. That religion is not a personal thing, which every man may new model or alter for himself, without rebuke from his fellow Christians, or from the governors of the Church. It is the joint patrimony of the whole community, and every man more or less is accountable to his neighbour for any waste made in it. It is the common concern, and everyone in his station and degree must give a helping hand to preserve it in its native purity. 2. That the teaching and propagating of false doctrines may subvert whole houses, and do a great deal of mischiefs so that truth is not always a gainer by unrestrained liberties of that kind. 3. That sharp rebukes are very proper in such cases, and are no breaches of charity but the truest instances of brotherly affection and love. 4. That admonitions and increpations should first be tried, even in case of great corruption in doctrine, rather than come to extremities

at once: a rule expressly taught us in what I am next going to cite.

“A man that is an heretic, after the first and second admonition, reject; knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself.” [Titus 3:10–11.] This text will deserve a more particular examination, containing much in it directly belonging to the point in hand. Wherefore I shall handle the several parts of it the more distinctly. 1. “A man that is an heretic.” Here the first question is, who, or what is an heretic? To which I answer in the general, not everyone that mistakes in judgment, though in matters of great importance, in points fundamental, but he that openly espouses such fundamental error. That I take to be the true and full notion of an heretic, according to the Scripture idea of it. Dr. Whitby adds to the definition, the espousing it “out of disgust, pride, envy, or some worldly principle,” [Whitby on Gal. 5:19.] and “against his conscience”. [Whitby on Titus. 3:10.] Indeed that may generally be the case; but that those several particulars are necessary to the definition of heretic is not to be allowed him by any means, for the reasons here following.

1. By that rule, there would be no certain knowing, in most cases, who is an heretic, or who not, since there is no looking into the heart: and how then could we at all observe the Scripture rule of avoiding or rejecting heretics?

2. There is as much danger, or more, when a blind enthusiast, or any person of invincible ignorance or prejudice, espouses false doctrines, and corrupts the faith, as when evil-minded men do the same thing out of envy, pride, etc. and against their own consciences: and what shall be done in such cases? The way certainly is to censure the doctrine as heresy, and to do all that prudence and charity prescribes for the preventing such well-meaning, but mad teachers, from seducing the flock of Christ. It is not possible for men accurately to distinguish one case from the other; and therefore one general rule must serve for both. God will distinguish at the last day. In the meantime, all proper care must be taken to guard against the threatening mischief. For the poison of the doctrine, by whomsoever spread, or upon whatsoever principle, is just the same; only, if it comes from a man otherwise honest, pious, sober, etc. it is likely to insinuate itself deeper, and spread the wider. I say then, heresy lies in espousing pernicious doctrines: that we can judge of, and by that rule, can understand how to proceed. The other way involves all in darkness, and leaves a matter of the greatest consequence to the utmost uncertainty. But let us examine what the learned author before mentioned had to plead in behalf of his notion. The strength of all lies chiefly in the word *αυτοκατάκριτος*, self-condemned, here used by the Apostle; as if no man could be an heretic that is not self-condemned, or does not go against his own judgment and conscience. But I observe, that the

Apostle directs Titus to admonish a heretic once and again. It is supposed, that Titus might know a heretic, viz. by, his espousing some doctrine subversive of the Gospel: for how could it be certainly known, whether the man believed himself, or taught contrary to his own judgment? If after being twice admonished for teaching such pernicious doctrine, he should still persist, then he was to be looked upon as αυτοκατάκριτος, self-condemned. It could no longer be pure ignorance or thoughtlessness, after two several warnings, but must now be looked upon as matter of his own choice or election, [Tertul. de Prescript. Haeret. cap. 6.] as mere willfulness and obstinacy for him to persist in opposition to the truth. When I say against the truth, I suppose that to have been a clear case to the admonisher before the first admonition, otherwise there had not been room for admonition at all. Admonish a man that is an heretic; not a man that is really no heretic, which would be contumelious and injurious. And if he persists after two admonitions, then look upon him as αυτοκατάκριτος, self-condemned, and reject him. It is plain enough from the whole tenor of this passage, that αυτοκατάκριτος, whatever it means, does not belong to the definition of an heretic as such, but to that of an admonished and still obstinate heretic. He is supposed a heretic before, and therefore was to be admonished once; if need should be, again: and then, if he persisted, he was to be looked upon as desperate and incorrigible; and therefore to be rejected utterly. [Hieron. in loc. vol. iv. p. 439.] There is indeed something elliptical in the sentence: knowing that he that is such; as much as to say, knowing that he who continues such after two admonitions, is now without excuse, [See Suicer. Thesaur. in αυτοκατάκριτος.] and, as it were, passes sentence upon himself, either as voluntarily cutting himself off from the Church, by an open revolt, [Cypr. Epis. lxxix. p. 182. edit. Oxon. Hieronym. in loc. p. 439. Compare Hammond upon the text.] or as rendering himself incapable of the privileges and blessings that belong to it, by renouncing its faith; which, in a just construction, is judging, or declaring himself unworthy [See Acts 13:46. Iren. adver. Haer. lib. iii. c. 1. p. 174. Massuet.] of the blessings tendered. I have been the longer in explaining this text, because the real meaning and purport of it has been frequently misunderstood, or misrepresented. Now I return to Dr. Whitby.

He pleads, “that the Apostle saith not to Titus, Do thou convince or inform him of his error, but, Do thou admonish him of his fault: which shows, that the crime lay not in his head or his mistaken judgment (for that can never be corrected by admonition, but only by instruction), but that it lay in the irregularity of his affections, and the perverseness of his will.” [Whitby on Titus 3:10.] But what if the fault lay in heart and head both, as indeed all faults do? Omnis peccans ignorat, is a true maxim. There is some error always in judgment, before there is an error in practice; for evil, as evil, cannot be chosen. The fault

therefore of an heretic, really such, is that some corrupt affection (I except the case of invincible infirmity) misleads him first to pass a rash precipitate judgment; and next to espouse that judgment openly. And lastly (if he proceeds so far), to persist in it against all advices or admonitions to the contrary. The heart perverts the head; and both conspire in the same false judgment and conduct. The good Doctor pleads farther: "No man who acts according to his judgment, how erroneous soever it may be, is self-condemned in that action." [Whitby on Titus 3:10.] Yes, if he made a rash judgment, and might have known or done better, he is self-condemned: for he condemns others who judge rashly and wrongly; when they might and ought to have judged better; and so of course he condemns himself, by the same sentence. [See Rom. 2:1.] There are two kinds of self-condemnation, one direct and explicit, the other indirect, implicit, virtual, consequential. As to direct self-condemnation, few fall into it: for men are so partial towards their own failings, that they seldom see their own false judgment, or wrong conduct, and as seldom condemn themselves for either. It is their fault that they do not: such self-condemnation would be commendable, and a good step towards recovery: it is not such self-condemnation as that, that the Apostle speaks of. There is too little of it everywhere; presumption and self-applause are the foibles of mankind. And they will easily take care in most cases not to be self-condemned, though condemned by all the world besides. It is not self-condemnation in this sense, that makes an ill man, or aggravates a fault, but the want of it. [See Hammond upon the text.] The other kind of self-condemnation, which I call indirect, is what the Apostle may point to as an aggravating circumstance of heresy, after two admonitions. The man justifies himself in opposition to truth and good counsel, does not condemn himself directly, when he ought to do it, and amend: but he condemns himself indirectly, as acting against the law of his mind, against that general law by which he condemns others, and justly, whenever they allow themselves in wrong things, and ought to know better. This is his condemnation, that he approves in a particular instance through partiality, what himself in the general condemns. All sinners, in this sense, are self-condemned; and so are heretics also among the rest. Indeed, all that do not make a proper use of their rational faculties, when they may and ought to do it, are thus self-condemned: and their own awakened consciences will rise up against them at the last day, as men guilty of great prevarication and self-repugnancy, for allowing in themselves what they otherwise disallow and condemn. "Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant," will then be the sentence due to all, who having been twice admonished of corrupting the faith, repented not of it, but persevered in their errors both of judgment and practice, when they might have known better.

I defined heresy, not merely a mistake of judgment (though in fundamentals), but espousing such erroneous judgment, either teaching and disseminating it, or openly supporting and assisting those that do, siding with them in it. This I conceive to be the true Scripture notion of heresy. [1 Cor. 11:19. Gal. 5:20. 2 Peter 2:1.] Nevertheless, an erroneous judgment in fundamentals has more Commonly passed under the name of heresy, and is undoubtedly a great fault; whatever name we call it by. It is running counter to all those texts which recommend zeal and earnestness for the true faith: for how can a man, consistently with himself, be zealous for what he either disbelieves or assents not to? It is likewise running cross to all those texts which exhort to sound faith, or which command us to hold fast what is good, cry forbid the being tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine, and the like. Whether such fault shall be called heresy or no, is only disputing about a name: but that it is in itself (particular circumstances excepted) a great offence against God, cannot be doubted; and it naturally leads to worse.

2. Flaming largely treated of the nature and notion of heresy, and what properly denominates any man a heretic, I am next to say something of what is meant by rejecting such persons. After all prudent and proper means have been used to reclaim them, or silence them, and they still persist in their heresy, either teaching or otherwise espousing false and pernicious doctrines; then the rule of the Apostle is to reject them, or cast them off, if they have not before cast off themselves. The text does not say, excommunicate them; for that would not be necessary, when they have excommunicated themselves: but it says, shun them, avoid them, reject them; which, in case they do not cast themselves out, implies and infers a command to exclude them: so that the text, by that general expression, seems to have provided for both the cases.

But I must here again take notice of Dr. Whitby's mistakes and false reasonings. He was sensible that according to his loose definition of heresy, there would be no knowing, for the most part, who is guilty of it, or who ought to be condemned for it: he produces the objection himself, and afterwards endeavours lamely to answer it. "It is objected," says he, "that there be few who oppose the truth wittingly, and they are only known to God, not to the Church; which therefore cannot admonish, avoid, or excommunicate them." [Whitby on Titus 3:10.] An insuperable objection against his notion, showing that it terminates in a flat contradiction to Scripture and to the plainest reason. Well, how does he reply to it? The sum of his answer is, "That Titus might have the discerning of spirits, a gift belonging to those times: and the Church that was in the days of the Apostles could easily know, whether the doctrines which others taught in opposition to them, were indeed doctrines received from the Apostles or not: if

they were not, they who taught them must know, they received no such doctrine from them, and so must be self-condemned in teaching it as received from them, or as the faith once delivered to the saints.” [Whitby on Titus 3:10.] Never was there a looser reply in so momentous a cause. For, 1. this amounts to saying, that all the precepts about admonishing, avoiding, or excommunicating of heretics, and of consequence, all the other precepts about preserving sound doctrine, or contending earnestly for the faith, expired in a great measure as soon as the miraculous gifts, or gift of discerning spirits ceased. The precepts from that time forwards became impracticable, because nobody now could know what was heresy, or who heretics, since they could not see into men’s hearts. Though heretics might subvert whole houses (and now more than ever, when there should be no Apostle living to control them), and though their words might eat as doth a canker; yet the Church is left without remedy: the pastors and guardians of it must not presume to excommunicate, or avoid, or admonish persons as heretics, unless they can first prove them heretics, or ill-designing men: but if it be certain, that they are led by an erroneous conscience, they must not be censured at all, but treated as good men and fellow Christians. “So that we are commanded to avoid a heretic; but this heretic is such a sort of a creature as nobody can ever find out, or distinguish from one he is to treat as a brother. But suppose this heretic should tell us, that he did not believe what himself affirmed, then indeed he would be self-condemned, and we might know it: but he must be a fool of a heretic who would declare this, unless he intended to recant and renounce his errors: and whenever he did this, he would no longer be a heretic, no longer to be avoided; and therefore being self-condemned in this sense, would be so far from a reason why we should avoid him, that it would be a reason why we should not avoid him: but treat him as a brother.” [Rogers’s Review of the Visible and Invisible Church, p. 409.] 2. From the same principles it will follow, that the whole discipline of the Church, after the time that the gift of discerning of spirits ceased, so far as concerned heretics, was rash and unwarrantable which no wise man will presume to say or think. 3. It farther follows, that be heresies ever so rife, and the faith ever so much endangered, there is no remedy for it: we cannot know in these times (though the Scriptures are allowed to be clear and perfect) what the doctrines of the Apostles were, or “whether the doctrines which others teach in opposition to them are indeed doctrines received from the Apostles or not:” however, if we may know that, yet without knowing men’s hearts too, all our zeal for the ancient faith is fruitless and vain.

Such are the absurdities which the learned Doctor inevitably runs into, only for the sake of a false favourite notion he had unwarily imbibed. The truth

of the whole matter is, we have nothing to do with the inward motives or views of heretics. The mischief lies in the false doctrines which they teach and propagate: and upon that account, and that only, they are to be admonished, avoided, censured, in order to prevent the subverting whole houses, and the like. Possibly such false teachers may intend well: of that God is Judge: but the faith of Christ, and the salvation of souls, must not be sacrificed even to the known good intentions of any man or men whatever; no, nor to the preaching even of an angel from heaven, were it a possible supposition. But it may be objected; what, must innocent men suffer for the sake of any good? Is that justice or equity? I answer, that they are innocent in this case, through an erroneous conscience, and invincible ignorance, is more than man knows or can know: of that God is Judge. But that corrupting the faith is not an innocent practice (considered in itself), but a very ill thing, everyone knows, or ought to know; and that is the rule for men to go by in judging, because they can go by no other; and it is in the main both a safe and a certain rule. And if it may sometimes happen, that discerning and upright judges may condemn a man who is innocent in God's sight (because of some unconquerable infirmity), while guilty in the eyes of man, this cannot be remedied. The good proceeding from such censures vastly overbalances it. And what if, after all, spiritual censures (for of such only I am speaking) should happen to fall upon such a person, he may be in some measure hurt in his reputation by it, and that is all: and possibly hereupon his errors, before invincible through ignorance, may be removed by wholesome instruction and admonitions, and so he is befriended in it, and may now come to have a covenant right to happiness, who before stood only in uncovenanted mercy. For though God will condemn no man for what he could not help; yet he has promised no man a reward who ever so ignorantly corrupts the faith of the Gospel. But it is said of the unlearned and unstable, that when they wrest the Scriptures, it is to their own destruction. I have dwelt the longer upon this argument, because it appears to me to be a very weighty affair, and not so well considered by many as it ought to be. I now proceed in order to some other texts, relating to the avoiding heretics.

St. John's advice in that case, touched upon before, is, "If there come any one unto you, and bring not this doctrine" (the doctrine of Christ in a material article), "receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds." [2 John 10–11.] The Apostle here forbids a Christian to salute [Χαίρειν αυτω μη λέγετες.] a man that perverts the Gospel in such a certain article, being a fundamental one: what article he spoke of, I have intimated above. It is observed by interpreters that denying a person the common forms of salutation was the same with looking upon him as

excommunicate. [See Hammond and Whitby.] And so these words of the Apostle carry in them the force of an excommunication, with respect to the heretics there pointed to, and the force of a prohibition, with respect to other Christians, who are hereby forbidden to receive such heretics into their houses, or to pay them so much as common civilities. This precept of the Apostle may be further illustrated by his own practice, recorded by Irenaeus, who had the information at second hand from Polycarp, a disciple of St. John's; that St. John once meeting with Cerinthus at the bath, retired instantly without bathing; for fear, said he, lest the bath should fall, by reason of Cerinthus's being there, the enemy to truth. [Iren. lib. iii. c. 3. p. 177. Bened. alias 204. Grab. Conf. Euseb. Eccl. H. lib. iii. c. 28. p. 123. Theodoret. Haeret. Fab. lib. ii. c. 3. p. 220.] The like story is there also told of Polycarp himself, with regard to another such heretic, namely, Marcion. And Irenaeus's just reflection upon the whole is very observable in these words: "So extremely cautious were the Apostles and their followers, to have no communication, no, not so much as in discourse, with any man that adulterated the truth." [Iren. *ibid.*] A conduct, which, as he remarks, was conformable to St. Paul's rule, Titus 3:10. The reader will take notice by the way, that though Cerinthus and Marcion might be otherwise ill men, and might perhaps act upon bad motives, yet the stress of the thing lay not there; but it was their being enemies to truth, and their adulterating the truth (in points fundamental), which made them so abhorred, and their company so detested by wise and holy men. No matter what their motives were, or their Morals in other respects: they corrupted the faith of Christ, and in effect subverted the Gospel: that was enough to render them detestable in the eyes of all men who sincerely loved and valued sound faith.

The bishops of Pergamus and Thyatira are reprov'd by our Lord for suffering, that is, for not ejecting the Balaamites or Nicolaitans, who taught false doctrine, relating to the fundamentals of Christian practice: they taught the lawfulness of fornication, and of eating things offer'd to idols. That was a heresy in doctrinals, immediately affecting the agenda of Christianity, the moral commands of Scripture; which they very probably misinterpreted and perverted, much after the same manner as others perverted such texts as contain the *oredenda*, matters of faith strictly so called. There is not much difference in the main between the two cases; excepting that one is more gross and scandalous, and shows itself in more sensible effects. There is the same presumptuous tampering with Scripture, the same kind of artificial elusions, the like wire-drawing of texts in both cases and there is likewise the same kind of unbelief or disbelief of God's sacred word, only in different articles, and the like opposition to Gospel truths, only to different purposes. If any man through mere weakness of judgment should have imbibed the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, but resolving

at the same time never to divulge it, nor practice upon it, I see not what harm a bare opinion, and owing only to infirmity, would do him, while dormant and without effect. But if any person, through the like weakness of judgment, should entertain low and degrading notions of his God and Saviour, though he should never divulge it, he would suffer some harm by it with respect to his religious services, which would be thereby rendered less perfect. For in that case, the ill effect so far is inseparable from the false opinion; though I doubt not but all merciful allowances would be made for it. But as the criminal part in the former case would lie chiefly in practicing upon the persuasion, or in divulging it to the hurt of other persons, so in this latter also, the most criminal circumstance would be the espousing and publicly supporting such false persuasion to the detriment of religion. For if he who shall break one of the least moral commandments, and shall teach men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven, (Matt. 5:19) it must be a very dangerous experiment for any man to presume to teach anything contrary to the Gospel of Christ in the main articles of faith or doctrine, because the Christian life is nearly concerned in both, and the honour of God and religion are bound up with them. And the pastors or guardians of the Christian religion ought no more to suffer any notorious insults upon the great credenda of our most holy religion, than upon the agenda: since both rest upon the same foundation, have a close connection with each other, and are, for the most part, likely to stand or fall together.

II. I have now proved from direct Scripture texts, that it is the duty of Christians to refuse communion with those who corrupt the faith of Christ in points fundamental, and persist in so doing, after proper cautions and admonitions given them. I am in the next place to enforce the doctrine yet farther, by considerations drawn from the very nature and reason of the thing, upon Scripture principles. Piety towards God, charity towards other men, and justice towards our own souls, all conspire to recommend and authorize such conduct.

1. I say, piety towards God requires such a conduct. For, can it be thought that when the high Lord and Governor of the universe vouchsafes to speak to us from heaven, and to reveal truths of importance, that good men ought patiently to bear the perverting of those sacred truths, or the adulterating of those heavenly instructions. Earthly governors would resent the putting false constructions upon their laws or edicts, or the wresting them to quite different purpose from what they were intended for, to deceive and mislead their people: how much more shall the God of heaven resent any indignities of that kind! It is the cause of God and religion, to rescue the word of God from perverse glosses and comments, and to preserve it in its native purity and perfection. To admit those who corrupt

and deprave its sense in any gross manner, to the common honours and privileges of fellow Christians, would be the ready way to introduce all imaginable confusion in faith and worship, and to deface Christianity to such a degree, that common Christians at least could not know how or where to find it. For example: had the Cerinthians, Ebionites, Marcionites, Valentinians, Manichees, and other sects too numerous to mention, been all admitted as fellow Christians, Christianity must have been looked upon as the most uncertain, inconstant, inconsistent thing in the world: and both the religion itself, and the Scriptures which contain it, would very probably have been lost before now, or have come down to us so mangled, adulterated, disguised, that no one could know what to depend upon as true and sincere, either as to words or sense. The discriminating of heretics from faithful Christians, and therewith preserving the unity of the Church and the purity of doctrine, has been a principal means of fixing the Christian religion in its most material articles, and of supporting the honour of it against all its enemies without, whether Jews, Pagans, or mere infidels. So necessary was it to discountenance all attempts for subverting or perverting the truth as it was in Christ Jesus, and to separate the clean from the unclean, by rejecting heretics, as unworthy of Christian communion, or even of the name of Christians, except it were in a very large sense.

2. As piety towards God, and reverence towards his sacred word, required such conduct; so likewise did charity towards men; charity towards the offenders, and charity towards all mankind. It was a charitable office towards the corruptors of the faith of Christ, to reject and disown them, in order to make them ashamed, [2 Thess. 3:14.] and to bring them to repentance, that so their souls “might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.” [1 Cor. 5:5.] It is true, that it often failed of having this salutary effect, as the judgments of God also often fail, and where they do not cure, they irritate and harden, and render worse, which is no argument against the salutary nature of the remedy, but shows only the incurable disorder of the patient. Indeed St. Paul does distinguish his coming with the rod of excommunication, from his coming in “love and in the spirit of meekness.” [1 Cor. 4:21.] not as if such discipline were not an instance of love, or were not perfectly consistent with a spirit of meekness, but it was not love in every view, or in every sense of the word, like the love shown towards the faithful in all the outward expressions of approbation and friendliness; for the case did not admit of it. It was love mingled with wholesome severity, the truer love for being so mingled, when the necessity of the case required it: wounds they were, but of a friend still, and in a case where the kindest of friends could not otherwise show themselves kinder than by so doing. Meekness it was not, under that precise formality, but consistent with all that could be called Christian meekness: for to

forbear sharpness and severity in such a case is not meekness, but tameness, and a Laodicean lukewarmness. So that the exercise of proper discipline, in such instances, is in reality fervent love and charity towards the offenders themselves, in a spiritual view, but expressing itself in the harsher way, the only way left for it towards men in their circumstances. Palliating medicines would be cruel and barbarous applications, when corrosives are the only means left to recover the patient, and to effect the cure. [The objections made to the method, as not proper, are abundantly answered by a very learned Prelate, Potter on Church Government, p. 399, etc.] Upon the whole therefore, charity towards the offenders themselves requires such a conduct as I have been mentioning.

There can be less appearance for any question, whether it be not also charity towards all men besides. It is charity towards the ignorant, as carrying instruction along with it; charity towards the unwary, as giving them warning to stand off from infection; charity towards the confirmed Christians, as encouraging them still more, and preserving them from insults; charity towards the whole Church, as supporting both their unity and purity; charity towards all mankind, towards them that are without, as it is recommending pure religion to them in the most advantageous light, obviating their most plausible calumnies, and giving them less occasion to blaspheme.

3. I observe, in the third place, that justice to our own souls requires, that we use all prudent and proper endeavours to discountenance heresies, by refusing communion with their open favourers and abettors. For otherwise, as John speaks, we become partakers of their evil doings. To own them as fellow Christians, is to take their guilt upon ourselves, or greater; I say, greater, because supposing them so far innocent as honestly to follow their own judgment, yet while we are of a contrary judgment, it cannot but be guilty practice and conduct in us, and very great too, to smother our sentiments, or not to bear our testimony in such a way as Christ has appointed, against all notorious corruptions either of faith, or worship, or doctrine. It appears then sufficiently, both from Scripture directly, and from the very nature and reason of the thing, that it is our bounden duty to refuse communion with those that persist in opposing the fundamental articles of our most holy religion. I am aware that several objections have been made, and will be made to what Christ has ordered, and the Church has all along practiced as concerning our conduct in this article: for what is there so just, so rational, or so commendable, that may not be objected to? However, in order to satisfy reasonable men at least, I design a distinct chapter for the further clearing up the question in hand.

Chapter V.

Objections removed, and some vulgar Mistakes rectified.

Having laid down our principles, and the grounds upon which we go, our next concern is to remove or obviate whatever threatens to overturn them, or to lessen their force, lest any weak objections on one side, left unanswered, may prevail more with some persons than the strongest arguments on the other. I proceed then to the business.

I. It may have been sometimes invidiously suggested, that the insisting so strongly upon the necessity of believing, or however of not opposing this doctrine, is carrying matters to an immoderate height, and tends to provoke others to run into a contrary extreme out of a kind of indignation, and excessive renitence. The plea is smooth and specious, and appears to carry a fair show of lenity and moderation in it, which are virtues much to be admired; but in reality it contains little, as here applied, more than artful abuse, and such as is frequently played with in other the like cases. For the purpose: if any person is disposed to undermine the inspiration of sacred Writ, he begins commonly with complaints of the stiffness and dogmatism of common Divines, which prejudice men of freer thoughts, as is pretended, against Scripture itself, and almost force them into another extreme. So again, if any man has a mind to relax the strictness of the Gospel rule, and to bring it down to his taste, he falls to declaiming against the excessive rigour of religionists, which frighten many sober persons, as is said, from embracing religion. Complaints of that kind may sometimes be just, but they are oftener mere artifice. It will be proper to examine, in the first place, what truth there is in the suggestions brought about our running into extremes. Without all question, extremes are carefully to be avoided in everything: extreme cold may be as bad as extreme heat: and extreme lenity is a fault, as much as extreme severity. But the thing to be proved is, that the insisting upon the doctrine of the Trinity, as an essential article, is an extreme, or that it is not in reality the true and golden mean between rigour on one hand and lukewarmness on the other. It may be true that the insisting upon this doctrine may have that accidental effect, to prejudice weak minds the more against it, or against religion itself. In like manner, the insisting upon the doctrine of the cross, the duty of self-denial, and the necessity of universal righteousness, may have prejudiced many against Christianity, and yet daily do so. But still if the doctrine be both true and important, it must be taught and inculcated: and the question is not in such cases, whether many may not be offended or scandalized at any doctrine, but whether the doctrine be such as ought to be insisted upon. For as a very judicious and learned Prelate [Bishop of

London, in his Charge of May 28, 1730, p. 28.] has appositely observed, “St. Paul has plainly taught us how we ought to conduct ourselves in such cases. He knew very well that Jew and Gentile took great offence at the doctrine of a crucified Saviour, and he could not but see that Christianity would be more favourably entertained by both, if that offence were removed, and the Gospel reduced to a scheme of mere morality, ratified by a person sent from God, and enforced by stronger assurances of rewards and punishments than had ever been given before. But, notwithstanding all this, we, says he, preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness.” [1 Cor. 1:23.] The reason is plain: for the ministers of Christ are under special direction, and must not dare to prevaricate in their sacred employment. They must never presume to betray the truth of the Gospel with any view to prevent offence: for such offence is taken, not given, and is therefore of no moment. They only are to bear the blame, who are causelessly offended at what they ought to receive with the profoundest respect and veneration.

I may here also take notice that when some persons of more warmth than wisdom have gone upon what they call healing measures, in order to reconcile many (as they supposed) to Christianity shortened and curtailed in its prime articles, they have been for the most part miserably disappointed. Their unwarrantable concessions, instead of making more Christians (half Christians I should say), have only made more infidels. And it was natural to think that such would the result be. For when once the advocates for religion begin to recede beyond what they have warrant for, they give very great advantage to the enemy, who may then modestly expect to draw them on farther, upon the same motive, or principle, which had before carried them too far. For if they yield to importunity, rather than to reason, in one case, why not in another? Or if the first step taken out of the way could appear rational, why not a second, and a third, and so on, till there be no end of wandering? It is frequently the fate of those over-complying gentlemen, that while they stoop too low in hopes to fetch others up, they are themselves dragged down, and can never recover it. They are insensibly carried over to the party towards which they lean; and instead of preserving a balance (which they lost in the first decline), they are at length found to run in with the other extreme. The Episcopian neutrality seldom stays long, before it passes over into Arianism or Socinianism; and these again easily degenerate into Deism and Atheism. It is much to be questioned, whether mysteries, after all, are really the things which are most apt to offend the fashionable world: the purity of the Gospel precepts is the hardest of digestion; and one Commandment, very probably, may make greater difficulty than many Creeds. But the principal reason for striking at mysteries first is, because it is

more decent to begin there; and after a breach once made in the main fabric, it is easy to go on to a total subversion. The Deists, in their turn, take up the same topics of moderation and lenity: "Let not the men of faith despise the men of reason; and again, let not the men of reason despise the men of faith, so long as both agree in the substantial duties:" this is the cant. And truly, if moderation is to stand for yielding and complying, be it right or wrong, and if that be all the rule we have to go by, I do not see that the men argue amiss. But surely we must stop somewhere and where can we better stop, than at necessities, at truths, and important truths? For things of that value ought never to be sacrificed to any temporal considerations, or to any views of a false and short-lived peace.

From hence it may be inferred, that it is not owing to any immoderate rigours of the more cautious Divines, if infidelity happens to gain ground, but to the immoderate and extravagant concessions of those who are not so careful as they should be, to keep up the ancient faith in its first purity and perfection. Accordingly it may be observed, how the unbelievers caress and compliment those complying gentlemen who meet them half way, while they are perpetually inveighing against the stiff Divines, as they call them, whom they can make no advantage of. They know their friends from their foes: and it may be learned from them how the case stands: *Fas est et ab haste doceri.*

To illustrate and confirm the general observations, let the reader reflect a little upon the unhappy conduct of Socinus, and the upshot of it. He had contrived a system for his friends to abide by, and he hoped they would rest there: but many of them, upon the same principles, whereby he had led them so far, resolved to go farther, throwing off the worship of Christ, in consequence of their mean opinion they had entertained of him. Socinus reclaimed, remonstrated, cried out aloud, hoping to stop their progress by his earnestness (for he had yielded too much before to talk of reason now), and to fetch them back; but all to no purpose. He represented to them the dreadful consequences of discarding the divine worship of Christ: "That it was rendering the whole Christian religion weak and precarious, was sapping the main foundation of their faith and hope, and grievously offending God the Father, and Christ Jesus [Socin. ad Radece. Epist. iii. p. 387.]: that he had never yet met with any man of true piety and godliness who durst venture upon it, but that he knew several of them who had thereupon turned Epicureans, or downright Atheists." [Socinus. Disput. inter F. S. et Christian. Franken. p. 772, 773.] All which was true: but why could not he have seen that Atheism hung at the end of the chain, till he came to the last link? Never did man more expose himself than Socinus did in that instance. For indeed the throwing off the divine worship of Christ was but the natural and inevitable consequence of his scheme, if one would act consistently: and the next

consequence to that was Deism or Atheism, by his own account. So it was plainly telling the world, that he had drawn his disciples into a labyrinth, and knew not how to extricate them. To go back was a mortifying thought to vain men; to go forwards was to plunge into downright Atheism. Such generally is the fate of the self-opinionated, who will not listen to sober counsels in time, but precipitately strike off from the right way to follow they know not what, or to fix they know not where. I might mention those amongst us who began with Christianity not Mysterious, [A book published with that title, A.D. 1696.] and in a few years after settled in Pantheism, [The Pantheisticon, published A.D. 1720.] little short of the broadest Atheism: and others might be named, who from finding fault with the Council of Nice, for corrupting Christianity [Rights of the Christian Church, p. 196, etc. published 1706.] (as they fondly supposed), have gradually, and in a course of years, come to reject Christianity itself, as needless and useless, and all revealed religion as mere rubbish. [Christianity as old as the Creation, p. 421, published 1730.] When once men break off from the reverence due to sacred Writ, and to the eminent lights of the best and purest ages, they roll downwards apace, and very rarely recover it. For if they were not strong enough to stand at first upon plain and firm ground, how shall they keep steady afterwards upon declivity? I say then, that the blame lies not upon those who abide unmovable in the old and well-tried doctrine of the Trinity, but upon those that are soon shaken in mind, and depart from it. To adhere firmly to it is not rigour, but constancy: and to forsake it, or to grow indifferent towards it, is not prudence or moderation, but unmanly levity and wantonness, or something worse.

II. It is sometimes pleaded, that a wicked life is the worst heresy, intimating as if breaches made in our most holy faith were of slight consideration, so long as a man lives a good moral life in other respects. I readily allow that a wicked life is the worst thing imaginable: but I conceive further, that the spreading and propagating of corrupt doctrines is leading a wicked life, in the strictest sense. I speak not of mere mistakes in judgment, but of espousing and propagating them; corrupting the faith in important articles, and diffusing such corruptions. A life so spent is a wicked life, if opposing divine truths, undermining the Gospel, and subverting souls be wicked attempts, as they undoubtedly are. It must be owned, that a good life is everything to a Christian but what does a good life consist of? Universal righteousness in faith and manners. Therefore to talk of a man's leading a good life while he is corrupting the faith and disseminating pernicious doctrines, is talking contradictions. As to the sincerity or good meaning of the men who do it, that shall be considered under another article: I speak now of the nature and quality of the thing, abstracted from the circumstances of the person: and I say, it is wickedness and a

perfect contradiction to a good life. It is evil in itself, and the iniquity of it is fixed in the nature and reason of things.

Some have seemed to wonder* why commonly a warmer zeal should be shown against heresies, than against ordinary immoralities: the wonder will presently cease, if the case be but rightly stated. Ask, whether one that commits fornication, or one that teaches and inculcates it as lawful practice, is the wickeder man? Here the case is plain, that the heretic who takes pains to spread such dissolute doctrine, and to debauch the principles of the age, is incomparably a viler man than he that barely perpetrates the sin. So then it must be allowed that an heretic in morality is infinitely a greater sinner than one who through his lusts and passions merely leads an immoral life.

*[The author of the Defence of Scripture as the only Standard of Faith is one of those wonderers, (p. 40). But he entirely mistakes the case, opposing imperfection in knowledge, which is his soft name for heresy, to imperfection in practice: whereas heresy is not barely imperfection in knowledge, but it is evil practice; for spreading pernicious doctrines is a fault in the conduct of life. Therefore the opposition lies between one evil practice and another, and the question is, which is worst.]

So as to faith, ask, whether a man that perverts any material article, either carelessly or through some prejudice, but lets it go no farther, or one that does the same thing, and then takes upon him to teach and inculcate the erroneous doctrine to others; I say, ask which of the two is the wickeder man? The latter, undoubtedly. He is the heretic in teaching and patronizing a corruption of faith, while the other who, corrupts it only for himself is no formal heretic, as I conceive, in strict propriety of speech, [Augustin. Epist. xliii. p. 88. ed. Benedict.] though not a good man. Thus, while we compare an heretic in morality with a man merely immoral; or an heretic in faith with a man that is merely a misbeliever; it is obvious to perceive, that there is much greater malignity in those that teach or espouse what they ought not, than in those that merely believe wrong, or do wrong: because the leaders and abettors of any ill thing diffuse the mischief all around; the other let it die with them. Thus far, I presume, is plain and clear.

After thus comparing kind with kind, let us next take them, as it were, across, and compare the heretic in faith with an immoral man, in the common sense of the word. We will allow that an heretic in matters of mere revelation is not so bad a man, generally speaking, as an heretic in morality; but still he may be a much worse man, or, to speak plainer, may do a great deal more mischief by his doctrine, than the immoral man may do by his example. For besides his propagating dangerous errors, subverting souls, it is farther to be considered that he sets himself up as a rival teacher, in opposition to the faithful ministers of Christ: he weakens their hands, frustrates their pious labours, perverts their flocks, lessens their esteem in the eyes of their people, gives the common enemy

a handle to insult and blaspheme, raises a kind of flame and war in the Church, and remotely administers to all immorality and dissoluteness of manners, by taking off the influence of the best instructions of their more knowing and more edifying guides. These are no slight mischiefs, but great, and wide, and often of long continuance, and in several respects irreparable.* Therefore let it not be thought strange, if the most holy and excellent men have ever expressed the greatest detestation of all attempts of that kind. Scarcely is a man excusable for advancing even a truth, to the detriment of public peace, if it be of a slight nature, not worth the contending for, or such as might innocently be dropped: but to advance falsehoods (and in points very material), tending to create infinite disturbances here, as well as to betray many to perdition hereafter; these are crimes unpardonable, if the authors see what they do; and if they do not, yet their guilt remains, if they might see, and will not. However, the nature and quality of the thing is not altered by their seeing or not seeing: for heresy is still heresy, though a man intends well, as much as persecution is still persecution, though a person thinks and believes that he does God service in it. Let it not therefore be imagined, that false teachers are to be numbered among the smaller offenders, or that they are not, generally speaking, the greatest of sinners. Accordingly, we find our blessed Lord never showed a keener resentment against any men whatever, than against false prophets, [Matt.. 8:15, 24:24. Mark 8:22. Compare Acts 20:29–30. See Grotius and Hammond on Matt. 7:15.] or those who taught false doctrines [Matt. 15:4–9.] in opposition to divine truths. I interpret false prophets so as to include false teachers, such at least as corrupt sound doctrine in any fundamental article: and so Grotius and Hammond interpret, like judicious and knowing men. But Dr. Whitby, disliking that construction, advances some odd speculations of his own to pervert the true meaning of the texts. He pleads that all false teachers, [Whitby on Matt. 7:15.] all that assert anything wrong, are not included. Perhaps not: but yet all that manifestly pervert the faith in any great degree may be included notwithstanding; yea, and must be, by parity of reason. He pretends it to be ridiculous, to judge of false teachers by false doctrines. But how can we judge better of a false teacher, than by the falsehood of what he teaches? It is the very rule which St. John lays down, [1 John 4:2–3. 2 John 9–11.] and so does St. Paul [1 Cor. 12:3.]; which might have deterred any considering man from calling it ridiculous. Besides, in the very reason of the thing, what rule could be pitched upon either surer or wiser? False teachers would pretend extraordinary endowments of learning perhaps, or sanctity, or piety, and an affectionate concern for the happiness of those whom they should address themselves to: but they might be detected by their fruits. [Theodorit. Haeret. Fab. lib. iii. p. 226. Vincent. Lirinens. Commonit. cap. 36.] For if their doctrine should be found contrary to the

doctrine of Christ, that is conviction at once, and all their glozing pretenses are worth nothing. They are false prophets, because their doctrines are false: what can be a plainer proof of it? Neither is it any objection to this, that our Lord afterwards speaks of doing, the will of his Father, and of working iniquity: for maintaining the truth is doing God's will; and corrupting or resisting it, is working iniquity. Therefore let this be included at least among other bad fruits, other works of iniquity; for it is properly such. Dr. Whitby pretends further, that false prophets is not a name for false teachers at large, or for heretics: that appears to be his meaning. But yet certain it is from the New Testament, and from some of the texts which he himself produces, that it is. St. Peter makes the name of false prophets equivalent to that of false teachers, who should bring in damnable heresies. [2 Peter 2:1.] And St. John gives the name of false prophets [1 John 4:1.] to the heretics of his time; namely, to the Docetae, and Cerinthians, and others of like stamp, as I have partly observed already, and shall more fully show in a succeeding chapter. Therefore it is right to interpret the false prophets which our Lord speaks of, in such a sense as to include all heretics, all false teachers, who in any grievous manner, or degree, should pervert the Gospel of Christ. And so the primitive Fathers interpret our Lord's words.**

*[Mr. Bayle describes it thus: "I do not know where we can find out crimes which are not of a less heinous nature than that of rending the mystical body of Jesus Christ, that spouse which he has redeemed with his blood, that mother which begets us to God, which nourishes us with the milk of that wisdom which is without guile, which leads us to everlasting bliss. What fouler crime can we think of, than rebelling against such a mother, than defaming her all the world over, endeavouring to stir up her children against her, tearing them from her bosom by millions, to drag them, as much as in us lies, into everlasting flames, them and their posterity from generation to generation? Where can we find the first-rate high treason against the divine Majesty, unless in instances of this kind?" Supplem. to Philosoph. Commentary, pref. p. 517.]

**[Justin Martyr. Dialog. p. 100, 101, 249. edit. Jebb. alias 208, 316. Thiriby. Tertullian. Praescript. c. iv. xliv. Cyrill. Hierosol. Catecb. iv. 1. Hieronym. In Matt. 7:15, 24:24. Athanas. ad Episc. AEgypti et Lib. p. 270, 272. Theodorit. Haeret. Fab. 1. iii. pref. p. 225.]

As our Lord himself made use of a particular sharpness of expression against false teachers, or heretics, so also did his Apostles after him. St. Paul has done it very often against those grievous wolves (as he calls them), which may appear in some measure from what has been cited above: I shall only refer to some noted texts [Acts 20:29–30. Rom. 16:17–18. Gal. 1:8–9, 5:10, 12. 1 Tim, 1:19–20, 4:1–3, 6:3–5. 2 Tim. 2:16–18. 2 Tim. 3:1–9. Titus 1:10–16, 3:10–11.] to avoid prolixity; but observing also in passing, that though St. Paul delivered an immoral man over to Satan [1 Cor. 5:5.] for his incontinence, yet he did not use so strong an

expression as anathema, or accursed, which he pronounced upon heretics. [Gal. 1:8–9.] St. Peter is exceeding tart against some false teachers of his days, [2 Peter 2:1–3.] who “privily brought in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them.” They also taught men to sit loose from all decent rule and order, and, under pretense of Christian liberty, to run riot in luxury and dissolute behaviour. They were heretics in morality as well as in faith, and of the worst kind and therefore what is said of them is not applicable to other false teachers in the same degree, but in proportion to the malignity of their respective heresy. The Nicolaitans, I suppose, were the men whom St. Peter pointed to. [Vid. Buddaeus Eccles. Apostol. p. 600.] I hinted that they were heretics in faith, because their doctrine, relating to God and Christ, was much the same with that of Cerinthus, as Irenaeus testifies of them [Iren. lib. iii. cap. 11. Conf. Buddaeus Eccles. Apostol. p. 367, 383, 406.]: and thus we may easily understand why St. Peter says of them, that they “denied the Lord that bought them.” St. Jude expresses himself with uncommon warmth against the same false teachers, whom St. Peter had before censured. [Vid. Buddaeus Eccles. Apostol. p. 594.] St. John, who was all love, and meekness, and charity, yet severely lashes the heretics of his times, either such as denied Christ’s humanity, or such as impugned his divinity; which I shall show in due time and place. The names which he bestows upon them are as follows; antichrists, [1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3. 2 John 7.] liars, [1 John 2:22.] seducers, [1 John 2:26.] false prophets, [1 John 4:1] deceivers. [2 John 7.] He scrupled not to go wandering upon the mountains in quest of a wicked robber, a captain of a gang, in order to recover him to Christ; and he did recover him [Euseb. E. H. lib. iii. c. 23. Clem. Alex. p. 959. ed. Ox.]: but with the heretic Cerinthus, a corrupter of the truth, he would not stay under the same roof [See above.]: by which it may appear, how much he detested heresies above common immoralities. His disciple Ignatius, an apostolical man, was exactly of the same sentiments. “For,” says he (speaking of them that commit adultery, and the like), “they that corrupt (debauch) families, shall not inherit the kingdom of God: therefore, if they who do such things according to the flesh, perish; how much more he, who by his pernicious doctrine corrupts that divine faith, for the which Jesus Christ was crucified! Such a man so defiled shall go into fire unquenchable; and so also shall he that hearkens unto him.” [Ignat. ad Ephes. c. 16.] See from hence how this holy Bishop, soon after a martyr, abominated heresies beyond even great immoralities, as being of more diffusive and more lasting malignity, and not destroying men’s bodies, but subverting their souls. His scholar Polycarp, another eminent Bishop of those times, was a man of exemplary severity against all kinds of sinners, but against none so much as against Marcion, a noted heretic, whom he calls the first born of Satan. [Iren. lib. iii. c. 3. Conf. Euseb. E. H. lib. iv. c. 14. The like is observed of

Justin and Irenaeus, by Ittigius Histor. Eccles. Saec. ii. p. 91.] I shall mention but one authority more, the very pious and holy St. Cyprian, of the third century. He argues the point at length, that a heretic is a much wickeder man than one that lapsed into idolatry under persecution. He states the comparison to this effect: “This is a worse crime than that which the lapsers may seem to have committed, who yet do a severe penance for their crime, and implore the mercy of God by a long and plenary satisfaction. The one seeks to the Church, and humbly entreats her favour, the other resists the Church, and proclaims open war against her. The one has the excuse of necessity, the other is retained by his own willfulness only. He that lapses only hurts himself; but he that endeavours to make a heresy or schism, draws many after him. Here is only the loss of one soul; but there a multitude are endangered. The lapses is sensible that he has done amiss, and therefore mourns and laments for it: but the other proudly swells in his crime, pleases himself in his misconduct, divides the children from their mother, draws away the sheep from the pastor, and disturbs the sacraments of God: and whereas a lapses sins but once, the other sins daily”. [Cyprian. de Unitat. Eccl. p. 117.]

From the authorities I have given, it may abundantly appear that Christ and his Apostles, and their followers, have, in a very distinguishing manner, expressed their abhorrence of false prophets, false apostles, false teachers; that is to say, of heretics, and their open favourers or abettors. It is true, there may be great difference between heresy and heresy; and what is said of heresies in general is not applicable in the same measure or degree to every heresy in particular, but in proportion only: in the mean while however it is evident, that heresy is not a thing of slight moment, but a crime of the first magnitude, if understood to mean the espousing of false doctrines, tending to corrupt either faith or morals in any considerable instances. But I suppose, they who think lightly of it, mean only some ignorant or careless mistake in judgment, which a man keeps to himself, and disturbs not the world with: which indeed does not amount to heresy (as I have more than once said), does not make a heretic. Heresy lies not merely in the inward thought, but in the overt acts, either teaching pernicious doctrines, or supporting and encouraging them that do. Heresy so considered is evil doing, [2 John 11.] and is condemned among the works of the flesh”. [Gal. 5:20.] So then, instead of saying that wicked life is the worst heresy, which is scarce sense, I should choose rather to say, what is both sense and truth (generally speaking) that a life of heresy is a most wicked life: it is joining with Satan and his emissaries, in a formed opposition to God and his Church, is complicated impiety and immorality.

III. But it will be pleaded further, that such as teach false doctrines may be

very sincere; and their sincerity will be their protection before the awful tribunal, or however ought to screen them from censure here. But it behooves us to consider well of this, so sovereign a preservative, that we may not trust too far to it; because if it should fail at last, there is nothing then left to depend on. Sincerity, I observe, is a very equivocal ambiguous term, used in more senses than one: and therefore, before I enter deeper into the subject, I would distinguish it into two kinds. 1. Sincerity, as opposed to hypocrisy and pretense. 2. Sincerity, as opposed to prejudice and partiality. There is no discoursing clearly upon the points without attending carefully to this distinction. Next then let us examine how the present question about the iniquity of teaching false doctrines, or the justice of censuring them, is at all affected by what is pleaded of the sincerity of the teachers, taking sincerity either in this or in that sense.

1. Consider we, first, sincerity, as opposed to hypocrisy and pretense. Suppose the teachers of false doctrine to be verily persuaded in their minds and consciences, that such their doctrine is true, and their conduct right, and that they ought to teach it: this is bringing the matter to the case of an erroneous conscience, upon our present supposition, that their doctrine is false, and ours true. Well then, what does an erroneous conscience amount to? Will it justify men in evil practices? or is it sufficient to bear them out against censure from others? No, by no means. Time was, when many thought it their duty to kill Christ's disciples; they believed it to be doing God service [John 16:2.]: and yet nobody can doubt but those sincere men so far were guilty of murder, and no one can think it an hard censure upon them to declare so. St. Paul in particular, before his conversion, "verily thought with himself, that he ought to do many things contrary to "the name of Jesus" [Acts 26:9.]: and yet how often did he afterwards condemn himself as a sinner, for doing those very things; because indeed he had done wickedly, in persecuting the truth, in persecuting the Church of God, when he might have been better informed. The like may be said, when men sincerely deny and oppose the important truths of the Gospel, and by their heresies give great disturbance, and do infinite mischief to God's Church. Their being verily persuaded that truth is on their side, or that they are doing right, if it may be somewhat of excuse as a mitigating circumstance, yet is no justification of their conduct, before God or man. They are impugnors of divine truths notwithstanding, and subverters of souls; and therefore condemned by God, and liable to all such censures from man, as Scripture ordains in case of heresy. So then, sincerity, in the first sense of the word, as opposed to guile, or hypocrisy, is of no avail in this matter. It changes not the nature of things, nor the rules of conduct: we are as much obliged to admonish, to avoid, to reject a man that thus sincerely corrupts the faith, and seduces common Christians, as the man that

does it in guile, and against his own conscience because indeed, though the iniquity may not be altogether so great, yet iniquity it is; and because the mischief, either way, is the same, and it is our bounden duty to guard against it. I must further add, that Scripture mentions it case of God's sending upon men "strong delusion," in the way of judicial infatuation, "that they should believe a "lie," [2 Thess. 2:11–12.] and "that they all might be damned who believe not the truth, but have pleasure in unrighteousness." Now, by the rule of sincerity (in this first sense), even such abandoned creatures as the Apostle there speaks of might plead not guilty, as teaching nothing but what they really believe, nothing which they condemn themselves for, or conceive to be false. They teach and propagate lies, but they believe them to be true all the while. There is no lack of charity in judging, [John 3:19. 2 Cor. 4:3–4. Heb. 10:26–31. 2 Peter 2:20–22.] that all who propagate Deism and infidelity in a Christian country (renouncing their baptism) are under such judicial blindness, if they really believe the lies which they are so industrious to spread: and their pretended sincerity, in that case, is no alleviation of their crime, but the worst symptom of it. Therefore sincerity in this sense, as signifying only believing what one teaches, can scarce amount to a tolerable plea by itself, since it is what may be found in men of a seared conscience and a reprobate mind.

2. Let us next consider the second sense of sincerity, as opposed to prejudice and partiality, and see whether, or how far, that alters the case, more than the other. But here a difficulty occurs at the first mention of it; how will it be proved? I do not say merely to other men, but how will it be proved to a man's self? If a man pleads his sincerity in this case, he ought to know that he has it, or he does but trifle with himself and others. He is to prove that he has no prepossession, no bias, no leaning to a side: he is to prove that he has used all due diligence in looking out for evidence; that neither haste, nor sloth, nor impatience has hindered: he is to prove that he has used all proper care and exactness in comparing and balancing the reasons and arguments on both sides: in short, he is to prove, that he has neither designedly nor carelessly left out anything in the account, nor at length made a conclusion upon any other view, or motive, but that reason and truth so required: for submitting to reason, without any bias, that is sincerity. When he has proved this, he has proved himself sincere, and then he is justified. But I humbly conceive, that the shorter and plainer way would be to say, that he has examined the question, weighed the reasons, and thereupon finds, that his judgment is right and well-grounded, and therefore he abides by it: for that is what the whole comes to; and so the proof of our sincerity, in this second sense of the word, resolves at length into the merits of the main cause. He that has reason on his side (I except the case of

unavoidable incapacity), he is the sincere man: for if any person jumps to a conclusion without premises, or lays more weight upon it than his reasons will support; it is plain that there is something besides reason, which sways him, and which determines him. Be it warmth of temper, be it weariness and impatience, be it partial fondness for novelty, be it what it will; if it is not reason, it is prejudice and partiality (I except against unavoidable incapacity), and the man is not sincere in the strict sense; which yet is the only sense that can be at all to the purpose. One might say then to such a person who pleads his sincerity, prove it, and we admit of it: sincerity without reasons to prove it is a dead sincerity. And we may here apply what St. James says in another case, with a very little change: "Show me thy sincerity without thy reasons, and I will show thee my sincerity by my reasons." He that proves his point best proves his sincerity. There is no other way for it, unless a man will plead ignorance or incapacity; and then why is he confident. The sum therefore of all is that the question about sincerity resolves at length into the main question in debate, and is to be decided by it.

There might seem at first hearing to be something in the plea of sincerity; and indeed, taking it in the first sense, it might be certainly known to a man's self, if it could be of any service to him in the cause: but it is a point acknowledged on all hands, that a man's being thus sincerely a sinner does not make him a saint. As to sincerity in the latter sense, that would be of service to us, if it could be proved [See Rogers's Discourse of the Invisible Church, p. 22, 23. edit 3d. Rogers's Review, p.109.]; but to prove it, is the same as to prove that truth and reason are on our side; that we are clear in the matter, and go upon sure grounds. So then, the pleading sincerity, in the present case, is only fetching a compass, to come round about again to the place where we set out. For all turns at last upon this; who has the best reasons to support his persuasion? If they who oppose the doctrine of the Trinity teach false and pernicious doctrine, and it can be proved upon them, we are right in condemning them, and in refusing communion with them. We have no occasion to inquire into their sincerity; which, in whatever sense we take it, is an insignificant plea, and such as, ought to be thrown out on both sides, serving only for amusement, diverting them from the business in hand.

It was upon these or the like considerations that I took occasion to say formerly: "We have nothing to do to inquire after your sincerity, of which God is Judge. Neither civil judicatures, nor ecclesiastical courts, ever proceed upon that bottom. Our business is, not to consider the sincerity of the men, but the nature, quality, and tendency of the doctrine. There have been sincere Photinians, sincere Samosatensians, sincere Sabellians, sincere Papists, sincere Jews and Mahometans. And indeed, what sects are there that have not sincere men amongst them?" [Second Defence, vol. iii. p. 8.] To which I may now briefly add,

that all sects have many who are sincere in the first sense of the word, and have some, probably, in the second sense also, but known to God only, who alone can judge how far their prejudices are insuperable, or their ignorance unavoidable. I was willing to repeat here what I had asserted in another place, because there is a gentleman to whom this plaid doctrine has appeared not a little surprising. [Reply to Mr. P. C's Letter, p. 52.] And thereupon he has been pleased to ask, "Is the Doctor willing to be responsible, at last, for the nature, quality, and tendency of all his notions?" To which I answer, willing or not willing, every man is responsible, at last, for the doctrines he teaches. And if they are false and pernicious (unless the error were unavoidable), they fall under the same condemnation with those idle words, of which account must be given at the day of judgment. [Matt. 7:36.] But, that I also may ask a question in my turn, is that gentleman willing to be responsible for his sincerity, that is to say, for his impartiality in every view, free from all biases or prejudices? Or is he sure that he has no culpable neglects, no precipitation of judgment to charge himself with? When he can be able to say, he knows he has not, I presume I may as reasonably say, I know what the nature, quality, and tendency of a doctrine is: and I conceive, this is a much surer and safer rule to judge by, than what he proposes. A well-grounded assurance must be had, either of our own strict sincerity and unprejudiced reason, or else of the truth and justice of what we espouse. Now, I conceive, in the general, it is much easier to come at the latter, than at the former, nay, and that the natural and regular process is to prove the former by the latter. The gentleman asks farther, "Is it impossible for him to be mistaken in any of his inquiries into truth?" I know, it is very possible for frail and fallible men to be mistaken in what they say, though not in what they prove: and therefore one would take care to advance nothing as of moment to be believed, but upon clear and sure grounds, such as the reason of mankind ought to submit to. But this I shall say more to under another head. However, to return him a question, as before: Is it impossible for him to be mistaken (or rather, is it not very natural and easy for him to mistake) in judging of his sincerity? I understand it in the sense of impartiality, the only sense pertinent to the cause in hand. It is further asked; "May not some things which he has, or however shall hereafter advance, differ, in some sort, from the ideas in the divine Mind?" Here the terms, some things, shall hereafter, and in some sort, are so obscure and indefinite, that there is no returning a definitive answer, more than this; that what God has revealed concerning the Trinity is, no doubt, agreeable to the divine Mind: and that is all that we contend for, appealing to Scripture for it. However, here again, I presume, we can be at least as sure that our doctrine answers the ideas of the divine Mind, as we can be that our sincerity is such as God sees no flaws in. So

the question returns; which method may we best trust to? which is the surest and safest rule to judge by? By a man's knowing himself perfectly, or by his knowing the truth of things?

The author proceeds to tell us, that sincerity is a proper thing to be inquired after in such cases, and that civil judicatures at least do it, when any person is arraigned. But do they ever inquire whether the person arraigned might believe it lawful to steal in case of necessity, or might judge it his duty to affront the government, or to talk treason against the crown? If the plea of sincerity were to be admitted in such cases, it would never fail to be pleaded: we should then have new employment for juries, to sit upon men's hearts; and the verdict, of course, would be brought in for the criminal, unless he were weak enough to confess malice prepense, and that he acted against conscience. The law of the land, and the law of common sense too, has taken a shorter, wiser way, which is to presume that when a man has done an ill thing, he either knew that it was evil, or else ought to have known it. *Ignorantia juris non excusat delictum*, is, I think, the fundamental maxim they go upon. Every man is obliged to know his duty; and it is at his own peril, if he mistakes the law he is to be judged by.* What room then is there for the plea of sincerity? But the gentleman observes, that the "characters of such as are impeached are often inquired into, and have great weight." Yes, in order to judge whether they are guilty of the fact, and how far it was designed and willful. But, I believe, if it should appear that the offender transgressed upon principle, and persisted in it, not sensible of any fault, but taking upon him to be wiser than the laws or the court, and to correct his judges, such sincerity so pleaded would be so far from alleviating the crime, or mitigating the sentence, that it would do just the reverse: and the court would be obliged to judge according to the nature, and quality, and tendency of the fact committed, and not by the mistaken sentiments of the person arraigned. I return therefore to what I before said, that in the question which concerns our behaviour towards the impugnors of the Christian faith, we have nothing to do to consider the sincerity of the men, but the quality of their doctrine. As to the rest, God is Judge: and he will make all reasonable and merciful allowances for unavoidable failings.

*[Mr. Gayle, in few words, well illustrates this article. "There is good reason for not excusing an ignorance of right at human tribunals: for though it may possibly happen that a man is honestly and innocently ignorant of what the laws of the land ordain; yet as the judges cannot discern whether he speaks sincerely or no, they cannot take up with his excuse, for fear of the disorders which might happen upon it; since a world of malefactors and disturbers of the public peace might make use of the same justification. Therefore, to prevent a general evil, they will make no exception to this general rule, *Ignorantia juris non excusat*. This may possibly be unjust and very hard upon particular persons; but it is

necessary to sacrifice something to the good of society.

“This is undoubtedly the reason why human tribunals admit no excuse upon an ignorance of right: but let us beware imagining that God proceeds by the same reason: as he is the Searcher of hearts, he knows most assuredly, whether such or such a person be under an invincible ignorance of right; and if he be, absolves him as freely as if the ignorance were only of fact.” Bayle, *Supplem. to Philosoph. Continent.* p. 589, 590. Compare Rogers’s *Review etc.* p. 104.]

But is it not hard and severe censure (may some say) to condemn those sincere men who mean as honestly as we can do, and to make their guilt the ground of renouncing communion with them? [See *Sober and Charitable Disquisition*, p. 14, 23, 39, 40, 42, 44, 47.] I answer: this is not a fair representation. That they are as sincere as we are in one sense, as believing what they teach, we admit; and it is nothing to the purpose: that they are sincere, as it signifies impartial, is the point to be tried; and it depends upon the issue of the main cause. In the meanwhile, we make not their guilt the formal cause of condemning them, but their corrupt doctrine, which indeed generally carries guilt with it, but more or less according to the circumstances and capacities of the persons. Therefore we say not how deep their guilt is; of that God is judge: but this we say, that we should ourselves be guilty in a very high degree, if we either taught such doctrines, or did not fully and plainly condemn them, refusing communion with such as openly and resolutely espouse them. What we do in this case is not so properly damning others, not passing any peremptory judgment of their final estate (to their own Master they stand or fall), but it is conscientiously discharging a weighty trust, cautiously providing, first, for our own salvation, and next for the salvation also of as many as we have any concern with. If our adversaries be honest and conscientious, so much the better for them, and we heartily wish they may be found such before the high tribunal. We approve of what Salvian very mildly and tenderly says, in respect to this very case, so far as concerns all that conscientiously, and in the integrity of their hearts, differ from us: “They are heretics, but do not know that they are so. In short, they are heretics in our judgment, not so in their own: for they esteem themselves such good Catholics, that they even throw upon us the infamous charge of heresy. Such therefore as they are to us, we are to them. We know assuredly that they are injurious to the divine generation of the Son of God, in making him inferior to the Father: they, on the other hand, think us injurious to the Father in believing them both equal. Truth is on our side; but they presume it is on theirs. We in reality honour God; but they think their opinion does him most honour. They are indeed undutiful to God, but this they esteem a great duty of religion. They are impious, but they believe it true piety. They err therefore, but they err

with an honest mind: not out of any hatred to God, but with affection to him, designing thereby to honour and show their love to the Lord. Though they have not the right faith, yet they think they have a perfect love of God. How they shall be punished, at the day of judgment, for this their error of a false persuasion, no one can know, except the Judge.” [Salvian. de Gubernat. Dei, p. 100.] Thus far we can go in our charity towards them: but our charitable dispositions towards their persons ought never to bribe us to think favourably of their principles, or move us to desert the proper defense of Gospel truths, or hinder us from declaring that the corrupting the faith of Christ is in its own nature a wicked thing, is detestable practice.

It will not be improper here to make mention of a noted and useful distinction of sin or wickedness, into material and formal; one conceived to go along with the matter of the transgression considered in the abstract, the other conceived to make the person formally a transgressor and a wicked man. I dare not say, that everyone who openly maintains the worst part of Popery, or Judaism, or Mohometism, is formally a wicked man: I know not how far invincible ignorance, or unavoidable incapacity, or unconquerable prejudices (owing, suppose, to education, or to a degree of enthusiasm, or other particular circumstances), may be pleadable in his favour: but still, after all the most candid allowances that can be made, I should not scruple to censure his opinions as wicked (materially considered), his doctrines impious, and his attempts to propagate them vile and execrable. They are truly so in the nature of the thing, abstracted from the circumstances of the person: and to a man that has the full and free use of his faculties, and opportunities suitable, they are crimes of the first magnitude, and ought to be censured as such. The gentlemen with whom I am now debating this point will not scruple to declare as much, with respect to the doctrine of persecution, and they are very severe against St. Paul [Vindication of Mr. Nation’s Sermon, p. 35. etc. Reply to P. C.’s Letter, p. 40. etc.] for practicing upon it, though he was, in one sense, perfectly sincere, honest, and pious [P. C.’s Letter to the Author of the Vindication, p. 38. etc. Rogers’s Visible and Invisible Church, p. 24, 25.] (so far as concerned his then present sentiments) in what he did. He went upon the doctrine of the Old Testament, in relation to false prophets and blasphemers, was right in his general principle, but wrong in the application. He acted not out of envy, malice, or other secular motives, like the Jews who crucified Christ: a new case happened which he had not considered so well as he might: he was so over-officious to do his presumed duty, that he stayed not to examine strictly whether it was duty or no; so eager and impatient to serve God, in his way, that he considered not whether it was really serving him, or the contrary. This appears to have been his case; and a pitiable case it was. I question whether the

corrupters of the Christian faith, many of them, could claim for themselves so fair an apology. Yet St. Paul was to blame, because the thing was evil in itself, and by the use of due care he might have known it. The same I say of sincere teachers of bad doctrines: the thing is evil in itself, and, generally speaking, they may, by a right use of their faculties, know that it is so. But whether they may or may not, it concerns us not to inquire: it is enough for us that their doctrine is false and dangerous, tending to subvert the Gospel of Christ.

IV. But it will be further objected, that we all along take for granted that our doctrines are true, and theirs false: and why are we so confident in this matter, unless we think ourselves infallible? The author of *Sober and Charitable Disquisition* is pleased to intimate, that though we will not own ourselves infallible, yet in fact we avow it. [Sober and Charitable Disquisition, p. 37.] He endeavours to prove the charge thus; “In the point in which you are certain, you are infallible, and wherein you pretend to be certain, you do equally pretend to infallibility: for certainty is, *cui non potest subesse falsum*. You must have evidence for a point in which you pretend to be certain, not only to put the matter out of doubt, but enough to assure you a mistake is impossible. I am infallibly certain two and two are four – it must be, and cannot be otherwise; without such evidence there is no certainty: and where error is impossible, there is infallibility”. [Sober and Charitable Disquisition, p. 37.] Nor can I see that anything short of downright infallibility can justify the behaviour (of the Trinitarians), if that can. But to disclaim infallibility in words, and claim it in fact, is too common a practice, though no very commendable one. [Ibid. p. 39.] It is questionable whether either side have such evidence as will justify them in thinking a mistake impossible without which there is no proper certainty; and if there be not, there is room for mutual charity and forbearance.” [Ibid. p. 38.]

I do not think it kind or fair in this instance, to bring in the word infallibility, where it has plainly nothing to do, only to throw an oblique reflection upon some persons who are far from deserving it: that is not a sober or a charitable method of debate. The sum of his argument, when the colours are taken off, is no more than this; that if we have not demonstration, as clear as in mathematics or metaphysics, on our side of the question, we ought not to insist upon it so far as to make it a term of communion. Now, suppose we should say we have (though we say no such thing), yet would that be what the world has been used to call claiming infallibility, or pretending to be infallible? Would it not be very wrong to say, that a man pretends to be infallible, only because he is very certain that the propositions in Euclid are infallibly true? Such an unmanly playing with words is unbecoming in any cause, much more in this. The infallibility of science, resting upon the nature of things, and the supposed truth

of our rational faculties, is quite another thing from personal infallibility supposed to be an extraordinary gift from heaven, to a pope, or a council, or to a church at large. Things so distinct ought not to have been confounded. Whatever certainty we pretend to, we rest it entirely upon the proofs we produce, for the world to judge of, and not upon any personal endowments. How foreign therefore, and beside the mark, must it appear, to speak of our pretending to be infallible? Indeed, the Papists have a hundred times told us, that we can have no proper certainty without infallibility: and if that were true, there is an end of the Reformation at once. The ground and basis upon which the Protestant name stands, and without which it would sink instantly, is, that there may be a proper certainty in matters of faith, doctrine, and discipline, without infallibility. They that endeavour to sap this true principle, undermine the foundation upon which we rest, and betray the clearest and best cause in the world, to Papists on one hand, and to sceptics on the other. I take this matter to be of exceeding great moment, and therefore shall not scruple the pains of considering it at large. I shall first represent the answers which have been given to the objection (as urged by Papists), in the words of our judicious Chillingworth: and I shall next consider what answer may be proper to give to the same objection, in the main, as dressed up anew by adversaries from another quarter.

1. Mr. Chillingworth writes thus: “Though we pretend not to certain means of not erring in interpreting all Scripture, particularly such places as are obscure and ambiguous, yet this, methinks, should be no impediment, but that we may have certain means of not erring in and about the sense of those places which are so plain and clear that they need no interpreters: and in such we say our faith is contained. If you ask me, how I can be sure that I know the true meaning of these places? I ask you again, can you be sure that you understand what I or any man else says? – God be thanked that we have sufficient means to be certain enough of the truth of our faith: but the privilege of not being in possibility of erring, that we challenge not, because we have as little reason as you to do so, and you have none at all. If you ask, seeing we may possibly err, how can we be assured we do not I ask you again, seeing your eyesight may deceive you, how can you be sure you see the sun when you do see it? [Chillingworth, p. 99, 100.] A pretty sophism! That whosoever possibly may err, cannot be certain that he doth not err. A judge may possibly err in judgment, can he therefore never have assurance that he hath judged right? A traveler may possibly mistake his way, must I therefore be doubtful whether I am in the right way from my hall to my chamber? Or can our London carrier have no certainty, in the middle of the day, when he is sober and in his wits, that he is in the way to London? These, you see, are right worthy consequences, and yet they are as like to your own, as an

egg to an egg, or milk to milk. [Ibid. p.104, 105.]

“Methinks, so subtle a man as you are should easily apprehend a wide difference between authority to do a thing, and infallibility in doing it. The former, the Doctor, together with the Article of the Church of England, attributeth to the Church, nay, to particular churches, and I subscribe to his opinion: that is, an authority of determining controversies of faith, according to plain and evident Scripture and universal tradition and infallibility, while they proceed according to this rule. As if there should arise an heretic that should call in question Christ’s passion and resurrection, the Church had authority to determine this controversy, and infallible direction how to do it, and to excommunicate this man, if he should persist in his error. [Ibid. p. 105.]

“The ground of your error here is your not distinguishing between actual certainty and absolute infallibility. Geometricians are not infallible in their own science; yet they are very certain of what they see demonstrated: and carpenters are not infallible, yet certain of the straightness of those things which agree with their rule and square. So though the Church be not infallibly certain that in all her definitions, whereof some are about disputable and ambiguous matters, she shall proceed according to her rule; yet being certain of the infallibility of her rule, and that in this or that thing she doth manifestly proceed according to it; she may be certain of the truth of some particular decrees, and yet not certain that she shall never decree but what is true. [Chillingworth, p. 125.]

“Though the Church being not infallible, I cannot believe her in everything she says, yet I can and must believe her in everything she proves, either by Scripture, reason, or universal tradition, be it fundamental or not fundamental. – Though she may err in some things, yet she does not err in what she proves, though it be not fundamental. [Ibid. p. 133, 134.] Protestants believing Scripture to be the word of God, may be certain enough of the truth and certainty of it. For what if they say the Catholic Church, much more themselves, may possibly err in some nonfundamental points, is it therefore consequent, they can be certain of none such? What if a wiser man than I may mistake the sense of some obscure place of Aristotle, may I not therefore, without any arrogance or inconsequence, conceive myself certain that I understand him in some plain places which carry their sense before them? – We pretend not at all to any assurance that we cannot err, but only to a sufficient certainty that we do not err, but rightly understand those things that are plain, whether fundamental or not fundamental. That God is, and is a rewarder of them that seek him: that etc. – These we conceive both true, because the Scripture says so, and truths fundamental, because they are necessary parts of the Gospel, whereof our Saviour says, *Qui non crediderit, damnabitur.*

“I do heartily acknowledge and believe the Articles of our faith to be in themselves truths as certain and infallible as the very common principles of geometry or metaphysics: but that there is required of us a knowledge of them and an adherence to them, as certain as that of sense or science; that such a certainty is required of us under pain of damnation, so that no man can hope to be in a state of salvation but he that finds in himself such a degree of faith, such a strength of adherence: this I have already demonstrated to be a great error, and of dangerous and pernicious consequences. [Chillingworth, p. 140, 141–290.]

“Though I deny that it is required of us to be certain in the highest degree, infallibly certain, of the truth of the things which we believe (for this were to know and not believe, neither is it possible unless our evidence of it, be it natural or supernatural, were of the highest degree), yet I deny not but we ought to be and may be infallibly certain that we are to believe the religion of Christ. For, 1. this is most certain, that we are in all things to do according to wisdom and reason, rather than against it. 2. This is as certain, that wisdom and reason require, that we should believe those things which are by many degrees more credible and probable than the contrary. 3. This is as certain, that to every man who considers impartially what great things may be said for the truth of Christianity, and what poor things they are which may be said against it, either for any other religion, or for none at all, it cannot but appear by many degrees more credible, that the Christian religion is true, than the contrary. And from all these premises, this conclusion evidently follows, that it is infallibly certain, that we are firmly to believe the truth of the Christian religion. – There is an abundance of arguments exceedingly credible, inducing men to believe the truth of Christianity: I say, so credible, that though they cannot make us evidently see what we believe, yet they evidently convince, that in true wisdom and prudence, the articles of it deserve credit, and ought to be accepted as things revealed by God.” [Chillingworth, p. 295. alias p. 254. Compare Stillingfleet’s Rational Account, p. i. chap. vi. p. 178, etc. 187, etc. 196. chap. vii. 205, etc. Compare also Mr. Cumming, who has very fully and solidly treated this argument. Dissertat. on Scripture Consequences, p. 61–76. Considerations, etc. p. 315–321.]

I have laid these several passages together, drawn out of this excellent writer: by which it may appear what kind of certainty is professed by Protestants, and how much the Protestant cause depends upon that single article. The sum is, that though we have not strict mathematical demonstration for matters of belief, so as to make faith and science the same thing, yet we have such a certainty as leaves no reasonable room for doubt, such as is sufficient to build saving faith upon, and as much authority also as is necessary to support it. And thus we get clear of Popish subtlety and sophistry, showing that there is a medium, namely,

moral certainty, between skepticism on one hand, and papal infallibility on the other.

2. No sooner are we thus relieved on that hand, but presently we are attacked from another quarter, and with the same artillery as before, only a little differently managed, as it is now to serve different purposes. For here again it is alleged, that without either infallibility or demonstration we can have no proper certainty, nor any just authority to declare matters of faith, or to insist upon them as terms of communion: and the conclusion here aimed at, or what must naturally follow, is, to sit loose to everything, unconcerned for the faith of Christ, cold and indifferent towards the great truths of the Gospel. Deists here and Papists there combine together to oppose the truth, and both extremes meet in one. But let us examine how our new adversaries manage. Their whole strength lies in one single dilemma, thus: "Either you have certainty, or you have not: if you pretend to certainty, that is claiming infallibility; if you renounce certainty, you have no authority to determine faith, or prescribe terms of communion." We answer, by distinguishing the kinds and degrees of certainty, and therefore do say, that though we claim not infallibility, yet we do claim certainty sufficient to guard against skepticism or heresy, and to maintain just authority.

I shall first examine the invidious charge of our claiming infallibility. The author of the *Sober and Charitable Disquisition* intimates, as before said, that we disclaim it in words, but in fact avow it. The same thing has been said by a multitude of other writers: I shall cite one only for a sample, because he has urged it as ingeniously and sarcastically as a man could well do, in a Dedication to the Pope. "Your Holiness is not perhaps aware, how near the churches of us Protestants have at length come to those privileges and perfections which you boast of as peculiar to your own. – You cannot err in anything you determine, and we never do: that is, in other words, you are infallible, and we always in the right." [Steel's Dedication to the Pope, p. 2.] It may hereupon be observed, how this witty gentleman takes upon him to ridicule a very necessary distinction, between an assurance that we cannot err, and a sufficient certainty that we do not err: a distinction, which the judicious Chillingworth laid all imaginable stress upon, perceiving that the whole Protestant cause depended upon it. For if we cannot have sufficient certainty that in several things, relating to faith and worship, we do not err, how do we justify our separation from the Church of Rome? If we are not certain that therein we do not err, then neither are we certain that she has erred, and that there was a just cause for leaving her; but all must resolve into humour, fancy, fickleness, and unsupported persuasion. It was this very principle of a sufficient certainty, that we do not err in what we prove, which rescued us

from the tyranny of those who pretend that they cannot err in whatever they define. The difference between those two is so great, and so palpable, that one would think it must argue either very slow faculties, or a perverse temper of mind, for any person to confound them. However, to give a more distinct idea of the two cases, I shall endeavour to represent the difference to the eye in one view, in two opposite columns, corresponding to each other.

<i>Popish Infallibility.</i>	<i>Protestant Certainty.</i>
1. The Church simply infallible in what she defines.	1. The Church morally certain in what she proves.
2. The Church says so, is the last resort, and decisive.	2. Not because the Church says it, but because Scripture and reason by her mouth declare it.
3. Submit to authority in all instances whatever: for authority here stands for proof.	3. Submit to authority in such instances only, where you see no good reason to the contrary; for then it is reasonable so to do.
4. Absolute implicit faith in man.	4. Absolute implicit faith in God only.
5. Examination superfluous and dangerous: prove nothing, swallow everything.	5. Examination allowed and approved: prove all things, hold fast that which is good.
6. The subject obeys the interpreter at all adventures, and submits as to an infallible verity.	6. The subject obeys his own reason in submitting to what is proved, and what the reason of mankind ought not to reject.
7. Be a thing ever so unreasonable or plainly false (transubstantiation for instance), it must be received as divine, though a human decision.	7. Nothing ordered to be received, but upon the foot of reason and Scripture, with great tenderness to private judgment: only taking for granted that our faculties are true, and may, in things plainly proved, be depended upon.

From this summary view, it may sufficiently appear, that there is a very

wide difference between the pretended papal infallibility, and Protestant certainty: and that as the one is contrived to introduce and perpetuate all imaginable errors, so the other is undoubtedly the surest way to exclude all pernicious errors, at least, and to preserve the most weighty truths.

The ground of what I call Protestant certainty is moral evidence: which, though it comes not up to infallibility, or to the evidence of demonstration, yet is certain enough for all the purposes of faith, or of a competent authority to maintain true doctrine. "Our Church," as a judicious writer says, "nowhere makes infallible certainty of assent a necessary condition of faith, it being sufficient to make faith certain, if our rule be infallible, and that applied with moral evidence." [Puller's Moderation of the Church of England, p. 142.]

Moral evidence, for the most part, governs the great affairs of the world, while rigid demonstration serves rather for the entertainment of contemplative men, than for the uses of common life. And since God has so ordered both our religious and secular affairs, as to lay us under a necessity of submitting, in most cases, to moral evidence, he has thereby bound it upon us as a duty; so that if we have not strict demonstration for what we believe, yet it is demonstration that our evidence is such as must command our assent, under pain of incurring the divine displeasure. As to the nature, and quality, and force of moral evidence, in general, I refer the reader, for satisfaction, to an excellent writer, who has distinctly and fully considered it. [Ditton on the Resurrection of Christ, part ii. p. 93, etc.] I shall content myself with making only a few occasional observations.

It seems to me a prejudice done to religion that the learned and philosophical sense of the words probable and certain (so different from the common vulgar sense of both) has been so often made use of by Divines. When a common Christian hears it said that it is only probable, not absolutely certain, that Christ lived or died; or that the Christian religion is true, or the like; how must it astonish him, or afflict him? In the vulgar use of the words probable and certain, it is a shocking thought; though in the scholastic sense all may be right, as there is no rigid or scientific demonstration of any matter of fact, or of any article of pure faith: and everything short of that the Schools are pleased to call probable only, not certain. If we were to hear any one, in ordinary conversation, say, that it is probable, not certain, that there is such a city as Rome, Paris, or Constantinople, would not the man be thought mad? Or if he were to say further, that it is probable only, not certain, that there was once such a prince as Alexander, or Julius Caesar, or William the Conqueror, or Henry the Eighth, should we take him to be right in his wits? And yet it is in such a sense only that Divines mean it, when they say, that the Christian religion is probably, not certainly true; understanding at the same time that it is as certain as any ancient

fact can be, fully, perfectly, indisputably certain, according to what the world generally means by certain. I should think therefore, it were better to leave off the scholastic way (which must needs give offence, and which few understand), and to adapt our phrases to the common acceptation, as also to Scripture language. Look the Scripture through for the meaning of the word certain and certainty, and you will find that it stands for certainty of facts, which is proper certainty, when properly proved: and it is but sinking the idea, and confounding common hearers or readers, to discredit it with the low names of probable and probability; which, in common speech, scarce rise higher than doubtful. I chose to mention this the rather, because I find that infidels have taken advantage of those expressions, to run down Christianity as not certain, but barely probable [See Christianity as old as the Creation, chap. xii. p. 184.] And how that must sound to a common English reader, let any man judge.

I would observe farther, that the like mischiefs may sometimes follow from an improper use of the word believe. Were any one to say, he believes there is such a country as France, or such a person as a Pope of Rome, he would presently be asked, why? can he doubt of it. That expression of believing commonly carries in it an idea of doubtfulness, and is used to denote a diffident assent. But when we would express any fact of which we have no doubt, we say we know it, or are certain of it. So here again there appears to be a difference between the language of the literati, and common speech, while the same ideas are not affixed to the same words, here and there. However, this latter case will not be apt to breed so much confusion as the former, though it may create some: which might perhaps be prevented by the addition of an adverb, when we are speaking of matters of faith, saying we assuredly believe, or undoubtedly believe thus and thus.

Now to return to the author of *Sober and Charitable Disquisition*. [Sober and Charitable Disquisition, p. 37.] He objects to us, that we have not a proper certainty of what we believe, like as we have of what we know, as that two and two are four. It is granted, we have not. Belief is not strictly science, nor faith vision: what then? In this sense of proper certainty, there is no certainty that the sun shines when we see it, nor that fire warms when we feel it, nor that there is any such thing as the sun in the firmament, nor indeed any material world: for, I apprehend, philosophers are agreed, that there is no strict demonstration of these things. [See Clarke's Notes upon Rohault, part i. c. 2.] Have these things therefore no proper certainty? Yes, they have, and such as ordinarily makes stronger impressions than abstract reasonings, or ideal speculations, and are more out of the reach of all doubt to the bulk of mankind. So say I likewise of matters of faith; they have a proper certainty, such as things of that kind admit of, such as is

fitted to common capacities, such as the world is governed by, such as passes for undoubted certainty in common language and common estimation, such as God has ordained for our use, and has obliged us to follow, and such as both our present interests and our eternal happiness are made to depend upon. So much for the certainty of matters of faith, considered in the general.

As to the particular point now before us, the certainty of it stands thus: we are morally and indubitably certain of the truth of the doctrine of the Trinity. And though we presume not to say, or to think, that we may not or cannot misconstrue Scripture, yet we have many and strong reasons to persuade us that in this instance we do not: and therefore it is infallibly certain (as Mr. Chillingworth well argues with respect to Christianity in general) that we ought firmly to believe it; because wisdom and reason require, that we should believe those things which are by many degrees more credible and probable than the contrary. Thus have we sure and safe grounds to go upon.* And as we are in strict duty bound to receive it as a revealed truth, so because it is a very important one, an article of the foundation, we are as strictly bound to preserve it, and earnestly to contend for it: and because one very proper means of preserving it, as well as of keeping ourselves pure, is to refuse communion (according to the general direction of Scripture in such cases) with those that openly impugn it, therefore a necessity is laid upon us so to act, and woe is unto us, if we act otherwise. But we do not therefore say, as is unkindly insinuated, that there is not room left for mutual charity: for we verily are persuaded, yea, and assuredly know, that our so acting is charity both to the faithful and unfaithful, and towards all mankind; and that the charging it as a breach of charity is hard and uncharitable censure, is judging according to appearance only, not according to truth.

*[I may here observe something of Mr. Bayle. In his *Philosophical Commentary*, (part i. p. 337, etc.) after taking notice that the Romanists have perpetually reproached the Protestants as destitute of any well-grounded certainty, and that the Protestants had answered the objection a thousand times over; he adds that it never was fully answered, never can be, in the common way, only it may be irresistibly retorted upon Papists: and the conclusion he at length rests in is, that God requires no more than a sincere and diligent search after truth. Mr. Bayle is so far right; but he forgot to tell us how we may arrive at a well-grounded certainty of that fact, that we have made a sincere and diligent search, without prejudice or bias, without any culpable sloth and negligence in inquiring, or precipitancy in judging. There is no mathematical or metaphysical certainty as to this fact, which by him is made the main thing. Moral certainty is the utmost that anyone can here pretend to, and that not so great as we can have of matters of faith; neither can our sincerity be any way so certainly proved, as by the evidence we produce for the doctrines we maintain. Therefore Mr. Bayle commits a fallacy, or is guilty of great forgetfulness, in

making a well-grounded certainty of our sincerity the last resource, rather than the other; for generally speaking, it is not so sure or so firm a ground to rest on, as the reasons of things, or the merits of a cause. For considering how obscure the search is into the inmost springs of action, or persuasion, which are very involved and intricate, how careless men are apt to be in the examination, and how liable also to be imposed upon by self-flattery; I say, these things considered, it is much safer to rely upon the moral certainty appearing in things, than upon any pretended certainty we may conceive of our own sincerity. I believe, the fallacy in this case has been chiefly owing to the equivocal meaning of the word sincerity: for because in one sense, as opposed to hypocrisy, a man may easily know he is sincere when he is so; it has been too hastily concluded, that he may as easily know it in the other sense of the word, as opposed to prejudice or particularity.]

All depends upon this, that men take care, in everything of moment, to go upon sure grounds, to know what they do. That is the very thing which chiefly distinguishes resolution from obstinacy, orthodoxy from heresy, wisdom from rashness, and righteousness from iniquity. God has given us rational faculties to discern truth from error, and right from wrong: and we ought to be well assured, in whatsoever we teach, as of moment, that we have made that use of our faculties which we ought to have done, to discern between good and evil. It is not our persuasion that can justify us; there are many fond persuasions; and we are not commanded merely to obey our persuasions (though we ought not to go against them), but to obey the truth. It is not merely our sincerity that can support us, for of that we know nothing, in any just and proper sense, but by the right and reason of the cause; and we are not commanded to hold fast our sincere errors, but to hold fast that which is good.

But what, will some ask, do we than pretend to know that our doctrine is true? Is faith advanced into knowledge? To this I answer that we know, not scientifically, but with moral certainty, which is knowing according to use of common speech; and though we do not strictly know what we merely believe, yet we know that we have such moral evidence for what we believe, as binds us to the belief of it. In this sense, we know what we do, and we have a well-grounded assurance that what we do is right, which is our justification. And this is what we ought always to have (I speak more particularly of guides and teachers) in points of importance, and where it is not allowed to suspend. Cannot we know, for instance, that a Deist is rash in rejecting all revealed religion? Yes, we know it as certainly, as that it would be rash to deny, that there is any such city as Rome or Constantinople; or that there ever were such men as Virgil, Horace, or Cicero. Cannot we know that a Jew is much in the wrong to deny that the Messiah is come? Yes, we know it as assuredly, as that a man would be in the wrong, to deny that the twelve Caesars lived some centuries ago. Cannot we know that the Popish doctrines of transubstantiation, image worship, service

in an unknown tongue, and the like, are not primitive Christianity? Yea, we know it as evidently, as that modern Rome is not ancient Rome, or that London is not Canterbury. Cannot one know that the Socinian interpretation of John 1:1, or of Heb. 1:10, or of the texts relating to Christ's preexistence, is not the mind of Scripture? Yea, one may know it as certainly, as that a counter is not the King's coin, or that a monster is not a man. I give these instances to show that it is not merely persuasion or sincerity, that we have to plead for our faith, but certainty and well-grounded assurance; such as is judged sufficient for wise and considerate men to go upon, and conduct themselves by, in secular affairs of greatest consequence. We have no occasion for infallibility to support us in such a claim: common reason suffices, taking in the proper helps, and making the due use of them with humility and care, with sobriety and godly fear.* Having gone through the most material objections I had met with, I may now proceed to the slighter and less considerable, but dispatching them in fewer words.

*[But here again it may be asked, may not a Jew, a Deist, Papist, a Socinian, or an Arian, with equal confidence say that he knows he is in the right? He may so, and probably will. Yet truth and falsehood have a real distinction in nature, and depend not on fond conceits, or strength of persuasion. If any man presumes to say he knows, when he does not know, he deceives himself, and is guilty before God; unless some unavoidable incapacity, or unconquerable prejudice, which God only is judge of, makes him innocent. And in that case it is not because he delivers his real persuasion (for it may be impious as to the matter of it), not because it is well-grounded, for he only thinks it is; but it is because of his infirmity, which himself neither sees nor knows (if he did, he would correct it), that God acquits him. How much any of us may stand in need of such merciful allowances, we cannot say: but in the meanwhile, all we have to look to, or to trust to, is to be as watchful and careful, that we go upon sure grounds, as if no such allowances might be made us. Such wary conduct is well enough understood and practiced in temporal affairs, where anything considerable is depending: the like we are to observe in spiritual.]

V. It has been sometimes invidiously suggested, that our zeal and constancy in contending so earnestly for what we call faith, is bearing hard upon our Christian brethren of an opposite persuasion, is afflicting and oppressing them, and, in short, is persecution and Popery. It can scarcely be conceived, that any sensible men should seriously advance such odd fancies, or that they mean anything more by them than rhetoric and flourish. Yet certain it is that such things have been offered with a serious air, and by men of no mean parts: I shall give some examples. One writes thus: "The humour of creed making and creed imposing is one of the most grievous instances of persecution, and the grand source of every other kind of it. If it be only their good opinion of us, that our fellow Christians suspend upon our non-assent to their confessions of faith, they,

in a very inhuman and unchristian way, persecute us. It is in itself barbarous,” says Mr. Marvel, “for these faith stretchers, whosoever they be, to put men’s consciences upon the torture, to rack them to the length of their own notions.” [Occasional Paper, vol. ii. numb. 1. p. 12, etc.] This declamatory talk has been gravely, solidly, and satisfactorily answered by a very good writer [Preface to the Westminster Confession, p. 96–104.]: and yet the objector chose rather to declaim again upon the same head, for several pages together, [Defence of the Scripture as the only Standard of Faith, by the Author of the Occasional Paper, p. 35–40.] than to quit his false reasonings, or acknowledge his mistakes. To say the best of it, it is a very wanton way of talking in a subject of the last importance, and is making a jest of the liberties of mankind here, and of their happiness hereafter. If those gentlemen have been so inhumanly and barbarously persecuted, how is it that they have not yet assumed the title of martyrs or confessors? For persecution and martyrdom are a kind of correlates, which suppose and imply each other. And what is that inhuman torture, that barbarous persecution, which they have endured? Have they had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, of bonds and imprisonment? Have they wandered about in sheep skins or goat skins, in dens or caves of the earth, for the sake of truth and godliness? No, but good Christians have suspended their good opinion of them, that is the grievance. And for what? Not for thinking as they please (for thoughts are free), but for overt acts of heresy, or perhaps blasphemy; for making public appeals to the people, in order to draw them off from listening to their better guides, to seduce them from the faith they have been baptized into, and to impose upon them such doctrines as must endanger their everlasting salvation. The kind and charitable endeavours of good men, whose province it is to prevent such fatal mischiefs in the mildest and gentlest way (such as Christ himself has prescribed); – these are the inhuman and unchristian persecutions which those gentlemen complain of. But to be a little more particular, they must not take it amiss to be told, in return to their odd complaint; 1. That they are guilty of a most intolerable abuse of words and names, in speaking of rack, torture, and persecution, where, even by their own account, there is not so much as a semblance of them: for it amounts, after all, only to the suspending our good opinion of them. 2. In this way of giving new and wrong names to things, they may, if they please, make the primitive churches also, and martyrs, yea, and Christ and his Apostles, persecutors. The primitive discipline, by their account, will be most of it persecution; and so instead of ten heathen persecutions (as they are commonly reckoned), they may increase the number of persecutions to five hundred or more, and call them Christian persecutions, or rather unchristian ones, for that, it seems, is the name for them. 3. It is wrong in these gentlemen to furnish the Papists with fresh

topics for real persecution. For since it will follow from this account, that persecution is Scripture doctrine, it may be pleaded, that Papal persecutions differ in kind only, or degree, from the other, but in the main are warranted by the New Testament itself, and by the universal practice of the Church in the best and purest ages. 4. This will likewise be furnishing infidels with new arguments against Christianity, as it is a persecuting religion: for it is certain, that the pretended persecution here complained of, is such as Scripture itself prescribes, as I have before proved. 5. But to come yet closer up to those complainants, let it be considered, whether they are not themselves the real persecutors, guilty of that very crime which they charge upon the churches of God. To revile men for doing their bounden duty, to load them with reproaches for righteousness sake, to libel and defame them for maintaining the faith of Christ in a Christian way, to seduce their flocks from them, and to demand at the same time to be caressed and honoured as fellow Christians; these are grievous impositions and oppressions, and may amount to persecution, properly so called. They that refuse to conform to order, who submit not to sound words and wholesome doctrine, who give unnecessary disturbance, and assume more than belongs to them; they are the invaders of liberty, the oppressors and persecutors of religious and righteous men.

It will be said, perhaps, that creed makers and creed imposers, as such, assume more than belongs to them. But if that be a fault, it is a fault common to all parties: for they who impugn the doctrines of the Church are themselves as much creed makers, and creed imposers, by their appeals to the people, and by their imposing their own doctrines on the public in a clamorous way (and generally with satire and invective upon all that dislike them), as others are who impose their creeds in a more regular and authoritative manner. Much has been said against creed making, by many who have as long creeds as others, only not the same creeds, and who are as confident in dictating, and as dogmatical in defining, and as eager to impose their own sentiments, as it is possible for men to be. The question, properly, is not, whether there shall be creeds or no; for all parties are for them, under one shape or other, and always will be: but the real matter in controversy is, who shall have the drawing of them, or who shall impose them: and when men declaim against imposing of creeds, the secret meaning of all seems to be, that they like not that such a power or privilege should be lodged in any hands but their own. However, the fault lies not in imposing creeds (where there is a competent authority), but in imposing false doctrine for true: and therefore the complaint is wide, while it runs only in generals, against all creed making, and against impositions at large, especially as practiced in the Protestant churches. We pretend not to impose articles of faith

in an arbitrary manner, or to require any implicit belief in the Church: we require no man to receive them for true, because they are ours, but because they carry their evidences along with them, and will bear examining.

But it will be said that the Protestant churches, however, do determine beforehand, that every person upon examination ought to find these things true which they have formed into creeds or articles. They do so, as to the main things at least; and where is the harm? It is no more than presuming that there are some things so certain, that the reason of mankind ought to submit to them, and that those things which they have defined are of that kind. To illustrate this matter farther, we may put a few cases: let the propositions, suppose, of Euclid be given into any man's hand to examine, there will be no presumption in telling him beforehand, that he will find them true: and if he afterwards says the contrary, it will be no breach of charity or ill manners to tell him, that either he has not duly examined them, or is not sincere in his report, or labours under an incapacity. Thus far will readily be allowed with respect to propositions of mathematical or metaphysical certainty: we may reasonably determine beforehand, in such instances, that they will be found true, upon a due examination, where capacity is not wanting. The like may be said of an account, which has been carefully cast up, and proved by the never failing rules of art: if any man comes after, and pretends to find an error in it, one may be assured beforehand that the error is his own, and that he has been guilty of some neglect in the casting it up. Apply this reasoning to cases of moral certainty: some of them are so plain, that a man may have as well-grounded an assurance there, as anywhere. Let the question be about the truth of Christianity in general: a point so clear and so certain, that there is no lack of charity in judging that the person who brings in a verdict against it has never fully and sincerely examined, or labours under some unconquerable infirmity. The like may be affirmed with respect to many particular doctrines contained in our Creeds or Articles. There is such a degree of moral evidence to attest them, that the reason of mankind ought to receive them. Now the imposing such doctrines, in those whose province it properly is, is not assuming, but is discharging a weighty trust: and this is quite another thing from the Popish way of imposing what they please, forbidding men to examine, or so much as to doubt of what they define; because their Church, they say, is infallible. Our way supposes that men ought to examine (if capable) in order to know that the doctrine proposed is true: and we judge, with reason that, if they examine with care, and decide with impartiality, they cannot think otherwise of it. The foundations we go upon are, that reason is reason with every man; that human faculties are true; and that there is such a thing as moral certainty, and that it is ground sufficient for the governors of the Church to rest their own faith

upon, and to hold out their light to others committed to their charge, and for whom they are so far responsible. Indeed, if the Church governors should happen to administer poison, instead of wholesome food, there will then be reason for complaint: but let not the complaint run against creed making or creed imposing in the general (which is foreign and impertinent), but let the particulars be specified, wherein they have rigorously imposed something false, or at least doubtful; and if the charge can be made good against them, they then ought with the same zeal to throw such article out, as they keep the rest in. Upon the whole, there is neither persecution nor Popery merely in imposing creeds, etc. under pain of Church censures, or exclusion from the ministerial function: but there is good order and discipline in it, such as Christ and his Apostles have commanded, and the Church in the best and purest ages has observed, and such as is necessary to keep the unity of the faith in the bond of peace.

VI. There is another objection near akin to the former, namely, that for Church governors to direct men what to believe, and to exclude them from the Christian Church, for impugning such belief, is assuming a kind of dominion over the faith and consciences of other persons. To which I answer: men may call those powers which Christ has left with his Church by what invidious names they please, but they cannot thereby alter the nature of things. That Christ has appointed his ministers as guardians of the faith, and has empowered them to excommunicate the impugnors of it, is a very plain case: and this is all that any Protestant churches plead for. Whether it should be called assuming dominion over the faith and consciences of men (since it is assuming no more than Christ has commanded), let the objectors consider. The objection is worded in ambiguous terms, which carry no certain or determinate ideas: the very phrase of having dominion over one's faith, though a Scripture phrase, is of obscure meaning; and it is hard to know whether St. Paul, who has used the phrase, [2 Cor. 1:24.] disclaimed all such dominion, or only declined the use of it in some circumstances. If it means, prescribing to others arbitrarily for one's own pleasure or advantage, not pursuant to Christ's directions (as some interpret [See Grotius and Hammond.]), then St. Paul disclaimed it absolutely: but if it means only the exercise of the power of excommunication, such as St. Paul did exercise over Hymenaeus and Alexander (for so others interpret [See Whitby and Wells.]), then St. Paul only declined the use of it in some particular circumstances. Whatever the phrase means, this is certain, that the Protestant churches claim no more than a directive or instructive power over men's faith or consciences: Church censure and discipline affect only the overt acts,* the speaking, writing, teaching perverse things, not the thinking or conceiving them: for how can a man be censured for private thoughts, which no one knows but himself? But if any

persons presume to teach false doctrine, and endeavour to draw disciples after them, then indeed they are accountable to the Church, as much as another kind of offenders are accountable to the State. Christianity is a social religion, and the members of it are bound to submit, in their external behaviour, to the rules of the society, under pain of forfeiting the outward privileges of it. And with what modesty, decency, or consistency, can any man claim a right of perverting his fellow Christians as he pleases, and at the same time deny others a right of doing what in them lies to preserve their people from falling into the snares laid for them? It is to very little purpose for seducers to plead, that their consciences are oppressed by Church censures, or their liberty restrained: for would not the consciences of better men be more oppressed, and their liberty restrained, if they were obliged tamely to sit by and look on, while their flocks are torn from them, not permitted to make use of those spiritual powers which God has put into their hands? Either therefore let the adversaries be content to keep their thoughts to themselves, and then nobody can have dominion over their faith at all; or if they resolve to usurp upon others, and to take all advantages for spreading false doctrines, let them not be offended, if the guides of souls, whose peculiar charge it is, use their best endeavours, in a proper manner, to apply such preservatives as Scripture directs in those cases. This is not taking cognizance of the inner man, but of the outward behaviour only; and that so far as such outward behaviour affects the prosperity or safety of the whole community, and might be of dangerous consequence to the peace of the Church, the purity of the Christian faith, the honour of God and religion, and the everlasting interests of mankind. Now, can the guarding, in a Christian mauler, against such fatal mischiefs, be properly or justly styled affecting dominion over others? Or is it not rather making use of a power which God has given them, to hinder others from exercising a lawless dominion over Christians, and over the Church of God? Say, that the Church is fallible, what then? Are her adversaries infallible? Or are they less liable to abuse their liberty, than the Church is to misemploy her authority? But enough of this.

*[“The laws of the Church regard only the external conduct. They do not require the inward belief of the mind in articles of faith, or the secret grace of the heart in moral duties. These things the ministers of Christ teach and exhort, but do not command. But the actions which they prescribe by their laws, are such external performances as are the visible signs, the natural and proper expressions of such inward acts and dispositions of soul, as Christ ‘has commanded. And these laws they do not affirm to have any farther obligation on the conscience, than as the performance directed by them is a proper sign and expression of such inward disposition of the heart as Christ requires, and consequently is agreeable and subservient to his law. And when even the action is thus qualified, they do not pretend that the conscience is obliged by their law, but by Christ’s.”

Rogers, of the Visible Church, p. 101.]

VII. There is another objection of more weight than the former, namely, that the censuring of heretics may often provoke them to return the like censures; and thus a kind of reciprocation of censures may be carried on to the great disturbance of the public peace, and the destruction of Christian charity. A late writer expresses the thing in a very lively manner, but somewhat overstrained, thus: “May not Arians, in their turn, think you guilty of as great sin, in opposing what they call the truth And may not Christians, on all sides, in so great and indeed necessary difference of opinions, rant and bluster against one another for the same reason, and bring their constant accusations against those who cannot think and say as they do, for denying the faith; or against those who have the same notions with themselves for betraying it? But what then? Would not Christian churches become cockpits, or fencing stages?” [Reply to Mr. P. C.’s Letter, p. 44.] In reply to what is here urged, I will not so far disguise my sentiments, as not to allow that it is a consideration of some moment: but yet there are other considerations of still greater moment, which must preponderate, and weigh down the scale. It is very certain, that ungodly men, for a cloak, will make use of the same pleas, and claim the same privileges, as righteous men dot and an erroneous conscience may honestly (if invincibly ignorant) usurp the same rights which a well-grounded faith has a clear title to. But still there is a very wide difference between true and false, between right and wrong: and it is no argument against the use of proper methods in a righteous cause, that others may abuse the same methods in a cause of a very contrary nature and quality. But I shall debate this point more distinctly both from Scripture and reason, as it is a point of some moment.

1. Let us consider what light we can have from Scripture. It is fact that the power of excommunication began to be misemployed, and to be turned against the Church itself, even in the times of the Apostles: for Diotrephes, loving to have the preeminence, cast some persons out of the Church [3 John 10]; very unwarrantably, and even in defiance of St. John himself: yet that usurpation of power, or abuse of power, did not move St. John to condemn the use of it in a proper way. So far from it, that he threatened to repay Diotrephes in his kind, to excommunicate or depose him, for his so rashly censuring other persons. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doth, prating against us with malicious words.” [3 John 10. See Bishop Potter on Church Government, p. 380.] We may observe likewise, from St. John’s Second Epistle, [2 John 10–11.] and from the charges given to the churches of Pergamus and Thyatira [Rev. 2:14–15, 20.] that the use of excommunication was to be retained in the Church, and was recommended from heaven by our Lord himself. And if it be said that the

Nicolaitans were an abominable sect, that alters not the case at all, so far as the present objection is concerned: for the more wicked any sect was, the more likely to retaliate upon the Church, and to make all possible disturbance when provoked to it. Notwithstanding all which, that accidental inconvenience of a misapplication of power was not judged considerable enough to counterbalance the great advantages and important uses of the same power rightly employed. And as we have the authority of an Apostle, who had the Spirit of God to direct him in what he wrote, and in what he did; this alone may be sufficient to determine the point in question. For whatever we may be apt to imagine (upon a superficial or limited view of circumstances), it is certain, that infinite wisdom cannot err, and therefore by that direction we ought to abide. St. Paul seems to have left us a general rule for all cases of this nature, in these words: “Stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the Gospel, and in nothing terrified by your adversaries, etc.” [Phil. 1:27–28.]

2. As to the reason of the thing, it is a known rule that when there is a necessity on one hand, it is in vain to plead inconveniences on the other. God has sent mankind a charter of salvation: it is necessary, above all things, that this charter be preserved inviolable; that it should not be falsified, perverted, frustrated. There will always be some or other, set on by the grand enemy of mankind, who will be labouring to corrupt and adulterate it, either adding to it, or taking from it; and if such practices are suffered to go on without rebuke, there is an end of Christianity. Here lies the necessity of watching against all such attempts, and strenuously resisting them; which cannot be done effectually without condemning the authors, and in the last result separating from them. Hence may arise mutual contentions and bickerings: let them bear the blame who give the offence, and are aggressors in the contests. Truths of everlasting moment must be supported, whether with peace or without. The Apostles were censured as men that turned the world upside down [Acts 17:6.]: the fault was in the world, and not in them. Their errand was important enough for the risking such a consequence. Our blessed Lord himself predicted what the accidental effect would be of the preaching of the Gospel; that it would “set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against the mother,” [Matt. 10:35.] and so on; which perhaps, in ridicule, might be called making cockpits or fencing stages: but the Gospel was worth it, and carried more than enough in it, to make mankind amends. As long as religion is held in any value or esteem, and meets with opposers, it must occasion warm disputes: who would wish that it should not? What remedy is there for it, while men are men, which is not infinitely worse than the disease? A total contempt of religion might end all disputes about it, nothing else will: and even then men’s quarrels would not be

fewer, but more; only they would be about matters of another kind, about everything they should value or esteem. Upon the whole, it is better, I suppose, that we should have some religion, though we often contend about it, that to have none at all, and to quarrel ten times oftener about trifles. It has been complained of, and has been thought to be a shrewd remark, that ecclesiastical history is made up of little else but religious contests and animosities of churchmen. But, pray, what is the history of mankind, but a history of wars and contentions about something or other, which they had a tender concern for? And it would be strange indeed, if a history of religion, the greatest concern of all, should not contain many contests. Who could believe that men had any religion, if during the state of the Church militant, and while there is like to be great opposition, there should be no warmth or vivacity shown in defense of it? But this I have hinted more than once already. Now to return to our point. Though the censuring of men that corrupt the faith may provoke, may increase ill blood, etc. yet it must be done: and to decline it, when necessary, is a culpable moderation, a blamable timidity. And it is farther to be considered, that though rejecting some persons from the communion of the Church may inflame the quarrel between the Church and its adversaries, yet it tends to preserve and promote the peace of its members within: therefore St. Paul prescribes this very remedy, for the securing the peace of the Church: “Mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them.” [Rom. 16:17.] So that though in some sense or respect, strict order and discipline may accidentally heighten differences, yet its true and natural tendency is peace; which it serves and promotes in one view, much more than it obstructs or disserves it in another. The objection therefore is grounded upon a false presumption, that peace suffers upon the whole, by such conduct; which we deny: for; upon a just balancing of the account, peace is very much befriended by it, [See Rogers’s Review, p. 290, 291.] and true and proper Christian peace could not long subsist without it.

However, I allow there is so much weight in the objection which I have been answering, that the consideration of it ought to make us exceeding cautious and deliberate, as to the steps we take, and the heights we proceed to in all cases of that nature: not to multiply necessaries without or beyond, reason; not to divide upon indifferent rites; customs, ceremonies, as Pope Victor is known to have done; nor upon dubious points of discipline, as Pope Stephen did: who had indeed right on his side, as to the matter in dispute, but pushed it too rigorously; and St. Cyprian, though mistaken, was yet the wiser, humbler, and better man. Where the main cause is both clear and weighty, yet even there many prudential cautions should be taken; not to suspect any persons without sufficient evidence;

not to be prying and inquisitive into their retired sentiments (ministers only excepted, or candidates for the ministry, whose faith should be strictly inquired into, [1 Tim. 3:9–10, 5:22.] before they be allowed); not to proceed to rigours with any man, till all gentle measures have been first tried; nor to break communion with any who do not openly espouse and pertinaciously abet false and pernicious doctrines. These, I apprehend, are the prudential cautions proper in such cases: and there may be more of like kind, which every man's common reason and discretion may supply. If truth and peace can be maintained together, that is the most desirable conjunction which a good man can wish for: but if human affairs will not always admit of both, then the rule is, out of two evils to choose the least, or of two advantages to prefer the greatest. Where divine truths and human customs or dictates clash, we must "obey God rather than man:" in other cases, civility and tenderness towards all men, is true obedience towards God. It requires good judgment to discern, under various circumstances, the true and precise boundaries between sinful men-pleasing and Christian charity: but this is certain, we are as much (yea, and more) obliged to maintain the fundamentals of faith, as to keep up peace. And it would be but an ill way to preserve peace (if it might be called peace), by forfeiting our Christianity; or to enlarge Christian communion by receiving those who, in a strict and proper sense, are not Christians. [Vid. Suicer. p.1540, 1541. Bingham, Antiq. b. i. 6. c. iii. p. 4.] "Unity is not to be purchased at so dear a rate. It were a thing much to be desired, that there were no divisions; yet difference of opinions touching things controverted is rather to be chosen than unanimous concord in damned errors: as it is better for men to go to heaven by divers ways, or rather by divers paths of the same way, than in the same path to go on peaceably to hell. *Amica pax, magis amica veritas.*" [Chillingworth, p. 218.]

VIII. It has been sometimes pleaded, in bar to the principles which we have before asserted, that no one ought to be excluded from Christian communion, whatever his faith be, provided he acknowledges sacred Writ for his rule, and is ready to admit any creeds or confessions drawn up entirely in Scripture terms." To which I answer, that a man who never declares his faith otherwise than in Scripture word is very safe from censure, and can never be excluded from Christian communion for heresy. It is the maintaining doctrines contrary to Scripture, in points fundamental, which makes a heretic; and therefore if a man never interprets it at all, but barely repeats the words, he is perfectly secure so far; and no one can condemn him. If this then be all that the plea aims at, it is foreign and impertinent to the cause in hand.

But if the meaning of the plea be this, that though a man teaches any wild doctrines whatever, yet if he does but father those doctrines upon sacred Writ, by

any feigned and forced construction (acknowledging Scripture all the while as his rule of faith), he ought to be received as a fellow Christian; I say, if this be the plea, it is so manifestly absurd and ridiculous, at the first hearing, that it can scarce deserve a serious answer. For does the faith of Christ lie in words only, or in things? [Tertullian. de Praescript. c. 9. Hieronym. Dial. adv. Lucifer. p. 386.] or is the repeating of the bare letter of Scripture, after a man has spirited away the sense, delivering divine truths, or contradicting and defeating them? To make the case plainer, I shall illustrate it by a resembling instance. Franciscus a Sancta Clara, a known Papist, (who published his book A.D. 1634.) contrived to make our XXXIX Articles speak his own sentiments, reconciling them with great dexterity, and most amazing subtlety, to the Council of Trent. Now, put the question, whether upon his thus professing his faith in Protestant terms, popishly interpreted, he could justly claim every privilege of a Church of England man, and whether we were bound to receive him as a fellow Protestant? A very little share of common sense, I presume, will be sufficient to determine the question in the negative. The like I say of any person who interprets our Christian charter to an Anti-Christian sense: he has no more right to be admitted as a fellow Christian, than the other had to be received as a fellow Protestant. For though both admit the same words or forms which we do, yet so long as they teach things directly contrary to those very words or forms rightly understood, they are chargeable with false doctrine, in our account; and their teaching such doctrine in a manner so insidious and fraudulent is so far from alleviating their guilt, that it greatly enhances it. It may be said perhaps, in the way of reply, that the famous Abbot of St. Clare knew that he perverted the true meaning and intent of our Articles, while those that pervert the sense of Scripture may believe that they justly interpret it. If that be the case, it is true that it will make a difference: but I have no occasion to consider that difference here, being foreign to the present point. For supposing the perverters of Scripture to do it ever so wickedly and fraudulently, yet they may make use of the same plea, that they are ready to profess their faith in Scripture words, and therefore ought not to be excluded from Christian communion. A Valentinian, a Montanist, a Muggletonian, or any other wild sectary, by this rule, might equally claim Christian communion, provided he does not reject Scripture itself, and turn infidel. Now a plea which thus manifestly overshoots the mark ought to be rejected as an absurd plea, like as an argument which proves too much ought to be thrown aside as worth nothing. Those who undesignedly pervert Scripture should have something better to plead than their retaining the words of Scripture: otherwise their plea reaches no farther than theirs does who industriously do the same thing; for they also retain the same words. Upon the whole therefore, a man's retaining the bare

letter of Scripture, while he corrupts the sense, is no sufficient reason for receiving him to Christian communion. For he is not only chargeable with denying the faith, as much as if he had rejected the text itself, [Tertull. de Praescript. c. 17.] but with perverting the words, and defeating the sense, while he professes an outward veneration for both. I cannot better express this whole matter than a late excellent Divine of our Church has done, in the words here following: "It is not barely repeating so many words, but the assenting to the proposition expressed by those words, which Christ requires. – The proposition affirmed or denied in Christ's words is the doctrine of Christ. He therefore who will not believe the proposition affirmed in Christ's words, ought to be looked upon by the Church as an heathen and a publican. – Let us take for instance these propositions; trams is the Christ; he was crucified; rose again from the dead: every word and sentence of Scripture, in which these articles are delivered, the most heretical among the Quakers will profess their assent to; but then they mean only this, that Christ is an internal principle of light within them, that his crucifixion and resurrection are nothing else but the mortification and regeneration of every believer. – Now are these the-doctrines of Christ, or are they not? If they are not, if they are contrary to the doctrines of Christ, then the persons understanding these Scriptures in such a sense may justly be looked upon as heathens and, publicans; and, notwithstanding their readiness to profess the words of Scripture, unfit to be admitted or continued in the Church." [Rogers's Review, p. 399, 400.] Thus far Dr. Rogers, whose words I take to be a just and full answer to the objection I have been examining. The reader will observe, that I have not been considering how far Scripture words may or may not be proper in Creeds, Tests, Confessions, and the like, and in what cases it may be prudent or necessary to express the Scripture sense in phrases suited to times, places, and circumstances: questions of that kind fall not within my present argument, but have been largely and thoroughly treated of by others. [Preface to the Westminster Confession, p. 106–112. Stebbing's Rational Inquiry, p. 19–56. Rogers's Review, p. 395–411.] All I am concerned to show is, that if any persons are found to pervert the sense of Scripture in any notorious manner, so as thereby to undermine the essentials of faith, their pretending a high regard for the authority of sacred Writ, or for the letter of it, is not reason sufficient for receiving them as fellow Christians.

IX. There is one objection more, which might have been brought in as an appendage to objection the second, had I sooner thought of it, but may conveniently enough have a distinct consideration here; namely, that the charging heresy as a crime of the first magnitude, seems to give too much countenance to the sanguinary proceedings of Papists against it. The objection

runs thus: “If these charges against them are just, and their fellow creatures have any authority to chastise them for such enormities, I cannot see why the Romish Church should be blamed for roasting such accursed villains (as the Arians) among other heretics. If we think a traitor against an earthly potentate worthy of death, how much more one who vilifies the Lord of heaven and earth! Is a murderer of an earthly father obnoxious to death, and shall such a viper as this escape? [Vindication of Mr. Nation’s Sermon, p. 12. Compare Mr. P. C.’s Letter in answer, p. 23, 24.] If civil power have authority to punish heretics, such a villain deserves far severer penalties to be inflicted on him, than multitudes of others whose injuries to their neighbours expose them, by our statute laws, to the gallows.” [Reply to Mr. P.C.’s. Letter, p. 21.] The sum of this argument, so far as it may be called an argument, amounts to thus much; that it is wrong to charge heresy in general, or Arianism in particular, with wickedness and impiety to any high degree, since it is neither felony nor treason: or if it be as bad, or worse than either, then the Papists are justified in all their sanguinary proceedings, which among Protestants is confessedly absurd. To which I answer, that the objection proceeds upon several false suppositions or suggestions: as 1. That those who plead only for spiritual reproofs or censures are pleading at the same time for civil penalties. 2. That the magnitude of crimes is to be measured by what passes in civil courts. 3. That civil courts look strictly to the demerits of the criminal, and not rather to the necessities of State. In opposition to these and the like mistakes, I observe:

1. That Scripture itself warrants and commands spiritual reproofs and censures; which is a point very foreign to that of civil penalties. St. Jude, St. Peter, St. John, St. Paul, and Christ himself, are often very sharp and poignant in their reproofs and censures, where they had no thought of exposing the offenders to civil penalties, or of justifying any sanguinary proceedings. St. Jude scruples not to call the heretics of his time ungodly men, deniers of the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ, filthy dreamers, despisers of dominion, followers of Cain, Balaam, and Core, raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame, wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever: and yet amidst all this severe, but just reproof, or satire, I presume, he never would have advised the correcting them by fire and faggot. St. Peter treats the same men with the like sharpness of style, in his Second Epistle: but it would be injurious to conclude from thence, that he was for sanguinary measures. St. John, in his Epistles, gives very hard names to heretics, calling them antichrists, etc. yet this does not prove that he was for using any violent methods with them. St. Paul describes the heretics of his time in very black characters, such as they deserved, yea, and pronounced them accursed; and yet it does not appear that he would

have approved the roasting of them, had they been much greater villains than they were. Shaming them, humbling them, and bringing them to repentance, that their “souls might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus,” was the utmost hurt he intended them. Our blessed Lord himself rebuked many with great sharpness, calling them hypocrites, blind guides, children of hell, fools, whited sepulchers, serpents, vipers, [See Matt. 28.] and the like: and yet it does not appear, that he would have approved any violent and sanguinary proceedings with those very persons. Therefore it is wrong to furnish the Romanists with arguments for their cruelties; as if civil penalties were just, wherever smart rebukes are proper; or as if it were warrantable to punish according to the degree of wickedness, though the wickedness be of such a kind as falls not properly under civil cognizance.

2. There may be crimes much greater than felony or treason; such as apostasy (which is “crucifying the Son of God afresh, and putting him to an open shame”), blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, and some kinds of heresy. Certainly, it may be lawful for Christian Divines to set forth those wickednesses in their proper colours, and they ought to do it though at the same time they may desire that the offenders in such sort may rather live to repent, than suffer death, or any civil penalties. And what if felons, or traitors against the State, be punished with death? It does not from thence follow, that they are the greatest of sinners; but reasons of government require, that crimes which more particularly affect the State, should be punished by the State: the rest are left to the censures of the Church, and the righteous judgment of God.

3. And I must further observe, that civil penalties look not merely at the demerits of the criminal, but the necessities of the civil community. Civil governors do not, cannot observe any exact proportion: God only can do it, in his final retributions. Theft and murder are crimes of a different magnitude; yet they are equally liable to capital penalties. As to heresies of such a kind, they may be greater sins than either in God’s sight: but it is not so necessary for a State to take cognizance of them, unless they break in upon civil peace. Felonies hurt many innocent men, who have no possible way to escape: none can be hurt by heresies (after proper warning given) but by their own consent. And therefore if spiritual censures, reproofs, admonitions, and other the like preservatives, be duly applied, those are ordinarily sufficient in cases of this nature: for if any, after such warnings given, will still listen to deceivers, and run in with them, they perish with their eyes open, and may take the blame to themselves. I mention this as one reason among many, why heresies, though supposed to be crimes of the first magnitude, yet ought to be treated in a milder way than crimes against the State. And I shall subjoin another reason to enforce the former, namely, that when we speak of heresies as heinous crimes, we mean as

materially considered, not determining whether the men are formally so wicked as those expressions amount to: which again makes a sensible difference between this case and the other of felonies or treasons, where the offenders commonly sin directly against conscience, and cannot plead so much as a good meaning or design. However, that favourable presumption, pleadable in excuse for heresies, ought to be no bar to spiritual censures. For if the persons offend willfully, then no censure of that kind can be thought severe: and if they offend ignorantly, such awakening admonitions may be of great use to them, to recover them from their stupid lethargy. And if the effect answers, they are delivered from a doubtful state, which at most could promise them pardon only, or rest them upon uncovenanted mercy, to a state of well-grounded hope and joy, entitling them to a reward: but this I hinted before. Upon the whole, there appears no force in the objection, that heretics ought either to be punished with death, or not censured as blasphemers and grievous sinners. Extremes are always wrong, whether of mildness or severity: and there is a medium between taking violent measures with them, and treating them as fellow Christians. The sin of corrupting the faith, dividing the Church, and seducing the people, cannot easily be too much aggravated, in order to create a just abhorrence of it: and it is the more necessary, because ordinarily men are not so apprehensive of the heinousness of this sin, as they are of the iniquity of treason, or felony, or gross immoralities.

I have now finished what I intended as to the argumentative part: but it remains still to confirm the main thing by the judgment and practice of the ancients, who may be properly called in, and will be found to be of considerable weight in the controversy: if the Scripture be plain to us now, in all things necessary, the same Scripture was undoubtedly plain to them, and to them more especially: and therefore, their judgment or practice cannot but be of use to us, if it be only to render plain things still plainer, as there are degrees of plainness.

After I had finished this chapter, I had the pleasure of reading Mr. Ball's little treatise of 33 octavo pages, in answer to most of the same objections* which I have been considering. If I may be allowed to give my judgment of it, it is written with great strength and solidity, without colouring or disguises, and is extremely well suited to common capacities. One shall not easily find more good sense and close argument in so short a compass. The Sober and Charitable Disquisition, as I apprehend, was intended by way of reply to that pamphlet of Mr. Ball's. But every discerning reader who shall compare the two performances together, will easily perceive the difference between artificial logic and natural, between laboured subtleties and plain naked truth.

*[An Answer to some common Objections made against those Ministers in the

West, who have appeared in Defence of the Doctrine of the ever blessed Trinity and its Importance. Written with all plainness, for the use of private Christians, by John Ball. Exon: printed by A. Brice, etc. A.D. 1727.]

Chapter VI.

A summary View of the Judgment and Practice of the primitive Churches, in Relation to the Necessity of believing the Doctrine of the Trinity.

The very judicious and learned Bp. Bull has represented this matter in the fullest and clearest light, in a set treatise, professedly written by way of reply to Episcopius, as I have before hinted in the entrance. To him therefore I refer such readers as will be at the pains to look thoroughly into the subject of this chapter; while I content myself with giving a summary view of the main things, interspersing here and there a few slight observations, which may be, as it were, supplemental to that great work. There are three ways of coming at the sentiments of the primitive Church, as to the necessity or importance of believing any doctrine: 1. By consulting the ancient Creeds, conceived to take in the most important articles of faith, when rightly understood. 2. By observing what doctrines were all along condemned as impious and heretical. 3. By collecting the testimonies of Fathers declaring their own sentiments, or the Church's, or both, as to what doctrines are important, or what opinions pernicious and dangerous.

I. I shall begin with Creeds. Here it is observable, that the doctrine of the Trinity, implicit or express, always made an article in the ancient Creeds: nay, several learned men have conceived, that in the earliest times it made up the whole. [Bull. Judic. Eccl. Cathol. cap. iii. a. 3. p. 331. Wall, Hist. of Inf. Baptism, part ii. cap. 9. sect. 11. p. 491.] Episcopius himself was of opinion that the ancient baptismal Creed was no more than this: "I believe in God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost." [Episcop. Institut. lib. iv. c. 34. p. 340.] He designed, by the observation, to serve his own hypothesis, viz. that the divine eternal generation of the Son was not inserted in the Creeds from the beginning. But he did not consider how much at the same time he disserved his own cause another way, by making the doctrine of the Trinity so important, as to have been the sole article (if I may so speak), or entire matter of the first Creeds. Nothing can be stronger for that doctrine, than that the ancient Creeds should be comprised in these few words: "I believe in God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost;" since it is declaring the sacred Three to be the one God, [Cyprianus itidem, etc. Bull. Judic. cap. iv. sect. 3. p. 308.] and recommending that faith as the prime thing, or the one thing necessary, without which no man could be a Christian. Bp. Bull very justly observes, that the short Creed now mentioned expressed the doctrine of the Trinity in a clearer, closer,

and stronger manner than some of the more enlarged Creeds afterwards did. For the inserting of additional articles, time after time, carried the words Son and Holy Ghost so far off from the word God, that it might look as if that high title, which belonged indifferently to all three, was there applied to the Father only: though the compilers of those larger Creeds really designed the same common application of the name God, as before. [Bull. *ibid.* p. 309.] From hence therefore it appears, that allowing Episcopius the supposition which he goes upon, in relation to the short concise form of the first baptismal Creed, yet it is so far from favouring his cause, that it makes against him; since that form so worded carries in it a confession of the three divine Persons being the one true God of Christians: and if the Creed in the first age contained no more, then that very doctrine must have been looked upon, from the beginning, as the sum and substance of Christianity.

As to the question about the length of the apostolical Creeds, or the number of articles they contained, learned men may offer their conjectures, and have done it:* but perhaps, after all, we have not sufficient light to determine anything with certainty. What I at present apprehend of that matter, I shall express distinctly, in the particulars here following. 1. It appears to me not improbable, that the earliest Creeds, as they took their rise from the form of baptism, contained little or nothing beyond it. There is a short Creed of that kind still extant in Cyril, [Catech. *Mystag.* i. n. 6.] comprehending but one single article, besides the article of the Trinity. And I may observe, that the shorter form of the Roman Creed (called the Apostles'), published by Usher, [Usher *de Symbolis*, p. 6, 9.] seems to carry some marks of its having been formerly shorter, by its bringing in the article of the Holy Ghost in this abrupt manner, "and in the Holy Ghost": words which came in very aptly in the primitive form, when they immediately followed "and in the Son;" but which would appear abrupt, after several new insertions made between the two articles. Wherefore to salve that appearing abruptness, the Church afterwards striking out and, inserted I believe in that place, making the article run, as it does at this day, "I believe in the Holy Ghost, etc." This observable circumstance relating to that Creed is a confirmation of the opinion, that the fast Creeds (in some places at least) were of such a kind as Episcopius mentions. 2. It appears to me farther probable, that when the Creeds ran in that short concise form, yet the interrogatories to and answers of the catechumens at baptism were fuller and more explicit. Tertullian takes notice that the responses in baptism were then somewhat larger than the model laid down by Christ, [Tertull. *de Coron.* c. iii. p. 102.] meaning, than the form of baptism: and he refers the enlargement of the responses to immemorial custom or tradition. Firmilian of the third century speaks of the [Cyprian. *Opp. Ep.*

lxxv. p. 223.] Symbol, or Creed of the Trinity, and of the prescribed ecclesiastical interrogation, and seems to make them distinct, supposing that the Symbol of the Trinity contained less than the other. But if the whole ran under the name of the Creed of the Trinity, even that shows what was looked upon as the principal thing in the Creed, giving denomination to the whole: and it affords a probable argument, that, at first, the whole was comprised in it. 3. It is not unlikely that some of the additional articles might have been inserted into the Creeds, in the very age of the Apostles, in opposition to the heresies then breaking out. This hypothesis appears to me much more probable, than that such articles should be inserted in opposition to Paganism or Judaism. It was needless to caution the new converts against Paganism or Judaism, which they had formally renounced: but it might be necessary to guard them against false Christians, who pretended to follow the same rule of faith, and to admit the same Scriptures. This supposition much better accounts for the article of “Maker of heaven and earth,” being so long omitted in the Roman Creed (perhaps for six or seven centuries), though it was inserted in other Creeds, where heresies gave occasion for it. [See Critical History of the Apostles’ Creed, p. 96–106.] And this also best accounts for the observable variety in the additional articles to the ancient Creeds: because the several churches adopted those articles which suited their then present circumstances, according as they found the faith of Christ most endangered in this or that particular, [See my Sermons, vol. ii. p. 195, etc. Critical History of the Athanasian Creed, vol. iv. p. 309.] by the heresies then and there reigning. I pretend not to propose this as certain fact, but as a probable, or the most probable opinion. [Buddei Imagog. vol. i. p. 443.] The sum of the whole matter seems to be well and justly expressed by a celebrated writer, as follows: “Not long after the Apostles’ days, and even in the apostolic age itself, several heresies sprung up in the Church, subversive of the fundamentals of Christianity: to prevent the malignant effects whereof, and to hinder such heretics from an undiscernible mixing themselves with the orthodox Christians, as also to establish and strengthen the true believers in the necessary truths of the Christian religion, the Christian verities opposite to those heresies were inserted in the Creed; and together with those other articles, which had without intermission been constantly used from the time of the Apostles, were proposed to the assent and belief of all persons who came to be baptized.” [Critical History of the Apostles’ Creed, p. 38.]

Now, to return to the doctrine of the Trinity, it is very certain that that always made either the whole or the principal part of the first Creeds: and therefore in every view, and upon all hypotheses, it must have been looked upon as a prime verity, a fundamental doctrine of Christianity. But it may be pleaded

perhaps (as indeed it has been pleaded of old time, [See Austin de Fide et Symbolo, cap. i. p. 151. Tom. Vi. Bened. edit. Fulgentius in Fragment. xxxvi. p. 652. edit. Paris.] as well as since), that the ancient Creeds are not explicit as to the doctrine of the Trinity in the commonly received sense. To which the answer, in short, is this: that though all the ancient Creeds are not equally explicit in that doctrine (and good reasons may be assigned why they are not), yet even those which are least explicit, do however contain the main doctrine briefly wrapped up, provided they are but interpreted according to the real meaning and intent of the compilers, as they ought to be.

1. I say, first, that all the ancient Creeds are not equally explicit; for which good reasons may be assigned, as shall be seen presently. Some of the early Creeds are very full and explicit in the doctrine, considering the time when they were made, long before the Trinitarian controversy was come to any such height as it grew up to afterwards. The Creed of Jerusalem preserved by Cyril (the most [Bull. Judic. Eccles. cap. vi. n. 5. p. 325. Toutée in Cyrill. Hierosol. p. 82.] ancient, perhaps of any now extant), is very express for the Divinity of God the Son, in these words: “And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, true God, begotten of the Father before all ages; by whom all things were made.” [Cyril. Hierosol. p. 159. Conf. 114, 137, 149.] Expressions which seem directly pointed at the Cerinthians, and others, who in the earliest times opposed the Divinity of Christ. [Vid. Bull. Judic. Eccl. c. vi. n. 16. p. 330.]

There is a Creed, or fragment of a Creed, in Irenaeus which plainly enough intimates the real and proper Divinity both of the Son and Holy Ghost. I shall cite such parts of it as are most to our purpose. “There is one God omnipotent, who made all things (out of nothing) by his Word – not by angels or by powers separate from his own mind; for the God of all needs nothing, but by his own Word and Spirit, makes, orders, and governs all things, and gives being to all.” [Iren. lib. i. cap. 22. p. 98. Bened. edit.] Here the reader will observe that the Word and Spirit, the Son and the Holy Ghost, are manifestly distinguished from all creatures, from all the things made: and it is the known doctrine of Irenaeus, that the Word and Spirit are the very self of the Father [p. 253. p. 163.] in a qualified sense, reckoned to him, included in him. But let the reader, who desires fuller satisfaction, take along with him [Alexander’s Essay on Irenaeus, p. 19. Printed for J. Clark and R. Hett, 1727.] Mr. Alexander’s excellent observations upon this and two or three more the like places of Irenaeus, and he will find how strong an attestation they amount to, to prove that the doctrine of the Trinity, as now received, was then looked upon as the summary and groundwork of all that Christians believed. There is another Creed of Irenaeus, wherein the Divinity of Christ, the doctrine of God incarnate, is expressed in strong terms. *Christum*

Jesum Dei Filium: qui propter eminentissimam erga figmentum suum dilectionem, eam quae esset ex virgine generationem sustinuit, ipse per se hominem adunans Deo, etc. Iren. lib. iii. c. 4.

There is a like Creed in Tertullian, fully expressing the Divinity of God the Son, and obliquely intimating the Divinity of the Holy Ghost; which however is known to be Tertullian's express doctrine elsewhere, in more places than one. [Tertull. contr. Prax. cap. 9, 13, 30.] His Creed runs thus:

“We believe in one God, but under this dispensation, which we call the economy, that the one God hath a Son, which is his Word, who proceeded from him, by whom all things were made, and without whom nothing was made. He was sent from the Father to the Virgin, and was born of her, both God and man, Son of man, and Son of God – who afterwards, according to his promise, sent from the Father the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, the Sanctifier of the faith of those who believe in the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost. This is the rule which has come down to us from the beginning of the Gospel.” [Tertull. adv. Prax. c. ii. p. 5, 6. Welchm. edit.]

In the next century we have the famous Creed of Gregory Bishop of Neocaesarea, commonly called Thaumaturgus, on the account of the many miracles which God wrought by him. The Creed is as express and explicit as possible for the doctrine of the Trinity, drawn up probably for the obviating all extremes of that time, whether of Samosatensians or Sabellians. Some have questioned the genuineness of it, but without sufficient cause.* I shall here set it down at full length, as follows:

“There is one God, Father of the living Word, the substantial Wisdom, and Power, and eternal express image: perfect parent of one perfect, Father of the only begotten Son. There is one Lord, one of one, God of God, the express character and image of the Godhead, the effective Word, the Wisdom that grasps the system of the universe, and the Power that made every creature, true Son of the true Father, invisible of invisible, incorruptible of incorruptible, immortal of immortal, and eternal of eternal. And there is one Holy Ghost, having his subsistence from God, and shining forth by the Son, [viz. to mankind,] perfect image of the perfect Son, life causal of all living, the holy fountain, essential sanctity, author of all sanctification: in whom God the Father is manifested, who is above all, and in all, and God the Son, who is through all. A perfect Trinity, undivided, unseparated in glory, eternity, and dominion. There is therefore nothing created or servile in this Trinity, nothing adventitious, that once was not, and came in after: for the Father was never without the Son, nor the Son without the Spirit, but this Trinity abides the same, unchangeable and invariable forever.” [Gregor. Thaumaturgi Symbolum apud Gregor. Nyssen. in Vid. Gregor. Opp. tom.

ii. p. 978, 979.] This is the so much celebrated Creed, of which some stories have been told more than we are bound to believe, by Gregory Nyssen: but misreports in circumstances do not invalidate the main thing. I have enclosed a small part of it within brackets, looking upon it as a marginal gloss, made by some ignorant sciolist, and afterwards foisted into the text. I owe the observation to Le Quien, who has confirmed it with substantial reasons, [Mich. Le Quien, in Dissertat. Damascen. tom. i. p. 2.] in his edition of Damascene.

*[The genuineness of the Creed is maintained by Bishop Bull, Defen. F. N. sect ii. c. 12. p. 137. Fabricius B. Gr. vol. v. p. 249. Opp. Hippol. vol. ii. p. 224. Dr. Berriman's Historical Account, p. 138, etc. Mr. Abr. Taylor, True Script. Doctrine, p. 128, etc.]

If it should now be asked, why other Creeds, elder than this, should not be equally explicit, as to the doctrine of the Trinity, or why the western formularies were not as minute and express as some of the eastern; the answer is short and easy: there was not the same occasion. Heresies were more or less prevalent at different times, and in different places; and Creeds varied accordingly. The east was more infested with them than the west: and therefore the eastern Creeds were larger and more explicit, generally, than the western. And when some churches had formed their Creeds, and made it customary for the catechumens to recite them publicly, they might not afterwards think it proper to alter the forms which the people had long been used to, without the greatest necessity. Such is Ruffinus's account of this matter. [Ruffin. in Symbol. p. 17. edit. Ox. Conf. Bull. Judic. Eccl. c. v. p. 312.] And I may add, that there was no absolute necessity of enlarging the baptismal Creeds as often as heresies arose in the Church; because the defects of the shorter Creeds might be competently supplied another way; namely, by very particular instructions and cautions given to the candidates for baptism, in the Catechetical Lectures contrived for that purpose: of which I have treated sufficiently elsewhere, [Sermons, vol. ii. p. 194, etc.] and need not here repeat.

2. But I am further to observe that even those shorter Creeds, such particularly as the Roman, though not so explicit in the article of the Trinity as the eastern Creeds, do yet contain the sum and substance of the doctrine in full and strong terms; provided only, that they be interpreted according to the true and certain meaning of the compilers, as they ought to be. The Creeds of the Church ought most certainly to be interpreted according to the mind of the Church, and not by any afterthoughts of heretics. [Bull. Judic. Eccl. cap. v. p. 322.] For though the Scripture, properly, is the rule for receiving any Creed, or any doctrine, yet it is not the rule of interpretation; but words, phrases, and formularies, must be interpreted according to their received use, and the known sense of the compilers and imposers. [See the Case of Arian Subscription Considered,

vol. ii. p. 354, 355. Remarks on Dr. Clarke's Exposition of the Catechism, p. 25. edit. 3d.] The very judicious author of the Critical History has expressed the same sentiments very fully and clearly, as follows: "Although nothing contained therein must be believed any farther than it agrees with the holy Scriptures, yet the intended sense of the greatest part thereof is not to be fetched from thence, but from the writings of the Fathers, and from those heresies against whom it (the Creed) was designed: which expression may, at the first hearing, be perhaps esteemed by some too hasty and inconsiderate: but the nature of the thing, well reflected on, makes it evident, and beyond contradiction. And if the authority of others before me will be more valued, and better received, it will be no difficult task to produce several who have affirmed the same thing. But at present I shall content myself with the testimony of Monsieur Jurieu, a French Divine now living, who writes in express terms, that for his part, he is persuaded, that we must not seek the *sense* of the articles of the Apostles' Creed in the *scriptures*, but in the *intention* of " those that composed it." [Critical History of the Apostles' Creed, p. 42. edit. 4th.]

From what has been said, it ought to be admitted as a clear case, or a ruled point, that the Creeds of the Church should be interpreted according to the mind of the Church; and the mind of the Church is to be learned chiefly from the writings of the Fathers. And while we proceed by this rule, it is manifest that the ancient Creeds, whether of the larger or shorter kind, do express the doctrine of the Trinity, as commonly received at this day. The Roman Creed for instance, even in its shorter form (as it stood in and before the fourth century), fully expresses the true and proper Divinity of Christ; indirectly, in calling the first Person Father, and directly, in calling the second Person only Son. The very name of Father, applied in the Creed to the first Person, intimates the relation he bears to a Son, of the same nature with him, existing of him, and from him, and with him. This is an observation frequently occurring in the Post-Nicene writers, who derived it from the more early Fathers, as I shall make appear presently. Fulgentius argues, that the Divinity of the Son is sufficiently intimated in the Creed, by the first article's acknowledging God to be a Father; inasmuch as Father and Son must be allowed to be of the same nature, and equal in all essential perfection. [Fulgent. Fragment. xxxvi. p. 652.] Ruffinus, before him, argues in like manner, and .so interprets the first article of the Creed. [Ruffin. in Symbol. p.18. ed. Ox.] Hilary, before them both, expresses the same thought more than once, and insists upon it as of great weight. [Conf. 860, 938, 1163. ed. Benedict.] The Greek writers are full of the same notion, asserting God to be a Father, and from that principle inferring the coequality and proper Divinity of Christ his Son. Gregory Nyssen, in his first oration against Eunomius, expresses the thing thus

[Gregor. Nyssen. Orat. 1. p. 15.]: “He says, there is one only God Almighty: if he means a Father under the name of Almighty, he says the same that we do, and nothing different; but if he intends it of an Almighty who is not a Father, he may preach up circumcision if he pleases, along with his other Jewish tenets. The faith of Christians looks to a Father. The Father indeed is all; he is Most High, Almighty, King of kings, and Lord of lords: whatever tides sound high or great, they belong to the Father; and all things that are the Father’s belong to the Son. Allow but this, and we admit the other.” To the same purpose speaks Athanasius, that the professing our belief in God, as a Father, is at the same time acknowledging the Divinity of the Son. [Athanas. de Decret. Synod. Nic. p. 236. Benedict.] And the like is observed by Cyril of Jerusalem, in his Exposition of the first article of the Creed. [Cyril. Hierosol. Catech. vii. n. 3. cont. Catech. viii. n. 1.]

The authors which I have cited, and to which more might be added, [See others cited and referred to in the Critical History of the Apostle’s Creed, p. 77, 78.] are all Post-Nicenes; but they very well understood the true and genuine principles of their Catholic predecessors, and are so many presumptive evidences of the doctrine of the Ante-Nicene Church, when, though writing on different occasions, and in distant places, they fall in so unanimously with the same way of thinking. Besides, testimonies may be cited from the Ante-Nicene writers themselves, expressing the same notion. Dionysius of Alexandria, who flourished about the middle of the third century, intimates the same thing thus: “The Father being eternal, the Son must be eternal too, light of light. – The names by me mentioned are undivided and inseparable: when I named the Father, before I mentioned the Son, I signified the Son in the Father. – If any of my false accusers suspect, that, because I called God Creator and former of all things, I made him Creator of Christ, let him consider, that I before styled him Father, and so the Son was included in him,” etc. [Dionys. Alex. apud Athenas. de Sententia Dionysii, p. 254, 257.] Here we may observe how this early and excellent writer argues from the very name and relation of Father, that Christ could not be a creature, in like manner as the Post-Nicene writers (before cited) argue from the same title applied to the first Person in the Creed. So that if we interpret the Creed according to the strict sense which the ancients had of the term Father, that very title indirectly asserts the Divinity of Christ, since God is thereby understood to be the Father of Christ, [Compare the Creed of Gregory Thaumaturgus, cited above, where the term Father is interpreted in the same high sense, and as implying the real and essential Divinity of the Son.] and not his Creator, as of angels or men.

But the same thing will be more directly proved from the title of Son, or only Son, applied to the second Person of the Trinity, in the Creed: for all the Fathers, both Ante-Nicene and Post-Nicene, constantly understood that title as

applied to Christ, to be expressive of his real and proper Divinity, of his partaking of the same nature and Godhead with the Father, whose only Son he is. Bishop Bull, in reply to Episcopius, has largely insisted upon this argument, proving that the title of *μονογενης*, only begotten, or only Son, in the Creed, denotes the real and eternal Divinity of Christ. He proves it, 1. from such places of Scripture where that title is applied to Christ. 2. From the strict force and propriety of the expression itself. 3. From the order and texture of the Creed. 4. From the universal and constant interpretation of the ancients. [Bull. Judic. Eccl. cap. v. p. 313.] I may refer to Bishop Bull, and others that have come after him, for proof that the title of Son of God, or only begotten Son, in Scripture, cannot reasonably be understood either of our Lord's miraculous conception by the Holy Ghost, or of his Messiahship, or of his being the first begotten from the dead, or of his receiving all power, and his being appointed heir of all things: none of these circumstances singly considered, nor all together, will be sufficient to account for the title of only Son, or only begotten; but there is a necessity of looking higher up to the preexistent and divine nature of the Word, who was in the beginning with God, and was himself very God, before the creation, and from all eternity. [See Bull. Judic. Eccl. cap. v. p. 313–320. Dr. Sherlock's Scripture Proofs of our Saviour's Divinity, p.161–183. Remarks on Dr. Clarke's Exposition of the Catechism, p. 44–48.] Angels and men have been called sons of God, in an improper and metaphorical sense; but they have never been styled only begotten, nor indeed sons in any such emphatic and distinguishing manner as Christ is. They are sons by adoption, or faint resemblance: he is truly, properly, and eminently Son of God, and therefore God, as every son of man is therefore truly man. [Novat. cap. xi. p. 31. edit. Welchm.] Novatian speaks the sense of all the Ante-Nicene Fathers in that article: I forbear to produce their testimonies here, having done it elsewhere [Sermons, vol. ii. p. 190.]: there is not a more noted principle or maxim among the earliest writers of the Church than this, that Christ is truly, properly, essentially God, because he is properly Son of God. The sum then is that the Apostles' Creed, in styling Christ only Son, or only begotten, has expressed his coeternal Divinity in such terms as were constantly and universally understood by the ancient churches, to carry that idea with them. Therefore the very learned Bishop Stillingfleet had good reason to say, "that although the Apostles' Creed does not in express words declare the Divinity of the three Persons in the Unity of the divine essence; yet taking the sense of those articles, as the Christian Church understood them from the Apostles' times, then we have as full and clear evidence of this doctrine, as we have that we received the Scriptures from them." [Stillingfleet on the Trinity, chap. ix. p. 229.] The result of what has been said under the present article is, that whether we take the longer or the shorter Creeds of the

ancient churches, whether those that are most explicit or those that are least so, all of them contained the doctrine of the Trinity, either as their whole subject matter, or as their principal part: and therefore so far as the Creeds of the ancient Church can be of use to show that any point of doctrine was judged important or fundamental, we have full proof that the doctrine we are speaking of was looked upon as an essential of Christianity in the best and purest ages.

It must indeed be owned, that it never was the intention of Creeds to furnish out any complete catalogue of fundamentals [See my Sermons, vol. ii. p. 193-196. Critical History of the Athanasian Creed, vol. iv. p. 309, etc.] and so it would be very wrong to argue and infer negatively that such an article was not In this or in that Creed, and therefore was not judged a fundamental by the compilers (for by that rule, neither the article of God's being Maker of heaven and earth, nor that of life everlasting, would be fundamental, having both been omitted in the. old Roman Creed), but it may be right enough to argue and infer positively that such an article was inserted in the Creeds, and was therefore judged to be a fundamental, or of great importance; since none could be admitted to Christian baptism, in such or such places, in the early times, without an open and explicit profession of' it. So much for the head of Creeds.

II. Another way of knowing the sentiments of the ancient Church, in relation to the necessity of believing the doctrine of the Trinity, is to observe what censures were passed upon the open impugners of it. For if it was accounted heresy, pernicious and deadly heresy, to oppose that doctrine, in whole or in part, then it is plain that the doctrine was judged important, was looked upon as an essential of the Gospel faith. Among the impugners of that doctrine, in the article of Christ's Divinity, have been commonly reckoned these seven. 1. Cerinthus; 2. Ebion, 3. Theodotus, 4. Artemon, 5. Beryllus, 6. Paul of Samosata, 7. Arius. Of whom I shall treat in their order, as briefly as may be consistent with perspicuity.

A.D. 60. *Cerinthus.*

Cerinthus lived in the apostolic age, was an impugner of our Lord's Divinity, and was condemned for it; probably, by St. John himself, and by the whole Church of that time and after: therefore the article of Christ's Divinity was then looked upon as a fundamental article. This is the sum of what I maintain under this head: I now come to the distinct proof of the several particulars.

1. That Cerinthus lived in the apostolic age is a fact so well attested by great variety of ancient evidences (some of which will come up presently), that it ought to pass for a certain and manifest truth. Yet a late learned foreigner,

[Frideric. Adolph. Lampe, in Comment. in S. Johan. Proleg. lib. ii. cap. 3. p. 181, etc.] having a private hypothesis to serve, has called the fact in question, as some few others before him had also done. [Vid. Buddaeus in Eccles. Apostol. p. 411.] His reasons have been considered and answered by learned hands [Taylor's True Scripture Doctrine, p. 283. Buddaeus, Eccl. Apostol. p.412–419.]; to whom I refer the reader, rather than enter into a needless dispute. Irenaeus is an authority so early, and so express for Cerinthus's [Irenaeus, lib. iii. cap. 3. 11.] flourishing in St. John's time, that it is alone sufficient to remove all doubt of the fact. Indeed Epiphanius [Epiphani. Haeres. xxviii. n. 2. p. 111.] and Philastrius [Philastr. Haeres. xxxvi. p. 80. edit. Fabric.] place Cerinthus so high in the apostolic age that they suppose him to have given great disturbance to St. Peter and St. Paul, and to have occasioned the calling of the first council at Jerusalem, A.D. 49 recorded in the Acts. [Acts 15.] But there is reason to suspect the truth of that report, [Vid. Buddaeus, Eccles. Apostol. p. 113, 196.] and therefore I am content to place Cerinthus some years lower, but early enough to have spread his heresies before St. John wrote his Epistles, and even before St. Paul wrote some of his.

2. Cerinthus held many errors: but the only one I am concerned to take notice of is his denying the Divinity of Christ. That he did so is plainly asserted by the ancient author of the Appendix to Tertullian's book of Prescription. [Cerinthus. Turtul. de Praescript. cap. lxxviii. p. 221. Rigalt.] But Irenaeus, a more early and a more accurate writer, will give us the truest and most distinct account of what Cerinthus held with respect to the Divinity of our blessed Lord. The sum of this heresy in that point was; that Jesus and Christ were two Persons: Jesus a mere man, conceived in the natural way, of Joseph and Mary; and Christ a celestial spirit, which descended from above, and resided in the man Jesus, not constantly, but occasionally, from his baptism to his crucifixion. [Iren. lib. i. cap. 26. p. 105. Bened. Conf. Epiphani. Haeres. xxviii. p. 110.] Whatever view we take this doctrine of Cerinthus in, it is denying the proper Divinity of our blessed Lord. The man Jesus, upon his principles, could not be divine at all, having no constant or personal union with what descended from above: and as to that spiritual substance, called Christ, which was supposed, some time, to reside in him, even that was not properly divine, according to Cerinthus. The most that he said of it was, that it was spiritual, and impassible because spiritual; he does not say because divine. He separates him from the principality that is over all, that is to say, from God supreme, and therefore could not look upon him as properly divine. I may further observe, that his doctrine of the Logos, or Word, was, that he was Son, not of God supreme, but of the only begotten, [Iren. lib. iii. cap. 11. p. 198.] one remove still farther off from God most high. And since he thus distinguished him from the only begotten, who was alone supposed to know the

Father immediately, it is plain he could not look upon the Word as strictly divine. Add to this, that Epiphanius, speaking of some of the Ebionites (who were near allied to the Cerinthians, and borrowed much of their doctrine from them), says, that they supposed their Christ to have descended from heaven, being a spirit, and first created of all, higher than the angels, and bearing rule over all; which afterwards assumed a body. [Epiphan. Haeres. xxx. cap. 3. p. 127. Conf. Vitringa. Observat. Sacr. lib. v. cap. 12. sect. 7. p. 146. edit. ult.] This description of Christ from above seems to answer pretty nearly to Cerinthus's notion of a spiritual substance, called Christ, so descending and residing in Jesus; and is a confirmation of what I am pleading for, viz. that Cerinthus did not look upon Christ as divine, (in any capacity) but as a creature only. So then, whether we consider Cerinthus as making Jesus a mere man, or as supposing the Christ (sometimes residing in Jesus) to be an inferior AEon, produced in time, and the offspring of silence, [See Bishop Bull. Def. F. N. sect. iii. cap. 1. p. 160, et Greg. Nazianz. Orat. xxiii. p. 414.] or, in short, a creature; either way he plainly impugned the true and proper Divinity of Jesus Christ.

3. The next thing to be considered is, what kind of reception such his doctrine met with in the Church of Christ. We have good reason to believe, that it was condemned as antichristian doctrine, by the Bishops of Asia, and by St. John himself. Indeed our proofs of this matter are of the conjectural kind: but they are not without their weight, if they amount to rational presumptions or strong probabilities. If it can be probably argued from external evidence, that St. John wrote his Gospel, or Epistles, in direct opposition to the tenets of Cerinthus, and if the internal characters of his writings themselves confirm the report; then both these circumstances concurring in the same thing, will together amount to as fair a proof of what we pretend, as matters of this nature will generally admit of.

That St. John wrote his Gospel with a view to confute Cerinthus, among other false teachers, is attested first by Irenaeus, [Iren. lib. iii. cap. 11. p. 188.] who was a disciple of Polycarp, and who flourished within less than a century of St. John's time. He is very particular in the account, observing what special errors of the same Cerinthus and others, the Apostle had an eye to, in the penning of his Gospel.

Our next author to Irenaeus is Victorinus Petavionensis, who flourished about A.D. 290. He reports that the Bishops of Asia, being alarmed at the pernicious doctrines then disseminated by Valentinus, Cerinthus, and Ebion, came in a body to St. John, importuning him to bear his testimony against them. [Victorin. in Apocalyps. Bibl. PP. tom. i. p. 576. alias tom. iii. p. 418.] The author, probably, mistakes in bringing in Valentinus so early: but that will not invalidate

his report as to the other two, or as to the main thing. Some doubts have been raised about the genuineness of that treatise ascribed to Victorinus: but Dr. Grabe seems to have well taken off the only material exception to it [Grabe, *Spicileg.* vol. ii. p. 45.]: to him therefore I refer the reader.

Our next author is Jerome, who twice tells the same story, with some particular circumstances, not so plainly intimated elsewhere; once in his prologue to his Commentaries on St. Matthew, [Hieronym. Prolog. in Matt. p. 3. opp. torn. iv. edit. Bened.] and again in his book of Ecclesiastical Writers. [Hieronym. de Viris illustrib. c. ix. p. 54, 55. Fabric.] He does not say, in particular, from whence he had his accounts: but he was a learned man, conversant in books, and he intimates that he had his intelligence from ecclesiastical memoirs.

Epiphanius of the same time testifies more than once, that St. John wrote against Cerinthus and Ebion, who had taught that Christ was a mere man. [Epiphan. Haeres. li. 2. p. 423. Conf. p. 424, 433, 434. Harr. lxix. p. 747.] It is some confirmation of this, what Irenaeus relates of St. John's meeting with Cerinthus at the bath (as I have before noted), and running from him with disdain. It shows, at least, that St. John and he were contemporaries, and that the Apostle well understood his principles, and detested them.

The main of the account may receive some farther confirmation from what Julian, the apostate Emperor, was pleased to observe (thirty years or more before St. Jerome), that John perceiving how that the persuasion of Christ's being God prevailed mightily among the Christians dispersed through many cities of Greece and Italy, did then take upon him to assert the same doctrine in his Gospel, with a view to humour them, and to get himself reputation. [Julian apud Cyril. lib. x. p. 327. edit. Lips.] Here then we have a plain confession from a vehement adversary, which confession of his (ridicule and banter apart) amounts to this; that the generality of Christians, as early as the apostolic age, were exceedingly zealous for the doctrine of Christ's Divinity, and that St. John himself commended them for it, encouraged them in it, and wrote his Gospel to confirm it. Julian, very probably, had learned it from incontestable monuments of antiquity; and since he could not disown the fact, he endeavoured, in his ludicrous way, to turn the whole into ridicule. He says nothing indeed of Cerinthus or Ebion, as he had no occasion: but yet this story of his, as he has told it, falls in with the other accounts in the main thing; for which reason I have mentioned it. Such is the external evidence we have to prove, that St. John, at the request of the bishops and churches of that time, wrote his Gospel to establish the faith of Christians in our Lord's Divinity, against Cerinthus and Ebion, or other false teachers who opposed it. [The very learned Vitringa has objected to this account, as to some circumstances. *Observ. Sacr.* lib. v. c. 10. sect. 7, 8. But he is well answered by Buddaeus,

Eccl. Apostol. p.419, etc.]

The truth of the fact will be much confirmed from the internal characters of St. John's writings: and this will fully appear by comparing his expressions with Cerinthus's tenets, observing, all the way, how aptly they answer in that respect, directly confronting and overturning the principles of that heresiarch and his followers.

In the beginning was the Word. That is to say, at the creation of all things (*εν αρχη*, as in Genesis) the Word existed [Origen. Comment. in Joan. p. 50. Conf. Buddaeus, Eccl. Apostol. p. 430, 438. Bull. Judic. Eccl. c. ii. sect. 4. p. 294.]: therefore he was before any creature; not only before Joseph and Mary, but even before any such created AEon as Cerinthus had talked of, whether called the Word or Christ.

And the Word was with God. Not a separate AEon, inferior to God, and distant from God (like to what Cerinthus supposed of the Demiurgus, the Maker or Framer of the world [Irenaeus, lib. i. c. 26. p. 105. lib. iii. c. 11. p. 188. Pseudo-Tertullian. de Praescript. Haeret. Append. p. 221. Epiphani. Haeres. xxviii. n. 1. p. 110.]), not estranged from God, but united to him, and abiding with him, [Origen. in Joan. p. 44.] while personally distinct from him.

And the Word was God. Not a mere man, as Cerinthus asserted of Jesus, nor a creature, as Cerinthus imagined of Christ, or of the Word, but very God. [Buddaei Eccles. Apostolica, p. 438.]

The same was in the beginning with God. This is resuming what had been said before, after a kind of break, to connect it the more closely with the account of the creation (which the Apostle was just going to mention), and to inculcate the more strongly, against Cerinthus, that he by whom all things were made was no distant, inferior AEon, estranged from God, and unacquainted with him, but one that had been always with the supreme Father.

All things were made by him. By the Word. Not by an inferior Demiurgus, not by any separate powers, not by angels (as the Cerinthians taught),* not by any creature creator, but by the Word himself, very God, and one with God. [Buddei Eccles. Apostol. p. 438. Conf. Vitring. Observ. Sacr. lib. v. c. 13. a. 4. p. 155.]

*[Theodorit. Haeret. Fab. lib. ii. c. 3. lib. v. c. 9. Augustin de Haeres. c. viii. Epiphani. Haeres. 28. 1. Philastr. Haer. 36, p. 77. Pseudo-Tertullian. Praescript. c. 68. Damascene. Haer. 28.]

And without him was not anything made that was made. Not the lower world only, but the upper world also; not the material and visible world only, but the world of invisibles, the celestial spirits, angels and archangels, they also were made by the same Word; for there was nothing made without him. [Bull. Judic. Eccl. c. ii. p. 294.] "By him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that

are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him.” [Col. 1:16. See my Sermons, vol. ii. p. 34–37.] So writes St. Paul, the best interpreter of what we have in St. John, as writing by the same Spirit, and with the same views, and probably against the very same men. Indeed, there is not in the whole New Testament anything of a more sublime and exalted strain, concerning the personal dignity of our blessed Lord, than what we find in the first chapter to the Colossians, from the fifteenth to the nineteenth verse inclusive; and in the second, from verse the second to the tenth. Those passages come the nearest of any to St. John’s divine proeme, and are only to be matched with it. It would be too great a digression here, to show how those so emphatic expressions of St. Paul are all particularly fitted to confront the tenets of Cerinthus, as if chosen for that very purpose, and directly pointed at them: but the learned reader who is disposed to examine into the fact, may consult a very judicious foreigner, who has drawn that matter out at length, expounding what St. Paul has said in those two chapters, in a very clear and excellent manner, by the opposition which it carries in it all the way to the Cerinthian heresy. [Buddaeus, Eccles. Apostolica, p. 468–487.] I return to St. John.

In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The same *Word* was *life*, the Λόγος and ζῶη, both one. [Vitringa in Prolog. Evangel. Johan. Observ. Sacr. lib. v. c. 13. p. 180.] There was no occasion therefore for subtly distinguishing the *Word* and *life* into two *Lolls*, as some did.

And the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness cometh not upon it. So I render the verse, conformable to the rendering of the same Greek verb, καταλαμβάνω, by our translators, in another place of this same Gospel. [John 12:35. Vid. Bps. Exercitat. in Johan. p. 54, 55.] The Apostle, as I conceive, in this fifth verse of his first chapter, alludes to the prevailing error of the Gnostics, and of all that sort of men; [Vid. Vitringa, Observat. Sacr. lib. v. c. 13. p. 136. Epiphanius speaking of the Gnosticism of those times, derives it in part from the perplexity which those men were under, in the question about the origin of evil. Epiphan. Haeres. xxiv. 6.] who had adopted the ancient Magian notion of a good God and an evil God, the first called *Light*, and the other *Darkness*: which two they supposed to be under perpetual struggles, and obstructed by each other. In opposition, probably, to those Magian principles, St. John here asserts, that the *Word*, the true *light*, was much superior to any such pretended rival power. In him was no darkness at all [“God is light, and in him is no darkness at all,” 1 John 1:5.]: no such opposite power could come upon him, to obstruct his purposes, or defeat his good and great designs.

He was in the world, and the world had been made by him, but the world

knew him not. So I translate, for greater accuracy and perspicuity. *He came unto his own, and his own received him not.* These two verses manifestly confront several of the Gnostic principles, viz. that the world was made by an inferior and evil God, an angel called Demiurgus; and that Christ came into another person's work, or province, not into his own, when he manifested himself to the world [Bull. Judic. Eccles. cap. ii. sect. 4. p. 294. Conf. Iren. lib. iii. c. 11. et lib. v. c. 18.]; and that he did not so manifest himself before his incarnation. Those several errors seem to be directly pointed at, and confuted by what the Evangelist has taught in those two verses [Vitringa, Observ. Sacr. vol. iii. p. 180.]. But of the true interpretation of those two verses, I have treated more largely elsewhere. [Sermons, vol. ii. p. 28, 29, 30.]

And the word was made flesh, became personally united with the man Jesus; *and dwelt among us,* resided constantly in the human nature so assumed. Very emphatical and pointed expressions, searching to the root of every heresy almost of that time, so far as concerned the person of Christ: for none of them would admit the Word made flesh, or God made man. [Iren. lib. iii. c. 11. p. 189. Conf. Bull. Judic. Eccl. c. ii. sect. 4. p. 194.] Such sentiments agreed not with their vain philosophy; they deemed the thing to be incredible. [Tertid. contr. Marcion. lib. iii. c. 8. p. 401. Conf. Just. Mart. Dial. p. 140, 204. edit. Jebb.] The Cerinthians admitted that a celestial spirit, descended occasionally upon Jesus; but they neither allowed that spirit to be personally united with Jesus, nor to be properly divine, as St. John teaches: so that in two respects those words of the Apostle confute their principles. [Budd. Eccl. Apost. p. 440.]

And we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the father, etc. Words diametrically opposite to Cerinthus's hypothesis, [Buddaeus, ibid. p. 440.] which made the Logos not the only begotten of the Father, but a remove farther off, viz. the Son of the only begotten, as before observed.

And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. The expression, of his fullness, [εκ του ωληρώματος αυτου,] is very observable. The Gnostics in general, and the Cerinthians in particular, were wont to talk much of the ωλήρωμα, or fullness; by which they meant a fictitious plenitude of the Deity, in which the whole race of AEons was supposed to subsist, and into which spiritual men (such as they esteemed themselves) should hereafter be received. It was the doctrine of the Valentinians (and probably of the elder Gnostics also), that they were themselves of the spiritual seed, had constant grace, and could not fail of being admitted into the plenitude above [Iren. lib. i. c. 6. p. 31.]; while others were in their esteem carnal, had grace but sparingly, or occasionally, and that not to bring them so high as the plenitude; but to an intermediate station only. But St. John here asserts, [Vitringa, Obs. Sacr. lib. v. c. 13.

p. 155, 156.] that all Christians equally and indifferently, all believers at large, have received of the plenitude, or fulness of the divine Logos; and that not sparingly, but in the largest measure, grace upon grace, accumulated grace [See Bull. Harmon. Apostol. Dissert. ii. c. 11. p. 481.]: or rather, grace following in constant succession, grace for grace; that is, new succours coming on as quick as the former should wear off or cease, or new supplies for the old ones past and gone, [Vid. Gataker. Adversar. Sacr. c. xxvii. Anonymi Fortuita Sacra, p. 80, 81, etc. Suicer. Thesaur. p. 1497.] without failure or intermission. Our present rendering, grace for grace, is literal, and just; provided only we understand it thus, that whenever one grace ceases or expires, another comes in its place, and is given us for the former, or in lieu of the former.

I have now run through the proeme of St. John's Gospel, endeavouring all the way to show how aptly the expressions suit with the supposition which I here go upon, that it was penned with a particular view to the heresies of Cerinthus and Ebion; to say nothing of Simon Magus, or the Gnostics of those times: for though I have chiefly, or in a manner solely, made Cerinthus's heresy the subject of this article, yet I would be understood to include any other heretics of the same time, or before him, so far as they fell in with the same common errors.

Let us now pass on to St. John's First Epistle, in order to consider whether that likewise may not be naturally interpreted the same way; so that one and the same key may serve for both.

Irenaeus seems to say, that St. John pointed his Epistle [Ibid. p. 207.] against the same. Tertullian also intimates, that St. John directed some parts of his Epistle against the Ebionites. [Tertull. Praescrip. c. 33. p. 214.] And St. Jerome insinuates, that he pointed his censure both against Cerinthus and Ebion, marking them out as antichrists in his Epistle. [See the whole passage cited above, p. 178.] If we come to examine the Epistle itself, we shall easily perceive, that a great part of it was levelled, not so much against Jews or Pagans, as against false Christians, against the heretics of that time, Simonians perhaps, or Cerinthians, or Ebionites, or Nicolaitans, or all of them, according as his expressions here or there are particularly pointed. The two principal errors which he there censures were, the denial of Christ's being come in the flesh, [1 John 4:3. compare 2 John 7.] and the disowning that Jesus was Christ. [1 John 2:22.] The Docetae (as they were afterwards called), the followers of Simon Magus, denied Christ's real humanity, making him a mere phantom, shadow, or apparition, a walking ghost, as I observed above. [See above.] And the Cerinthians making a distinction between Jesus and Christ, did not allow that both were one person. Against those chiefly St. John wrote his Epistle. He speaks of antichrists newly risen up [1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3. 2 John 7.]; which could not be intended of Jews or Pagans, who had opposed

the Gospel all along: and he speaks of men that had been of the Church, but had apostatized from it; “they went out from us, but they were not of us.” [1 John 2:19.] Let us now proceed to the explication of those passages in St. John’s Epistle, which relate to our purpose.

The Apostle observes, that *the word of life* (or the Word in whom was life, John 1:4.) *was from the beginning* [1 John 1:1.]; conformable to what he says in the entrance to his Gospel, and in opposition both to Cerinthus and Ebion, who made Jesus a mere man, and who either denied any preexisting substantial Logos, or, at most, supposed him to stand foremost in the rank of creatures. The Apostle further styles the same Logos *eternal life*, [1 John 1: 2. compare 1 John 5:20.] to intimate his eternal existence, in opposition to the same heretics. He adds, *which was with the father*, parallel to what he says in his Gospel, *was with God*, and which has been explained above. [See above. Conf. Tertull. contr. Prax. c. xv. Bull. Judic. Eccles. c. ii. sect. 5. p. 295.]

In the second chapter of the same Epistle, the Apostle describes the antichristian heretics of that time as *denying that Jesus is Christ*; which amounted to the same with *denying the Father and the Son* [1 John 2:22.]; because *Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father*. [1 John 2:23. Basil. Judic. Eccles. c. ii. sect. 5. p. 296.] Cerinthus denied that Jesus was Christ, dividing Christ from Jesus, as before explained: and he of consequence denied the Son, because he allowed not that Jesus was personally united with the Word, the eternal Son of God, nor that that Logos which he speaks of was the only begotten of the Father, being Son only of the only begotten, according to his scheme: so that he totally disowned the divine Sonship both of Jesus and Christ, and by such denial denied both the Father and Son. [Buddaei Eccles. Apostol. p. 445.]

The Apostle goes on to say, *Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God*. [1 John 4:15. compare 3:23.] Where again he manifestly strikes at the Cerinthian and Ebionite principles, which allowed not Jesus to be the Son of God, in any true and proper sense, such as St. John lays down in several places of his writings, but particularly in the entrance to his Gospel, [Bull. Judic. c. ii. sect. 9. p. 297.] as explained above.

In the chapter next following, the Apostle repeats the same thing as before, or uses words to the same effect: *Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God* [1 John 5:1.]: and soon after adds, *Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?* [1 John 5:5.] Here lay the main stress, to believe that Jesus, who was truly and really man, was as truly and really the eternal Son of God. [Bull. ibid. p. 297.] The Apostle, in the next verse, seems to point at the Docetae, as he had before done in the same Epistle, [1 John 4:2–3. compare 2 John 7. and see Bull. Judic. p. 296. Buddaei Eccl. Apostol. p. 550,

etc.] being equally concerned to maintain, that Christ had real flesh, as that he had real Divinity; that so the faith of the Gospel might stand upon this firm foundation, that the eternal Son of God became Son of man for the salvation of mankind. Hereupon therefore the Apostle, in defense of Christ's real humanity, says, *This is he that came by water and blood.* [1 John 5:6.] What he elsewhere expresses, by his coming in the flesh, [1 John 1:1–2, 4:2–3. 2 John 7. compare 1 Tim. 3:16. 1 Peter 3:18, 4:1.] here he expresses more emphatically, by his coming in, or by water and blood; alluding to what Christ shed at his passion, as a proof that he had then a real body, and was really man, not a specter, phantom, or apparition, as some heretics pretended. It is to be noted, that the ancient visionaries (who were the Simonians, Menandrians, Saturnilians, and Basilidians), being ashamed perhaps to confess Christ crucified, [Hence it is that Polycarp joins both together in the same reproof: Polycarp. Epist. c. 7.] contrived any wild supposition imaginable to evade it. Basilides pretended that Christ himself did not suffer, but that Simon of Cyrene was crucified in his room. [Irenaeus lib. i. c. 24. alias 22. p.101. Epiphanius. xxiv. 3. Philastrus. c. xxxli. p. 68. Augustinus. de Haeres. n. iv. Theodoritus. Haeret. Fab. lib. i. c. 4.] The elder Docetae had not so happy a talent at inventing, but were content to say that Christ had no real body, and suffered in appearance only, imposing upon the eyes of the spectators. In opposition probably to that kind of men (of which there might be many in the apostolic age), the Apostle here emphatically observes, that Christ came by water and blood: for his shedding both water and blood out of his side, at his passion, was a demonstration, that there was a real body then hanging upon the cross, not a phantom, or a spiritual substance. Which very argument is well urged by Irenaeus [Iren. lib. iv. c. 33. (alias 57.) p. 271.] and Novatian, [Novat. c. x. p. 31. edit. Welchm.] in proof of the same thing, against the Docetae. As St. John is the only Evangelist who has related that circumstance of the passion, [John 11:34.] so it is observable, how particular a stress he lays upon it; immediately subjoining, in confirmation of it, *and he that saw it* (meaning himself perhaps, or else the soldier that pierced our Lord [See Dodwell, Dissert. in Iren. i. p. 39.]) bare record, *and his record is true*, etc. And he confirms it farther from two prophecies out of the Old Testament. Wherefore it is the more probable, that in his Epistle before, he alluded to that circumstance, and in proof of Christ's humanity. But St. John strengthens the argument further, by superadding the consideration of the testimony of the Spirit. *And there is the spirit also bearing witness, because the spirit is truth* [1 John 5:6.] itself, is essential truth. The Spirit residing in the Church, and working in believers by supernatural graces, bears testimony to the doctrine taught by the Apostles, and believed by the Church; particularly to the doctrine here spoken of, viz. that Christ the Son of God became Son of man for

the salvation of mankind.

The Apostle, having said that the Spirit is truth, or essential truth (which was giving him a title common to God the Father, and to Christ), in order to obviate any misapprehension or offence, accounts for what he had said, and reconciles it, by declaring presently that the Father, and the Word, and the Spirit are all one, are equally truth itself: *For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one.* [1 John 5:7.] Therefore it was as right to say, that the Spirit is truth, as it might be to say it either of Father or Son, since they are all one. That point being cleared, the Apostle then returns [1 John 5:8.] to speak of the Spirit, the water, and the blood, as testifying the same thing to mankind, which is testified above to the angels in heaven. And the Spirit is now particularly mentioned as bearing witness in earth (rather than the Father or the Son), because, since the time of Christ's ascension, the Church has been under the special economy of the Holy Spirit, who was to guide the Apostles, and the churches after them, into all truth. [John 16:13.]

I know it has been objected that this way of reckoning the Spirit twice is reducing the six witnesses to five. Now, indeed, if the text had called them six witnesses, there would have been some force in the objection: but as it is mere fancy and presumption, to make them six, we may take the liberty to think, that the fifth twice told will fully answer all that the text mentions.

The Apostle having said thus much of the testimony of the Spirit, who is one with the Father, comes next to make the proper application of it, enforcing it still farther, by directly calling it the testimony of God: *If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this is the witness of God, which he hath testified of his Son* [1 John 5:9.] – *that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.* [1 John 5:11.] This is the burden of the whole Epistle, the sum and substance of what the Apostle aims at quite through, [Bull. Judic. Eccl. c. ii. s. 9. p. 297.] that God had been pleased to reconcile the world unto himself by the mediation of his own divine Son made man. This was what the water and the blood testified in part, and what the Spirit of God, one with God, more abundantly testifies in the whole. [Buddaeus, Eccl. Apostol. p. 446.]

I was willing thus occasionally to explain that celebrated passage, concerning the three Witnesses, which has been the subject of long and warm debates, both as to the genuineness of the text, and the connection of it with the rest, upon which hangs the true interpretation. The exposition which I have given appears to me just and natural, supposing the text to be genuine: and I conceive that the genuineness thereof has been sufficiently maintained by a great many able hands [See most of them numbered up in Taylor's True Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity, p. 32.]; and particularly by a late learned and accurate writer, [Mr. Twells,

Critical Examination of the New Text and Version of the New Testament, part ii. p. 123–154.] to whose useful labours I refer the reader for satisfaction, and now I return.

The Apostle, in the close, remarkably sums up all, in these strong and chosen words: *We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.* [1 John 5:20.] I need not here stand to prove, that the title of true God, in this text, is to be understood of Christ, because I have done it elsewhere [Sermons, vol. ii. p. 123–128. Compare Taylor's True Scripture Doctrine, p. 282, etc. Dr. Bishop's Eight Sermons, p. 56, etc.]: but I would observe farther, how aptly every word is chosen to obviate the erroneous tenets of Cerinthus, and of other the like false teachers of those times. The Son of God: not the Son of Joseph and Mary, nor the Son of the only begotten, but the immediate Son of God; related to God as a son to a father, not as a creature to his Lord and Maker. He is come, come in the flesh, and not merely to reside for a time, or occasionally, and to fly off again, but to abide and dwell with man, clothed with humanity. We are in him that is true, in the true Father, by his Son Jesus Christ: who is the true God; not an inferior power or angel (such as Cerinthus supposed the Demiurgus to be), not a created AEon, the offspring of the Monogenes, or of Silence, as Cerinthus fondly imagined the Logos to be; but true God, one with the Father. And eternal life, the same that had been with the Father from the beginning, before anything was created, consequently from all eternity.

I have now gone through both the Epistle and Gospel of St. John, pointing out the most observable passages in both, which concerned the present question. The sum of what I have advanced under this article is, that St. John most apparently levelled a great part of his First Epistle against the Cerinthian doctrines; and that it may be strongly argued, from evidences external and internal, that he wrote the proeme to his Gospel with the same or the like views. It appears further, that in his Epistle particularly, he has asserted the necessity of believing our Lord's divine Sonship, his proper Divinity, under pain of being excluded heaven and happiness: "Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father." Whosoever denies Christ to be Son of God (in St. John's sense of Son, a Son that was always with God, and is God), is a liar and antichrist, denying both the Father and the Son. [1 John 2:22–23.] The conclusion therefore from all is, that the denying our blessed Lord's real Divinity is heresy and antichristianism, much to be abhorred by every disciple of Christ, according to the infallible decision of an inspired Apostle. [Bull. Judic. Eccl. p. 298.] Many were the evasions and subterfuges of self-opinionated men, who thought it a thing incredible that the divine Word should put on flesh, or God become man, and

who chose rather to pass censure upon the wisdom of Heaven, than suspect their own: but sober and modest men resigned up their faith to divine revelation, as was their bounden duty to do; and among the foremost of those was our blessed Apostle. So now, besides the reason of things, taking in what the Scriptures have declared of the truth of our doctrine, and besides the true and natural import of the form of baptism (urged above), we have moreover the determination of St. John himself, for the importance of the doctrine of our Lord's Divinity, and of consequence, for the doctrine of a coequal and coeternal Trinity.

But supposing it might be reasonably doubted (though I see not how it can) whether we have rightly interpreted St. John as to the main thing, or whether Cerinthus and others of like principles were directly struck at by him; yet still we may be able to maintain our point another way, by showing at least that the ancient churches, next succeeding the Apostles, and the churches after, did condemn Cerinthus and Ebion, and all others who denied our Lord's real and proper Divinity. And I may here observe, before I go farther, that if what I have offered about St. John's condemning the doctrine of Cerinthus be just, it may be considered as looking forwards, and condemning the principles of the Ebionites also, whom I am next to mention: and so on the other hand, what I shall have to say of the Ebionites, and their being condemned by the Church, may be understood to look backwards, equally affecting the Cerinthians so far as they agreed in the same common sentiments. Indeed, Bishop Bull had considered both together, and in a scriptural view, as I have hitherto considered Cerinthus singly: but I apprehended that if one were taken in a scriptural, and the other in an ecclesiastical view, the two parts would reflect light and strength one upon another, and the whole would be both more distinct and more complete. I proceed then to consider the Ebionites, as censured by the Church, in the second and third centuries, for denying our Lord's Divinity; though, if what I have before advanced be true, they were fully condemned before for the same, even within the apostolic age, as well as the Cerinthians.

A.D. 72. *Ebion.*

From Cerinthus the master, I pass on to Ebion, his disciple and successor [Pseudo-Tertullian. Prescript. cap. xlvi. p. 221. Philastr. Haeres. xxxvii. p. 81. Dial. contr. Lucifer. p. 304.]; so called, I suppose, because of his being Cerinthus's admirer and follower in some things. They seem to have been contemporaries, both of the apostolic age, though Ebion, perhaps, the younger or later of the two. I follow Epiphanius chiefly, in placing Ebion as I do, [Epiphanius. Haer. xxx. 2.] a little after the time of the destruction of Jerusalem. But if he flourished ten or twenty years later, or began to spread his heresy but a little before St. John wrote his Gospel

(that is, before A.D. 97), as Jerome seems to have thought, that will make no difference with respect to the main thing which I am upon.

Neither is it very material, whether there ever was such a person as Ebion, founder of the sect, or whether the Ebionites took their name from their mean condition, or from their poor and abject notions, rather than from any leader called Ebion. But as the ancients in general do assert there was such a man,* though some few of them may seem to contradict it, I cannot but esteem their testimonies as much more weighty than the conjectures of some learned moderns, [See the most of them numbered up in Ittigius de Haeres. primi Secul. p. 303. Buddaeus, Eccles. Apostol. p. 492.] though specious, to the contrary: besides that other as learned and judicious moderns [Bull. Judic. Eccles. cap. ii. sect. 17. p. 303. Fabricius in not. ad Philastr. p. 81, etc. Mosheim. Observ. Sacr. lib. i. c. 5. Et in Vindic. cont. Toland. c. 7. Buddaeus, Eccles. Apostol. p. 491, etc. Berriman, Serm. p. 48.] have well defended the ancient persuasion, and have sufficiently replied to the common exceptions made to it. Wherefore, there remains very little room for doubt or scruple, as to the truth of the fact, that there was formerly such a person as Ebion, founder of the sect of the Ebionites.

*[Tertullian. Prescript, cap. x. xxxiii. de Carn. Christi, c. xiv. xviii. Virg. Veland. c. vi. Victorinus Petavion. in Apocalyps. Alexand. Alexandr. Epist. Synod. apud Theodorit. E. H. lib. i. cap. 4. p. 15. Hilarius, p. 779, 789, 799, 916, 919. edit. Bened. Ruffin. in Symbol. p. 27. Theodorit. Haeret. Fabul. p. 188, 218. Epiphan. Haeres. xxx. 2. et passim. Philastr. Haer. xxxvii. p. 81. Hieron. contr. Lucifer. p. 304. et in Isai. 1:3. p. 10. adv. Helvid. p. 141. et alibi. Augustin. Epist. ad Hieronym. lxxii. p. 195. ed. Bened.]

The Ebionites, as all allow, denied any proper Divinity of Christ. Some of them indeed admitted that he was born of a virgin [Vid. Origen. contr. Cels. lib. v. p. 272. Theodorit. Haeret. Fab. lib. ii. c. 1. p. 219.]; but most of them, the elder Ebionites especially, denied even that,* and none of them confessed his true Godhead. I shall not here stand to enumerate or clear their sentiments, because they are well known; besides that they will appear distinctly in the sequel, as I run through the Ante-Nicene writers in order, who have condemned the Ebionites by name, or at least have condemned their principles, as amounting to heresy.

*[Vid. Irenaeus, lib. iii. c. 21. p. 215. lib. v. c. 1. p. 292. Tertullian de Carn. Christi, c. xiv. p. 319. Eusebius, Eccl. H. lib. iii. c. 27. Epiphan. Haer. xxx. p. 125. Theodorit. Haeret. Fab. lib. ii. c. 1. p. 218. Philastr. Haeres. xxxvii. p. 82.]

A.D. 107. I shall begin with Ignatius, an eminent personage, a disciple of St. John, and by him ordained Bishop of Antioch, and who afterwards died a martyr, either in 116 or 107. Accounts differ as to the time: I choose, with the learned Mosheim, [Mosheim. Vindiciae. Antiquae contr. Toland. c. viii. p. 230.] to take the earlier date, according to the Acts of his martyrdom, being as probable as the

other. Ignatius does not mention the Ebionites by name; but he plainly enough condemns their principles, in more places than one.

In his Epistle to the Ephesians, he commends their unity of faith and doctrine, inasmuch as they walked according to truth, and no heresy dwelt with them. [Ignat. Epist. ad Ephes. c. 6.] Then he proceeds to speak of heretics, as follows: "Some are wont to bear about them the name [of Christ] in wicked craftiness, while they commit things unworthy of God: whom it behooves you to avoid as you would wild beasts. For they are a kind of fell dogs that will bite you unawares: you should be upon your guard against them, as they are next to incurable. There is one Physician fleshly and spiritual, made and not made, God incarnate, in mortality true life, both of Mary and of God, first passible and then impassible [Jesus Christ our Lord], let no one therefore deceive you; as hitherto "you are not deceived, but are wholly of God." [Ignat. ad Ephes. 7, 8.]

These words of Ignatius, in their general view, strike at all the heresies of that time, which any way tended to undermine the doctrine of God incarnate, whether by impugning Christ's humanity or Divinity: and as the Ebionites and Cerinthians were among those that impugned our Lord's Divinity, the censure here given must of course affect them. Some of the expressions seem to be particularly pointed at them. Made and not made: the words not made directly confront both those heresies. [See my Second Defence, vol. iii. p. 239. Bull. Def. F. N. sect ii. c. 2. p. 39. Judic. Eccl. cap. i. n. 1. p. 296.] So also the words God incarnate, God coming in the flesh. Then again, of Mary and of God: those heretics would have said, of Mary and of Joseph; none of them would then have said, of God. Let the reader observe, that Ignatius here plainly excludes all such heretics from salvation, since they had rejected the only Physician that could heal them, Christ God-man, by denying the union of God and man in him. [Bull. Judic. Eccles. p. 286.] The principles which this truly primitive and apostolical writer goes upon are, 1. That the salutary doctrine of redemption is, that the reconciliation of God and man is wrought by a Mediator who is both God and man. 2. That denying and opposing that doctrine is, in effect, renouncing all claim to the benefit of it, since it is reasonable to think, that when God reveals his good and gracious designs towards mankind, they who will not give credit to them shall have no part in them. St. John himself seems to go upon the same general principle, where he says, "Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father." [1 John 2:23.] He that throws up the belief of the privileges granted, does interpretatively throw up the privileges themselves: this is a maxim which appears to run through the writings of all the Fathers, where they are treating of heresies; and we shall find more of it as we pass along.

In the same Epistle, the same heavenly man, after expressing his

detestation of heresies in very strong words, which I have quoted above, [See above.] proceeds to set down the faith of the Church, with respect to the Incarnation of the Son of God, in these remarkable lines: “For Jesus Christ, our God, was conceived of Mary, according to the divine dispensation, being of the seed of David, and of the Holy Spirit.” [Ignat. ad Ephes. c. 18.] Against the impugners of this doctrine, the good man, in the same place, threatens hell and damnation [cap. 16.]: so little was he acquainted with that neutrality and indifference which has since too much prevailed. Yet he was a person of admirable lenity in his temper, and of a most exalted charity; which he proved by that very instance, since nothing could have extorted those expressions from him, but a most ardent zeal for the salvation of souls. [Bull. Judic. c.. i. p. 287.]

A.D. 155. Justin, the philosopher, afterwards martyr, is our next considerable writer. His real and great concern for the doctrine of our Lord’s Divinity appears all the way through his famous Dialogue with Trypho the Jew; being the relation of a conference he had held at Ephesus with that most celebrated Rabbi. [Euseb. E. H. lib. iv. c. 18.] He makes no express mention of the Ebionites, and so does not condemn them by name; but he does it more than once, by necessary inference and implication. I forbear to cite the places, choosing rather, for brevity sake, to refer the reader to Bishop Bull, who has produced them at length, and descanted properly upon them. [Bull. Judic. Eccles. cap. vii. s. 11, 12. p. 349, etc.]

But there is one passage in Justin, which requires a more particular consideration, because the Socinians and Remonstrants have frequently boasted of it, and do so to this day, as proving, in their opinion, that those who disowned Christ's proper Divinity, or even preexistence, were tolerated in the primitive Church, were received as brethren and fellow Christians. This pretense has been largely and solidly confuted by Bishop Bull; and as there is scarce room for adding anything (the question being in a manner exhausted), so neither is there much need of any reinforcement. But it may be of some use to recapitulate what that learned Prelate has said as also to take some brief notice of what the adversaries have since attempted, in order to depreciate and disparage it, instead of making any just reply to it. I shall first cite the whole passage of Justin, and then give a summary account of Bishop Bull's reasonings upon it, that the reader may then judge for himself, as to the force of them. Trypho the Jew, in the Dialogue, having a little before told Justin, that his doctrine concerning Christ (that he was God before the world, and afterwards became man, and of a virgin) appeared to him a very great paradox, and contrary to common sense, Justin replies as follows [Just. Dial. p. 140. Jebb. 234. Thirlby.]: "I am very sensible that this account will look like a paradox, and more especially to those of your nation, who are in no disposition either to apprehend or follow the things of God, but the dictates only of your own Rabbins, as God himself proclaims. [Isa. 29:13.] Nevertheless (said I to Trypho) my argument does not fall, as to his being the Messiah of God, though I should not be able to prove that the Son of the Maker of the universe preexisted, being God, and was born a man of the Virgin: but after it has been once fully proved that he is the Messiah of God (whatever else he be), though I should not farther demonstrate his preexistence, and his condescending to become man of like passions with us, taking flesh upon him according to the Father's good pleasure, all that you can justly say is, that I am so far in an error; but you should not hereupon deny that he is the Christ, appearing as a man born of human parents, and approving himself as the chosen Messiah. For, said I, my good friends, some there are of our profession (of your nations)* who acknowledging him to be the Messiah, yet conceive of him as of a man born of human parents: whom however I assent not to, no, not though there were ever so many concurring to tell me so;** since we are commanded by Christ himself, not to submit to the doctrines of men, but to what the holy Prophets have delivered, and himself hath taught us."

*[[Blurred Greek] is undoubtedly the true reading; warranted by the propriety of the expression, and Justin's usual phraseology, and the whole turn and texture of the sentence. See Bull. Judic. Eccl. cap. vii sect. 6. p. 346. Thirlby in locum. Nevertheless, one might perhaps, in prudence, wave this just criticism, since nothing depends upon it, as

to the main cause (except it be to make Justin write sense so far), but the insisting upon it gives the adversaries a handle for dropping the material things, and making some show of an opposition upon this bye point, as if all depended upon it.]

*[I prefer the rendering here given before the common one, taking the hint from the ingenious Mr. Thirlby in his notes upon the passage. The common rendering is; neither would it be admitted by the generality [of Christians] who are in my sentiments: the sense is flat.]

This is the famous passage, from whence (as I have said) the Socinians and Remonstrants have endeavoured to draw an argument for neutrality or indifference concerning the article of Christ's Divinity; imagining that the impugners of that doctrine were received by Justin and the Church in his time, as brethren and fellow Christians. But there is nothing in this paragraph of Justin to support such fancies. Let it be observed in the first place, that the persons whom Justin here speaks of, as believing in Jesus as the Messiah, but denying his birth of a virgin, and his preexistence, were most certainly the Ebionites of his time. Their hypothesis, and theirs only, exactly answers the description here given; as Bishop Bull has demonstrated at large. [Bull. Judic. Eccles. cap. vii. sect. 8. p. 347.] This premised, we may now proceed to lay down the arguments urged by Bishop Bull against the construction offered by the Remonstrants, and next subjoin a summary of the solutions he has given in answer to their objections.

1. As the passage itself in Justin is very far from declaring in express terms, or by any certain consequence, what some collect from it, so it is very unlikely that Justin should be singular in his sentiments on that head, directly thwarting the sentiments of Ignatius before him, of Irenaeus and Tertullian of the same century with him, and, in short, of all the ancients besides him, who have constantly condemned those Ebionite principles as pernicious and heretical. [See Bull. Judic. cap. vii. sect. 5. p.345.]

2. The argument drawn from this passage by our adversaries, if it proves anything at all, proves too much; which is a certain sign that it is faulty: for it proves that even those who denied our Lord's birth of a virgin (a truth attested to by the Prophets and Evangelists, and most religiously held by the ancient Church) were received as fellow Christians; which is highly absurd. [Bull. *ibid.* sect. iii. p. 343.]

3. It is very observable, that the Ebionites rejected three of the Gospels, receiving only St. Matthew's (or what they called so), and that curtailed. They rejected likewise all St. Paul's writings, reproaching him as an apostate. [Iren. lib. i. c. 26. Conf. Epiphani. Haer. xxx. 13. Euseb. E. H. lib. iii. c. 27. Origen. contra Cels. lib. v. p. 274. Theodorit. Haeret. Fab. lib. ii. cap. 1.] How unlikely is it that Justin should own such reprobates as those were for fellow Christians! Episcopus was himself

sensible of this difficulty, and could not but acknowledge it plainly absurd, that Justin, and the Church of his time, should hold any communion with such an ungodly race of men as the Ebionites were. [Vid. Respons. ad Specim. Calumn. p. 296.] What salvo therefore had he for it? None, but the denying that Justin was there speaking of the Ebionites; though it is a plain case that he was: therefore Episcopius was here caught in his own snare, as Bishop Bull justly observes, retorting his own concessions upon him with irresistible force. [Vid. Bull. Append. ad cap. vii. sect. 9. p. 357.]

4. Add to this, that the Liturgies then used in the Church were so full and express for the Divinity of Christ, that there is no likelihood that the Ebionites should join in them; neither could they do it without solemn mockery. See this argument drawn out at large in Bishop Bull. [Bull. *ibid.* p. 353.]

5. If the Church would have communicated with the Ebionites, the Ebionites would not with them: and therefore Justin could never have intended to call them brethren. See this also explained at large in Bishop Bull. [Bull. *ibid.* p. 349. Conf. p. 346.] These are the reasons which that incomparable Prelate has urged against the Socinian or Episcopian construction of the passage in Justin. But as it is not always sufficient to demonstrate a truth, and leave it to shift for itself, without reconciling it, and clearing it from objections; we may next go on to specify the solutions given to the difficulties pleaded on the other side.

1. It is pleaded, that according to Justin, a person might reasonably be supposed the Messiah, though no more than a man. But to this it is answered, that Justin nowhere asserts that such a thing could be supposed consistently with Scripture or good sense. No; his constant doctrine is, and which he everywhere labours and contends for, that the Messiah is and must be God. [See this explained at large in Bull, c. vii. p. 344, 345.] But since the Jews, with whom he was disputing, had taken up low notions of their expected Messiah, Justin urged it against Trypho, as an argument to him, and such as upon his principles he could not gainsay, that he might receive Jesus (as his Ebionite countrymen had done) for the Messiah, though he disowned his Godhead. So there was no necessity for his continuing in Judaism, though he would not admit the Divinity of Jesus.

2. It is pleaded, that those impugnors of Christ's Divinity are styled men of our profession, that is, Christians; and therefore he admitted them as fellow Christians. To say nothing here of the truer reading (men of your nation), there is no consequence in the argument. The Ebionites were Christians in a large sense, men of Christian profession, nominal Christians; as Justin allowed the worst of heretics to be [Vid. Dialog. p. 100, 244, 245. Jebb. *alias* 208, 311, 312. Apolog. i. p. 43. edit. Thirlby.]: and this is all he could mean by allowing the Ebionites to be Christians. [Vid. Bull. Indic. cap. vii. sect. 6. p. 346.]

3. It is pleaded, that Justin signified his dissent from them very faintly and coldly (whom I assent not to), expressing no detestation or abhorrence of the men, or of their principles. To which it may be answered, 1. That he expresses himself as strongly here, as he does in another cause of great moment, against those who denied that the world was created. [Just. Dial. p. 20. alias 148.] 2. As Justin here expressed no abhorrence, so neither did he express any approbation of them; as his way was when he dissented from [Vid. Justin. Dial. p. 243, alias 311.] persons of the Church, with whom he held communion: so we may fairly set one negative argument against another. 3. There might be special reasons why, in that particular case, he did not launch out into satire and invective against the Ebionites. He was endeavouring to persuade Trypho to come so far at least as the Ebionites had done, rather than continue an hardened and desperate Jew: it would have been highly improper, in the conducting an argument of that kind, [See Thirlby upon the passage, p. 243.] to have fallen severely upon the Ebionites, whose tenets he was making so good use of. [See a like argument urged by Novatian from the doctrine of the Docetae; which he heartily detested, but yet contented himself, in that instance, while making use of it, with saying [Latin] (c. 23.) which was sufficient: more would have been there and then improper.] 4. Yet even in that very passage he gave oblique intimations of his heartily disapproving the Ebionite principles. He rebukes Trypho and his associates with some tartness, as shutting their eyes against the truth, and being slow to perceive the things of God, for their not Admitting the Divinity of Jesus Christ, so fully proved from the Old Testament: what then could he think of the Ebionites, who had both Old Testament and New before them, and yet rejected their Lord's Divinity? [Compare Bull, cap. vii. sect. 4. p. 344.] Then again, in the close of the same passage, Justin plainly enough intimates, that those who denied Christ's Divinity or birth of a virgin, rejected the doctrine of the Church, and of the Prophets, and of Christ himself, to follow human inventions, or doctrines of men. [Ibid. p. 347.] So if Justin did not condemn the Ebionites with hard words, he did it with hard arguments, which were altogether as forcible, and served his purpose better. Upon the whole therefore, nothing can be inferred from this passage of Justin, to countenance the receiving of the Ebionites, or their successors, to Christian communion: the contrary is evident as the light. And indeed it would be hard to say for what purpose Justin wrote that very Dialogue (the main substance whereof is taken up in proving the Divinity of Christ), if after all he thought it an article of slight moment, and such as was not of weight sufficient to be made a term of Christian communion. But enough of this.

Bishop Bull's answer to Episcopius has met with the esteem of the learned world, [See Nelson's Life of Bull, p. 383, etc.] and nothing like a just reply has been

attempted since: only Le Clerc, above twenty years after, writing an Ecclesiastical History, [Published A.D. 1716.] was pleased, in passing, to make some brief strictures upon it, and to bring up again some of the former pretenses, which had long been exploded. He deals more in hints and insinuations, than in arguments, or direct assertions, like one who had an inclination to put some fallacy upon his readers, but at the same time to provide for a retreat. He hints [Cleric. Eccles. Histor. p. 635.] that the persons whom Justin there speaks of might be Nazaraeans. He was very sensible where the difficulty pressed, if they were supposed to be Ebionites; as Bishop Bull had fully proved them to have been. But whether they are to be called Ebionites or Nazaraeans, they were undoubtedly men that denied Christ's Divinity and his birth of a virgin (as before shown), and were therefore heretics in ecclesiastical account. As to Nazaraeans, about whom so much has been boasted of late, [By Zuicker, Sandius, Toland, Artemonius, and others.] it will be soon enough to consider how far Justin had a view to them, when it can be proved, that their principles, with respect to Christ, were the same with those which Justin there condemns: a hard thing to make out. [Vid. Mosheim, Vindic. Antiq. Discipl. advers. Toland. cap. 5, 6. Buddaeus, Eccles. Apostol. p. 545–550. Mosheim, Histor. Eccles. Saec. i. part. 2. sect. i. c. 4. p. 99. Conf. Buddaeus, Eccles. Apostol. p. 547. Bull. Judic. Eccl. cap. ii. sect. 13–16. Primit. Trad. cap. i. sect. 6–10. Huetins in not. ad Origen. Comment. p. 74. Le Quien, Dissert. Damascene. vii. p. 94, etc.]

Le Clerc would appear to doubt whether the persons pointed to in Justin really denied Christ's divine nature or no. It is as plain as possible, that they did. But however if they did not, then there is an end of all the Remonstrant pretenses at once: and there is not so much as colour left for saying, that Justin held communion with the impugnors of Christ's Divinity.

He goes on to observe how mildly and softly Justin treated them, [Ibid. p. 635.] above common heretics, whom he allowed not to be Christians. This is the old Episcopian plea, [Respons. ad Specim. Calumn. p. 296.] which had been abundantly answered by Bishop Bull, as Le Clerc well knew; though he took no notice. Neither does it appear that Justin believed the Ebionites (of whom he speaks) to have been Christians in any other sense than as other heretics were, that is, nominal Christians, as I have observed above.

He proceeds to say, that it cannot be determined, for want of ancient evidences, how far those Nazaraeans (for so he chooses to call them) were tolerated. [p. 636.] Directly false, or sophistical. Indeed, as to Nazaraeans, since it is disputable who or what they were, or how far orthodox* (accounts being different, and sometimes repugnant), it may be disputable how they were received by other Christians: but as to such persons as Justin speaks of (whatever

name we assign them), men that denied Christ's Divinity and miraculous conception, it is a very clear case, and fully attested by many and undoubted evidences, that they never were received by the Church of Christ, but constantly rejected as antichrists and heretics. And this is all that we need contend for: the rest is only playing with words and names, and is mere amusement, wide of the point in hand.

*[Though I say disputable, because very learned men have been much divided about the Nazaraeans, yet I make no question myself, but the Nazaraeans were the remains of the first Christians of Jerusalem, were entirely orthodox in the article of Christ's Divinity, and directly opposite to the Ebionites. So far, at least, Bishop Bull and Le Quien have, in my judgment, clearly and satisfactorily proved. So that to obtrude the Nazaraeans upon us here, instead of Ebionites, is only raising a mist, to confound weak readers.]

He goes on to infer, that since Justin was so moderate in that case, there is no reason now for condemning the Socinians or others that impugn Christ's Divinity: that is plainly his drift and meaning, only a little covertly expressed. [Clerici Eccles. Hist. p. 636.] So, though he had neither answered nor considered the reasons offered by Bishop Bull against any such inference from Justin's words, nor the solutions given to the objections before made, nor indeed had advanced anything beyond mere surmises and shuffles; yet he draws the same conclusion which the Remonstrants had before done, as if he had proved his point to satisfaction.

But lest he should seem entirely to have passed over Bishop Bull's performance, he singles out a bye-point [Clerici Eccles. Histor. p. 636.] (not material in respect of the main thing) to contest with him. It is the emendation of a word which Bishop Bull had offered, and justified, like a judicious writer and a true critic, to make his author speak sense, rather than to support the main cause, which did not need it: I say, Le Clerc singles out that to dispute upon, and that is all. And even there he is entirely wrong, as has been abundantly shown by a learned hand [Thirlby, in Notis ad Just. Mart. p. 234.]; for which reason I shall say no more of it. But allowing those gentlemen their absurd reading, the cause stands just where it did; and they are as far off as ever from being able to prove from that passage in Justin Martyr, that the Socinians should be received as fellow Christians.

I had almost forgot to take notice of two insinuations dropped by Le Clerc in their favour, viz. that they receive the whole Canon (which the Ebionites did not), and they lead good moral lives. As to the first, it is only maintaining their heresy with greater art, and more exquisite subtlety, and in a way which may do the more mischief, because the poison is concealed: the ancient heretics were

plainer men. Besides, anyone who has seen the Five Letters of Inspiration, and knows also what freedom that author has taken with the sacred writers, in his comments and elsewhere, will conceive no high opinion of his veneration for the Scriptures: it is keeping them indeed, for the saving of appearances, but in order to expose them the more insidiously.

As to a good moral life, that is, a partial obedience, it avails nothing, while maintaining of heresies is itself immoral practice, both against God and man: besides that the natural consequence of Socinianism is Deism; which leads to all immorality. And this distant, and almost insensible way of introducing Deism, is the most dangerous of any: for thousands perhaps may be thus led by slow and almost imperceptible degrees into it, who could not have been brought to it by the shorter, coarser methods. But I pass on.

There is another gentleman, who, after Le Clerc, has appeared on the same side. He calls himself Artemonius in his last piece, [Initium Evangelii S. Joannis restitutum per L. M. Artemonium, A.D. 1726.] as in another, long before, Lucas Mellierus, and is known to be Samuel Crellius, descended from the famous John Crellius. He hath here acted a more ungenerous part than Le Clerc himself had done. He pretends, first, that Le Clerc (who had scarce touched the main things, as I have shown) had confuted Bishop Bull; and next insinuates, that the Bishop had laid violent hands upon the text of Justin, only to serve his hypothesis: which is untrue in both its parts. For the Bishop's correction is undoubtedly right: or if it were not, yet nothing depends upon it, the main cause being perfectly secure without it. In the last place, he takes notice of Mr. Thirlby's Reply to Le Clerc, and contents himself with a kind of faint promise to make some rejoinder. [Artemonius, p. 516.] I shall only remark, that when a person so well disposed for any impracticable undertaking (as appears by his strange attempt* upon John 1:1) declines venturing, and promises only, and that faintly too, where he has a strong inclination, it is a certain sign that he apprehends more difficulty than ordinary; and that while he verbally triumphed over Bishop Bull, he was wiser than to engage in close dispute.

*[It is an attempt to make an emendation against all the manuscripts of the New Testament, against all the versions, against all the quotations from antiquity, in a very critical passage (where, if anywhere, some remains of such a reading would have been preserved among Ebionites, Samosatensians, Arians, or others, had it ever been known), by mere dint of wit, and force of fancy, without any foundation of reason or authority.]

The reader, I hope, will pardon me for dwelling so long upon this passage in Justin. I thought it worth the considering with some care: and I have endeavoured to be as short as the nature of the question would permit me to be. I am sensible, after all, that I have not taken compass enough to do full justice to

it; and therefore I entreat the reader, who would have entire satisfaction about it, to consult Bishop Bull himself, in whom he will find it.

A.D. 176. About this time [Vid. Oudin. de Scriptor. Eccles. vol. i. p. 207.

Dodwell. Dissert. iv. 360. Fabric. Bibl. Gr. lib. v. c. 1. p. 66.] very probably, the famous Irenaeus wrote his treatise against heresies: and he is the first that condemns the Ebionites by name; and that not merely for being immoral men, nor merely for rejecting a great part of the sacred Canon, neither yet for denying Christ's birth of a virgin, but for impugning Christ's Divinity. He excludes them from Church communion, and from a state of grace and salvation, chiefly, or solely, upon that score. He writes thus: "The spiritual man will pass judgment also upon the Ebionites. How can they be saved, unless it was God (ο Θεος) that wrought their salvation on earth? or how shall man come to God, if God had not come to man?" [Iren. lib. iv. c. 33, alias 53.] Irenaeus here lays the charge upon the fundamental error of the Ebionites, their rejecting Christ's Divinity; an error which they had imbibed from their countrymen the Jews, and brought with them into Christianity. And this was the principal ground and reason of their rejecting some of the Gospels, particularly St. John's: for they had not yet learned the art of reconciling the doctrine of the New Testament with their principles. Irenaeus excludes the men from salvation for their disbelief, abstracting from the consideration of invincible ignorance or sincerity; which would be impertinently brought in with respect to this or that particular case, since it is common to all, and makes no difference as to the abstract nature of things, or our judgment thereupon: for we are to judge by what we know, leaving things secret to God. The Ebionites are here censured as rejecting salvation, because they rejected the belief of the divine methods appointed for it; agreeable to a maxim before laid down by Ignatius, and before him by St. John, as I have observed above. [See above.]

Before I proceed further with Irenaeus, I would here take notice by the way, how considerable a person he was. He is said to have been near the Apostles' times [Basil. de Sp. S. c. 29. Theodorit. Haeret. Fab. lib. ii. cap. 2. Epiphan. Haer. H. xxiv. 8. Vir Apostolicorum temporum. Hieron. Epist. Liii. ad Theodorum, p. 581.]; for indeed he was born in or near that age, [See Dodwell. Dissert. in Iren. Diss. iii. p. 229.] and was advanced in [Dodwell. Dissert. iv. p. 291. Oudin. vol. i. p. 207.] years when he wrote his book against heresies. The charismata, the miraculous gifts, were common in his days, and he himself a witness of them in many instances. The gifts of healing (as restoring sight to the blind, and hearing to the deaf, and limbs to the cripple, yea, and life to the dead) continued in the Church to his time; besides the gift of tongues, and of prophecy, and of casting out devils, and the like. [Vid. Iren. lib. ii. c. 31. p. 164. alias c. 56. p. 188. lib. ii. c. 32, alias 57. lib. v. c. 6.] He

speaks twice of raising the dead, and in one place very emphatically thus: “And now, as I before said, the dead have risen, and have continued with us many years:” [lib. ii. cap. 32. p.166. Conf. Dodwell. Dissert. ii. p. 165, etc.] those very gifts are what Irenaeus more than once appeals to, as proofs of the true faith resting in the Church, in opposition to heretics who had not the extraordinary graces, but were detected in their imposture, whenever they pretended to them. [Iren. lib. ii. cap. 31, 32.] He lays it down as a rule, and a maxim, that truth then went along with the Church, because the Spirit of truth rested upon it [Iren. lib. iii. cap. 24, alias 40.]; which is the argument St. Paul himself uses to the like purpose [Gal. 3:2.]: and it was a very good one at that time, and as circumstances then stood. [Dodwell. Diss. ii. p. 168.] But I return.

Irenaeus, in another place, smartly reproves the Ebionites for denying Christ’s Divinity, and his birth of a virgin. [Iren. lib. iii. cap. 21, alias 24.] “God therefore became man, and the Lord himself saved us, giving the sign of the Virgin: and not as some now say, who presume to interpret the Scripture, Behold a young woman shall be with child, and shall bear a son; as Theodotion the Ephesian, and Aquila of Pontus, both of them Jewish proselytes, interpret. Whom the Ebionites following, pretend he was begotten of Joseph, thereby dissolving, so far as in them lies, that so important dispensation of God, and frustrating the prediction of the Prophets which God has brought about.” Here it is observable how strong the expression is, God (ο Θεος) became man, and the Lord himself saved us. So far in opposition to the Ebionites, with respect to their denial of Christ’s Divinity: the rest relates to their denial of his miraculous conception. Could any one judge from his smart reproof of them in the close, that those men were received as Christian brethren in that age? Absurd and incredible.

I would only take notice further, that some over censorious critics have suspected that Tremens was here out in his chronology, and inconsistent with himself, in making the Ebionites to be followers of Aquila and Theodotion. But Irenaeus is to be understood of the Ebionites of his own time only. [Vid. Mosheim. Vindic. An tiq. cap. vii. p. 179, 180.] The sect had subsisted long before, but now received fresh countenance and encouragement from the versions of Aquila and Theodotion, which they greedily closed in with, as favouring their heresy.

There is a third passage in Tremens, where he again falls upon the Ebionites, for their opposing Christ’s Divinity, and birth of a virgin. [Iren. lib. v. cap. 1. 293, alias p. 394.] “Vain also are the Ebionites in not receiving the union of God and man, by faith, into their souls, but persisting still in the old leaven of [common] generation: for they will not understand, that the Holy Spirit came upon Mary, and the power of the Highest overshadowed her, and therefore that

which was born of her is holy, and is the Son of the Highest, of God, the Father of all, who wrought his incarnation, and manifested a new generation; that as by the first generation we had inherited death, so by this other generation we might inherit life. They then reject the mixture of heavenly wine, content to be no more than earthly water, not taking God into their mixture, but abiding only in Adam, who was vanquished and expelled Paradise. They consider not, that as at the beginning of our formation in Adam, the breath of life from God, united with the frame, enlivened the man, and rendered him a rational creature; so at the end, the Word of the Father and Spirit of God, united with the old substance of Adam's formation, has made a living and perfect man comprehending the perfect Father; that as in the natural man we are all dead, so in the spiritual man we may all be made alive."

Here we are to observe that Irenaeus judged the Ebionites to be in a dangerous or desperate state, on the account of their not admitting the union of God and man in the Person of Christ, on account of their not taking the divine nature in, to supply the imperfections of the human, the Word of the Father, the Spirit of God, to enliven and exalt the human nature, the old Adam. I may remark by the way, that Tremens here seems to understand Spirit of God, and Holy Spirit before, of the second Person, of the Logos himself coming down upon the Virgin. So the earliest Fathers commonly do, [Herm. Lib. iii. Simil. v. cap. 6. Clem. Ep. ii. cap. 9. Just. Mart. Apol. i. p. 54, alias 75. Clem. Alex. Strom. lib. v. p. 654. Tertul. de Carn. Christi, cap. xiv. Tertul. contr. Prax. cap. xxvii. Novat. cap. xx. Cyprian. de Idolor. Vanit. sic cod. German. et 4. MSS. Pamel. Lactant. lib. iv. cap. 12.] interpreting Luke 1:35 to that sense: which I the rather note, because so their asserting Christ's birth of a virgin, and his preexisting as Spirit of God, and God, amounted to the same thing. For the reason given by St. Luke (or rather by the angel in St. Luke), why Mary should conceive, though she knew not a man, is, that the Holy Spirit should come upon her, that the power of the Highest [δύναμις ὑψίστου] should overshadow her: so that, after this, to deny the birth of a virgin, amounted, in construction, to the same with denying any such coming of an Holy Spirit upon Mary, any divine preexistence of Christ. And hence, I conceive, it is, that we so often find in the ancient Fathers those two doctrines so linked together, or so intermingled with each other, that they appear, in a manner, but as the same thing twice told, or the same doctrine diversely expressed. The Ebionites denied the descent of the Logos upon Mary: they rejected the divine part in Christ, admitting only the human. This is what Irenaeus calls rejecting the heavenly wine (alluding to their celebrating the Eucharist in water only, without wine [Epiphanius. Haer. xxx. 16.]), not receiving God into their mixture, but contenting themselves with the earthly Adam, who was

cast out of Paradise; intimating that the Ebionites should as certainly be excluded heaven. The thought which Irenaeus goes upon may be illustrated from a passage in Hippolytus, which, speaking of Christ, runs thus: "As it was prophesied beforehand, so he manifested himself of the Virgin and Holy Spirit; made a new man (a second Adam), having an heavenly nature of the Father, as he is the Logos, and having an earthly one, as of the old Adam, incarnate of a virgin. He came into the world, and manifested himself as God." [Hippolyt. contr. Noet. cap. xvii. p. 18, 19. Conf. Tertullian. de Carn. Christi, cap. xvii.] But to return to Irenaeus, it is very plain that he looked upon the reconciliation of God and man as depending entirely upon the Mediator's being both in one [Vid. Iren. lib. iii. cap. 18, alias 20.]: and in how strict a sense he understood Christ to be God is well known to as many as know anything of Irenaeus. But if the English reader desires farther satisfaction on that head, he may have it abundantly from Mr. Alexander's Essay on Irenaeus, [Printed for John Clarke and Richard Hett, A.D. 1727.] a very judicious and faithful performance, a finished piece in its kind. I heartily wish that that learned gentleman had leisure, as he has abilities, to draw out more of the Fathers in the same way.

A.D. 206. Tertullian reckons the Ebionites among the antichrists for denying Jesus to be Son of God, [Tertul. Praescript. cap. xxxiii.] that is, for impugning the Divinity of Christ: for that Tertullian understood the phrase of Son of God as applied to Christ, to mean the same as God of God, [Tertul. Apol. cap. xxi.] is plain from all his writings. And what he must think of the dangerous state the Ebionites were in, by their heresy in that article, may appear sufficiently from a maxim he lays down, that none have life who believe not in the Son, and none believe in the Son, who admit not that he is a Son [Contr. Prax. cap. xxx.] in such a sense as he had mentioned.

He again censures the Ebionites, as making Christ a mere man, and denying that he is the Son of God. [Tertullian. de Carn. Christi, cap. xiv.] Where it is observable he passes over in silence their denying his birth of a virgin, or condemns both their positions in one, as resolving into the same error. However, the stress of his censure lies upon their impugning Christ's divine Sonship, that is, his real and proper Divinity: for such was Tertullian's sense of Son of God, as I before intimated.

In another place, he speaks of the Ebionites as denying Christ's birth of a virgin, but makes that amount to denying his being Son of God, [Tertullian. de Carn. Christi, cap. xviii.] in his high sense of that phrase. And the reason why the denial of the one implied the denial of the other (in his way of arguing, common to other Fathers) seems to have been this; that it would have been utterly unworthy [Tertul. de Carn. Christi, cap. xvii.] of the Son of God to have taken man

upon him, except it were by a virgin: therefore the denial of the mother's virginity amounted to a denial of God's being born of her; it was making it absurd. From whence we see a further reason of what I before hinted, that the two false positions of the Ebionites were considered as near allied, and were condemned in one, as hanging both together, and perhaps one invented for the sake of the other. [See what the learned Vitringa says of Cerinthus's denying the miraculous conception, *Observat. Sacr. lib. v. cap. 12. sect. 6. p. 145, 146. edit. ult.*] The denying the miraculous conception was, by inference and implication, denying Christ's Divinity, as the affirming of the one was conceived to amount to affirming the other. But the later Ebionites (as we shall see), having a mind to reform their scheme, contrived at length to admit the miraculous conception, and still rejected our Lord's Divinity: which was retaining the main substance of their heresy, but under a better appearance than before. We shall observe presently what the Church of Christ thought of them after that new reform.

A.D. 249. Origen is the first that takes notice of the Ebionites as divided into two sorts, [Orig. *contr. Cels. p. 272. Conf. Comment. in Matt. p. 427.*] one denying, as before, Christ's birth of a virgin, the other admitting it. But still he reckons both among the pretended Christians, [Orig. *ibid. p. 272.*] and introduces them among other heretics. [Ibid. 271, 272, 274.] But whether or no he charged them with heresy on account of their denying our Lord's Divinity would not certainly appear, if he had not expressed himself more fully in some other of his writings. In his Comment upon St. Matthew, he takes the like notice of the two sorts of Ebionites, charging both as rejecting Christ's Divinity, [Comm. in *Matth. p. 427.*] and as poor in faith [Ibid. 428.] towards Christ Jesus; alluding to their name, which signifies the same as poor. But Pamphilus, in his Apology for Origen, produces some passages of his, out of his Comments on the Epistle to Titus, where he condemns the Ebionites more expressly as heretics, for their denying Christ's Divinity. [Pamphil. *Apolog. p. 226. edit. Bened. Conf. Comment. in Joann. p. 397.*] As to any doubt which may be made about Pamphilus's Apology (appearing only in Ruffinus's version), and the credit due to it, I refer the reader to Bishop Bull, who has largely discussed that question, and has sufficiently maintained the authority of that version. [Bull *Def. F. N. sect. ii. cap. 9. p. 114, etc.*] As to Origen's own orthodoxy in the article of Christ's Divinity, it has been abundantly vindicated, and cleared from all reasonable exception. [Bishop Bull, *sect. ii. cap. 9. Compare my Second Defence, vol. iii. Qu. xii. p. 322, etc.*]

A.D. 290. I shall add but one writer more, Victorinus Petavionensis, before referred to as saying that St. John wrote his Gospel against Ebion, among others who were of the school of Satan. [See above.] It is very plain by his manner of expression that he looked upon Ebion as a very ill man and an heretic, being of

Satan's school, and condemned by the Apostle himself. And considering how particular St. John is in setting forth the Divinity of Christ, we cannot doubt but Victorinus's censure of Ebion respects that article.

I might add many testimonies of Post-Nicene Fathers, to confirm what I have been proving, namely, that the Ebionites were constantly looked upon as heretics for denying our Lord's Divinity. But I choose to go no lower than the Ante-Nicene writers, because they are sufficient, and they are the less to be excepted to; and I am willing also to consult the ease of my readers, as well as to spare myself needless trouble. I am aware of a passage in St. Jerome, which seems to say, that the Ebionites and Cerinthians were condemned as heretics upon another account, not relating to our Lord's Divinity [Hieronym. ad August. Ep. lxxiv. Opp. tom. iv. 623. Bened.]: and I observe, that the learned Le Clerc has endeavoured to make use of it [Clerici Eccles. Histor. p. 477.] for the supporting a favourite hypothesis, which he appears too fond of. But it is very certain, that Jerome's words in that place, if interpreted with utmost rigour, are a perfect contradiction to all antiquity, and to what himself has asserted in other places of his works. [See two passages quoted above, p. 178, 179. And compare Hieronym. contr. Helvid. tom. iv. p.140.] Some therefore have greatly blamed St. Jerome [Mosheim. Vindic. Antiq. contr. Toland. p. 164.] for prevaricating in the contradictory account he here gives; while others, more kindly, and, I think, more justly, have endeavoured to bring him off by a candid construction. [Bull. Judic. Eccl. cap. ii. sect. 13. p. 300. Remarks on Christianity as Old, etc. with respect to Ecclesiastical Antiquity: first part continued, p. 78, 79.] Whichever way we take, there is nothing concerned in it, except it be St. Jerome's character: for as to the cause we are upon, it is too firmly established by the ecclesiastical writers in general, and even Jerome in particular (as I before hinted) to be at all weakened by this single passage to the contrary, if it were contrary.

Having shown above, as I humbly conceive, that the Cerinthians (with whom I would be understood to include the Ebionites) were condemned by St. John himself, for impugning our Lord's Divinity, and having proved further, that the Ebionites (with whom I would be understood to include the Cerinthians) were condemned all along in the Church for the first three centuries; the conclusion I now draw is, that both Cerinthians and Ebionites stand condemned from the days of the Apostles, and downwards, for the opposition they made to that important doctrine. After this, it will be less needful to prove that others also were condemned in like manner for the like opposition to the same doctrine. But since the doing it may tend in some measure to confirm what has been said, I shall go on to mention other impugnors of our Lord's Divinity within the three first centuries, and a little farther: only, I shall endeavour to be as brief as

possible in the account, not to weary the reader.

A.D. 195. *Theodotus*.

Theodotus, a citizen of Byzantium, by trade a currier, but a man of parts, and competently furnished with secular learning, having denied his Saviour in time of persecution, and being afterwards upbraided for it, as one that had denied his God; to extenuate the offence, he pretended that he had not denied God, but man, [Epiphan. Haer. liv. i. Augustin. Haer. 33. Philastr. Haer. cap. 1. Damascene. Haer. 54. Synodic. Pappi. cap. iii. Pseudo-Tertullian. Praescript. cap. liii. Theodorit. Haeret. Fab. lib. ii. cap. 5.] for that Christ was no more. A miserable salvo for a guilty practice; which, instead of lessening his crime, enhanced it yet more, and was so far from removing the just obloquy he before lay under, that it served only to edge and enforce it. However, he hereupon became the reviver of an old heresy, or the ringleader of a new one (new in dress and circumstances), and soon after called by the new name of the God-denying apostasy. [Euseb. H. E. lib. v. cap. 28.] The first account we have of this matter is from a nameless author in Eusebius, reasonably supposed, upon comparing other testimonies, [Vid. Pearson, Vindic. Ignat. part it. p. 23. Opp. Posth. p.147, etc. Cave, Histor. Literar. vol. i. p. 65.] to have been Caius, the Roman Presbyter, who flourished about A.D. 214. Learned men have inquired how Caius could say that Theodotus was founder of the heresy, [Euseb. ibid.] and the first that made Christ a mere man, when it is certain and manifest, that both Cerinthians and Ebionites had done it before him. Some say plainly that Caius was guilty of a blunder [Ittigus de Haeresiarchis, sect. ii. cap. 15. p. 261.]: which indeed is cutting the dispute short, and may be a good way, if there be not a better. Others say that Theodotus was really the first that made Jesus a mere man, for that the Cerinthians and Ebionites, before, admitted of a superior nature, a spirit assistant from above, residing at times in Jesus, which made him more than a common man. [Vitringa, Observat. Sacr. lib. v. cap. 10. p. 128. Edit. ult.] But it will be difficult to prove, either that Ebion was in the same scheme with Cerinthus, as to the doctrine of AEons, and as to the dividing of Jesus from Christ, or that he was not exactly in the same principles which Theodotus espoused, as to making Christ a mere man. Eusebius's account of the Ebionites, and their tenets, [Euseb. E. H. liv. iii. cap. 27.] seems to represent their scheme as being exactly the same in that respect; and Theodorit is very express for its being so [Theodorit. Haeret. Fab. lib. v. cap. 11. p. 278.]: only Theodotus's was a little more refined than that of the ancients Ebionites, because he allowed the miraculous conception or birth of a virgin, which they denied. However, both they and he supposed Christ a mere man: and therefore he was not the first that taught it. Some therefore think that Theodotus is said to be first, because he was the first

among the Gentile Christians [Bull. Judic. cap. iii. sect. 1. p. 304.]; for Cerinthus and Ebion were of Jewish extract: which account appears fair and plausible. But I conceive, after all, that Caius was not considering in that place, who in the Church had first taught that Christ was a mere man, but who had been the founder of such a particular sect, called Theodotians, or Artemonians, and who had first taught them to deny Christ, under the pretense of his being a mere man. Theodotus, plainly, was their founder and leader: he was at the head of that revolt, the first man that undertook to conduct it, and to support it upon that principle. The other accounts of Theodotus lead to this sense, and in the main say the same thing that Caius does. Epiphanius takes notice, that all the other Christians who were apprehended and brought to the question along with Theodotus, honestly confessed Christ, and suffered: he was the only man of the company that presumed to deny him, afterwards inventing an odd salvo for it, being more of an artist in his way, [Epiphanius. Haer. liv. p. 1.] than others were. No one else, at that time, and upon that occasion, durst venture to deny his God: he was the first that then broke the ice, and led the way, [Damascene. Haeres. 54. Philastr. Haer. 50. Pseudo-Tertullian. cap. liii.] instructing others to say after him, that it was not denying God, but man. I know not whether, in one particular, he may not be thought to have exceeded the irreverence and impiety of Ebion, namely, in his calling Christ a mere man, considered even in his state of exaltation, when he abjured him. Ebion would have called him God, so considered, as having been then deified, according to his way of thinking. [See Hilary de Trin. lib. ii. n. 4. p. 789. Epiphanius. Haer. xxx. n. 18. p. 142.] But Caius probably had no view to any such nicety of distinction, but intended only to say, that Theodotus was the founder of a new sect, called afterwards by his name, and teacher also of a new doctrine; new as to the circumstances and application, though, as to the main substance of it, borrowed from the Ebionites before him, or more particularly from the Alogi, a branch of the Ebionites. [Epiphanius. Haer. liv.]

Having seen that Theodotus was an impugner of our Lord's Divinity, we are next to observe, that he was condemned immediately by the Church for it. He was excommunicated by Victor then Bishop of Rome, as an heresiarch: so the same Caius relates. [Eusebius. lib. v. tap. 28. Conf. Theodor. Haeret. Fab. lib. ii. cap. 5.] A sentence approved by the churches of Christ: otherwise Victor himself would have been condemned for it, as he was greatly blamed for misapplying the ecclesiastical censure in a case of another nature, relating to the time for keeping Easter. The churches and bishops of those times were exceeding watchful and jealous of any abuses of power in particular churches or men. They were as checks one upon another, that nothing of moment should be done by any, which had not the consent of the rest. This conduct obliged everyone to observe the

strictest caution in any affair of general concern, and it tended to keep up the most exact harmony and unanimity in the several churches. But I return.

Hippolytus of the third century takes notice; in passing, of this Theodotus, as a person that falsified the truth, and perverted Scripture, in order to countenance his erroneous doctrine about Christ's being a mere man. [Hippol. contr. Noet. cap. iii. p. 7. Conf. Epiphan. Haer. lvii. 2.] He compares the heretic Noetus with Theodotus, to make Noetus the more odious for following such a leader in his manner of writing: so that it is plain enough what Hippolytus thought of Theodotus.

The same Theodotus is numbered also in the list of heretics [Pseudo-Tertullian. cap. liii.] by the writer of the Appendix to Tertullian's book of Prescription. That Appendix is supposed by some [Allix, Fathers vindicated touching the Trinity, p. 99.] to be little else but an extract from our Hippolytus's Treatise against Heresies. However that be, the piece is ancient, and of good value. [Vid. Dodwell. Dissert. de Success. Pontif. p. 216.] Theodotus is there charged as a blasphemer against Christ, for denying him to be God, though he allowed his birth of a virgin. It was the God-denying heresy: and therein lay its essential malignity. Had he said that Christ was an angel, or an archangel, or the highest of all creatures, it would have been treating our Lord with something more of respect; but still it would have come infinitely short of his real dignity, and of the faith of the Church concerning him, from the beginning. This I observe, lest any favourer of Arianism should falsely surmise, that the censures passed upon Theodotus and such other impugners of Christ's Divinity, do not affect those who make Christ a glorious creature, but those only who suppose him a mere man: whereas, in truth, Theodotus and the rest were condemned for the impugning Christ's proper and essential Divinity; a fault common to them and the Arians, so that both are concluded under the same censure.

I may further add, that the conduct of the Church, with respect to the Praxeans, Noetians, and Sabellians, is a demonstration of the truth of what I say. Those men charged the Church as teaching three Gods. [Tertullian. contr. Prax. cap. iii. Epiphan. Haer. lvii. 62.] Then would have been the time, and must have been, for the Church to declare (had they ever meant it) that the Father only is God, and the Son and Holy Ghost creatures. But they studiously and conscientiously avoided it, as one sees in Hippolytus and Tertullian, and others. And if any man incautiously, in debate, happened but to let fall any expressions which seemed to lean that way (as appeared in the famous case of Dionysius of Alexandria), the Church of that time would not bear it, but rejected everything of that kind with abhorrence. They distinguished themselves off from Sabellianism, but so as to avoid the other extreme, afterwards called Arianism: a plain sign and proof [See

this argument excellently drawn out by Mr. Thirlby, Def. of the Answ. p. 36, etc.] that the proper Divinity of Christ was what they aimed to support. I may observe also by the way, that the Sabellian objection all along supposed and implied, that the Godhead of the Holy Ghost, as well as of the Son, was the then received doctrine. But I return.

There was another Theodotus, surnamed Trapexita (the Banker), who was a disciple of the former, and who endeavoured to refine upon his scheme, by the addition of some odd conceits concerning Melchizedec. I shall only observe farther, that as from the elder Theodotus some were named Theodotians, so from the junior Theodotus others were called Melchizedec-ians. [Vid. Euseb. lib. v. cap. 28. Le Quien, Not. ad Damascene. Haer. lxiv. Theodorit. Haeret. Fab. lib. ii. esp. 6.]

A.D. 205. *Artemon.*

Artemon, otherwise called Artemis, was a disciple of Theodotus, a reviver or promoter of the same heresy. He appears to have been a very warm man, and of vast assurance; or his followers, at least, were such. For they confidently gave it out, that their doctrine was as old as the Apostles, [Euseb. lib. v. cap. 28. Theodorit. Haeret. Fab. lib. ii. cap. 4.] and that the doctrine of Christ's Divinity began with Pope Zephyrin, that is, about A.D. 198. Such ignorance, if it was mere ignorance, was pitiable: but there is too much reason to suspect, that they knew better. The nameless author in Eusebius (supposed to be Caius) well urges, [Euseb. E. H. lib. v. cap. 28.] that besides the holy Scriptures, older than all, there were the works of Justin and Miltiades, of Tatian and Clemens, of Irenaeus and Melito, and a great many more, defenders of Christ's Divinity, directly confronting their wild report, and plainly proving to the world, that it was mere fiction and romance, too improbable to be offered even to the lowest of the populace. And as to their pleading that Pope Victor, the immediate predecessor of Zephyrin, was on their side of the question, he confutes them at once, by observing that Victor was the very person who had excommunicated Theodotus, their founder and leader, for that very doctrine which they espoused. All I have farther to observe of these confident men, is, that they were censured by the Church of their time, and not admitted to communion among faithful Christians. That may reasonably be inferred from what Caius says, as before mentioned. But it appears further from what passed some years after, in the case of Paul of Samosata, when the Antiochian Fathers censured him for heresy, and sent him to seek communion, if he pleased, with the Artemonians, [Euseb. H. E. lib. vii. c. 30.] whose sentiments he had taken into, and whose execrable heresy (so they call it [Euseb. *ibid.*]) he had revived. To which agrees what Athanasius says, speaking of the Arian heresy: This heresy, says he, was looked upon as detestable, before the

Council of Nice, when Artemas advanced it. [Athanas. de Synod. p. 733. edit. Bened.]

A.D. 242. *Beryllus*.

Beryllus, Bishop of Bostra in Arabia, has been reputed one of those that once denied the Divinity of Christ; and therefore Bishop Bull takes him in among the rest. [Bull. Judic. c. ii. p. 305.] But yet strictly speaking, the charge against him was not that he denied the Divinity of Christ, but his proper Divinity [Euseb. E. H. lib. vi. c. 33.]: by which I understand his personal Divinity, or divine personality. For Beryllus's notion was, that the man Christ Jesus was the whole person, a mere human person, which had indeed a divine Person residing in him, viz. the person of the Father. So Beryllus's doctrine was a kind of Sabellianism; which however, in strictness, amounts to a denial of Christ's Divinity. For while it allows him no distinct divine personality, all that remains is, the man Christ with the Father indwelling; which at length resolves into the same doctrine, in the main, with what Cerinthus, Ebion, Theodotus, and Artemon taught as to the proper person of Jesus. It is denying his divine Sonship, and divine personality, which, in effect, is denying his proper Divinity. I the rather note this, because from hence it may appear, that the Church's condemning Praxeas, Noetus, and Sabellius, as guilty of heresy, proceeded from the same pious zeal for the Divinity of Christ, as their condemnation of Cerinthus, Ebion, etc. before: for both were intended to preserve that important article, and to secure the baptismal faith in a real and divine Trinity. Tertullian was sharp enough to see that the Praxean doctrine, under colour of magnifying Christ, by advancing him into the same personality with the Father, in reality left no distinct Son at all, more than the man Jesus, and so fell in with Valentinus's notion (he might have said, Cerinthus's also), which separated Jesus from Christ, dividing them into two persons. [Tertul. adv. Prax. c. 27.] All the difference is that Cerinthus or Valentinus supposed the Christ from above to be some AEon, or inferior power, residing occasionally with the man Jesus; while the Praxeans substituted God the Father instead of that supposed AEon, making him the Christ from above, conceived to inhabit at times the same man Jesus. Which as it comes very near the old Ebionite notion, so is it exactly the same with what several of the foreign Socinians, and most of our English ones, have maintained in late times. Indeed, the Praxeans were charged as Patripassians, which is a charge that does not affect the modern Socinians: but I apprehend, from the passage of Tertullian just cited, that the Praxeans, to get off from Patripassianism, learned at length to divide the Persons of Father and Son, and then the Father could be considered only as inhabiting Jesus, a mere man, and a distinct person from him. Sabellianism, and Photinianism, and Socinianism, do in reality come at length

into one; all resolving into Judaism: for the fundamental error of them all is, the denying the divine Sonship and personal Divinity of Christ; rejecting the eternal substantial Logos, who was with the Father before the world was, and is God from everlasting to everlasting. I say then that the zeal shown by the ancient Church against the Sabellians of all denominations (as well as their zeal against the more direct impugners of Christ's Divinity), is a very strong argument of their judging the doctrine of a coeternal Trinity to be an essential of the Gospel. They intended much the same thing by animadverting upon those or these; for they saw plainly that the Divinity of Christ, considered as a real Person, was as much undermined by Sabellianism, as it was attacked by the other. Many and various have been the ways of evading and eluding these two prime verities, viz, that three real Persons are one God, and that God and man is one Christ: but watchful and honest Christians still kept their eyes fixed upon those sacred truths, and would never admit any doctrine as true, which was contrary to them, or as sufficient, that was short of them. If anyone denied Christ's humanity (as the Docetae, or Phantasiastae), that was manifestly false doctrine, to be rejected at once: but if another admitted his humanity, and stopped there, that was short and insufficient. If it was added (as by Cerinthus) that a celestial substance or spirit rested sometimes upon Jesus, that was true, but still short of the whole truth in more respects than one. If it were said, constantly residing, that was better, but still very insufficient. If to that were added, personally united, that came nearer up to the full truth, but still was evasive, and short. Say, divine substance personally united with the human: that comes nearer to the point than any of the former; but still there is room for evasion, because it might mean the Father; and then it amounts to Sabellianism only, and Patripassianism. Add, therefore, that such divine substance is personally distinct from the Father and the Holy Spirit, and then it is confessing three real and divine Persons in one Godhead, which is the whole truth. The several kinds of heresies which have affected this Scripture truth, are but the various wanderings of human imagination. Truth is simple and uniform, while error is almost infinite. But I return to Beryllus.

The error which Beryllus unhappily split upon, was the denying a real distinction of divine Persons, as I before observed; which in direct consequence made Christ Jesus a mere man, in whom the Father dwelt. The bishops of the neighbouring sees were alarmed at the doctrine, and met in synod to condemn the heresy, and the teacher of it. But the great Origen being called in to debate and clear the point in question, Beryllus was made sensible of his error, and being a person of a pious and an humble mind, he honestly retracted it [Euseb. E. H. lib. vi. c. 33.]: and it is farther to be observed, that he loved his instructor

Origen ever after, and was sincerely thankful to him [Hieronym. Eccles. Script. lxx. p. 138. edit. Fabric.] for affording him so much new light (new to him) in a question of the greatest importance. A rare example of godly sincerity, and true Christian humility. His mistake had shown some weakness of judgment; but his recovery manifested. great strength of mind, and a good command over himself and his own passions.

A.D. 265. *Paul of Samosata.*

Paul of Samosata, Bishop of Antioch, was of a temper and character very different from what we have mentioned in the last article: he gave the churches fresh occasion for exerting their pious zeal in behalf of our Lord's Divinity. He was impeached for heresy in a council of Antioch, A.D. 265, and distinguished himself off at that time, and escaped without censure; but in another council, A.D. 270, he was again accused, and convicted, and thereupon deposed. He is charged by the council which condemned him, with reviving the heresy of Artemon, with denying his Lord and God, with disowning any Son of God from heaven, preaching up a detestable heresy, a damnable doctrine, and the like. [Euseb. E. H. lib. vii. c. 30.] The sum of his heresy, upon comparing the best accounts, appears to be this: that there is but one real Person in the Godhead, viz. the Father [Vid. Athanas. contr. Apollinar. p. 942. Epiphan. Haer. lxxv. 1. 3.]; that the Logos is a mere attribute, quality, power, or operation, nothing real and substantial [Epiphan. Haer. lxxv. 1. Philastr. lxxiv. p. 126.]; and that Christ, as it follows of consequence, is a mere man. [Euseb. E. H. lib. vii. c. 27. Theodorit. Haeret. Fab. lib. ii. p. 223. Augustin. Haer. 44. Damascene Haeres. lxxv.] His scheme appears to have been, in substance, little different from the Sabellian [See my First Defence, vol. i. Query xxiii. p. 249. Second Defence, vol. iii. p. 423. Dr. Berriman's Historical Account, p. 144, etc.]: but the stress of the charge against him rested upon this, that he had denied his Lord's Divinity; and therefore his heresy was called, like Theodotus's and Artemon's before, the God-denying wickedness. [Euseb. lib. vii. c. 29.]

A.D. 317. *Arius.*

I cannot well conclude this view of antiquity, with respect to the heresies against Christ's Divinity, without throwing in a word or two about the famous Arius, and his condemnation for proclaiming God the Son a creature, therein denying his Lord's real and proper Divinity, as much as any before him. Alexander, then Bishop of Alexandria, in his Epistle to the other Alexander of Byzantium, or Constantinople, (about A.D. 321) charges the Arians with denying their Saviour's Divinity, [Theodorit. Eccl. Hist. cap. iv. p. 9. edit. Vales.] and with reviving the heresy of Ebion, Artemon, and Paul of Samosata. [Theodorit.

ibid. p. 14.] Not that the Arian scheme was exactly the same with any of those three (for there are degrees of variation from truth, and many wrong ways to one right), but it fell in with them all in the main thing, and in which the principal malignity of their heresies consisted, namely, in the rejecting the true Godhead of Christ. I shall say nothing of the synodical censures passed upon Arius and his adherents, at the first opening of the heresy. In the year 325 he was condemned, in more solemn form, by the famous Council of Nice, by three hundred and eighteen bishops called from all parts of the Christian world, seventeen only of the number scrupling it for a time, and at last two only or three dissenting. They condemned his sentiments, as amounting to impiety, madness, blasphemy, such as they almost trembled to hear [Apud Socr. lib. i. c. 9.]; which appears by the Council's letter after his condemnation. Their sentence in that cause carried the greater weight in it, as the Council was general, called together out of Europe, Asia, and Africa, from all parts of the empire [Euseb. de Vit. Constantin. lib. iii. c. 7.]; as it was upon the matter free, and under no secular awe or influences; and lastly, as it was made up of the wisest, worthiest, and every way excellent prelates [Ibid. lib. iii. c. 9.] which the Christian world could then furnish. The determination of so venerable a council gave a considerable check to Arianism, and always carried great force with it; though it did not so quash the controversy as finally to put an end to it, any more than the Council of the Apostles at Jerusalem [Acts 15.] (A.D. 49) put an end to the dispute about the necessity of imposing circumcision. [See Buddaeus, Eccl. Apost. p. 114, 294, etc.] But as that first council had its use in the Church, and very great use, notwithstanding the repeated oppositions made to it, so had this other also, and has to this day. Divine wisdom has appointed no certain effective remedies for the perverseness of man, but has provided sufficient means for the instruction and direction of the humble and modest, and well designing.

Some persons have suggested, that the Council of Ariminum (held in 359), consisting of four hundred bishops or more, [Athanas. de Synod. 720, 749. Sulpic. Sever. p. 267. Socr. E. H. lib. iv. c. 17.] may properly be mentioned on the other side, as a counterbalance to the Council of Nice: but there is no comparison betwixt them, when the circumstances are duly considered. For, 1. the Council of Rimini, or Ariminum, was not general, being of the west only. 2. It was not free, being greatly menaced, distressed, and overawed by the Emperor Constantius. [Athanas. ad Afros, 892, 893. Socrat. E. H. lib. ii. c. 37. Sozom. lib. iv. c. 19. Hilar. Pictav. 1242. ed. Bened.] 3. Out of the number of four hundred, there were but eighty Arians, [Sulpic. Sever. lib. ii. c. 56.] at the utmost: the other three hundred and twenty, or more, were really orthodox men, induced by artifices to subscribe a creed which they understood in a good sense, [Hieron. contr. Lucifer.] but which,

being worded in general terms, was capable of being perverted to a bad one. The deep dissimulation, at that time used by the Arian managers, procured them the advantage only of a short-lived triumph. For no sooner did the orthodox side perceive how they had been imposed upon, and what use was to be made of it, but they declared to the world their own good meaning, and the perfidiousness of the opposite party. But of this I have treated more largely elsewhere. [See my Defence, vol. i. Query xxiv. p. 331, 332. Answer to Whitby, vol. ii. p. 223. Compare Berriman's Histor. Account, p. 228, etc.] It was of that time that St. Jerome speaks, when he pleasantly says, that the "whole Christian world groaned" (viz. under the slander thrown upon them by their adversaries), "and wondered to see itself become all over Arian" [Hieronym, contr. Lucifer. p. 300.]: that is to say, they wondered at the assurance of the Arians, in so imposing upon the Catholics, and in representing them to be the very reverse of what they were. [Hieron. ibid. 301.] The learned Mr. Bingham understood these matters well, and has expressed them justly and fully in these few lines. [Bingham's Antiquities, b. vi. ch. 3. s. 10. Compare Dr. Berriman, Hist. Acc. p. 228, etc.] "The Arians put an equivocal and poisonous sense upon them (the words of the Council) giving out, after the Council was ended, that they had not only abolished the word consubstantial, but with it condemned the Nicene faith also: which was strange surprising news to the bishops that had been at Ariminum. Then says St. Jerome, *Ingenuit totus orbis, et Arianum se esse miratus est*, The whole world groaned, and was amazed to think she should be reputed Arian. That is, the Catholic bishops of the whole world (for there were three hundred* of them present at the Council) were amazed to find themselves so abused, and represented as Arian, when they never intended in the least to confirm the Arian doctrine." But as to the extent of the Nicene faith, both at that time and after, I have spoken more particularly of it in another place, [Defence, vol. i. Query xxix. p. 331–334.] and need not here repeat. Only the reader may permit me to sum up the whole in the same words, or nearly as before. "There never was a council on the Arian side so free, so large, so in every respect unexceptionable, as the Council of Nice was: but whatever opposition was made to it, was carried on with such wiles and subtleties and refined artifices (to say nothing of cruelties), as every honest man would be ashamed of: and notwithstanding all that the Arians could do, they were not able long to maintain their ground; but the men who sustained the shock, and kept up the credit of the Nicene faith, were not only the most numerous, but appear to have been as wise, and as judicious, and as pious men as ever the Church was adorned with since the times of the Apostles. [See this Council defended more at large by Dr. Berriman, in his Remarks on Mr. Chandler, p. 19–42, and in his Review of the Remarks, p. 28–41.]

*[He might have said, three hundred and twenty. But I believe Jerome meant more than that three hundred and twenty by the *totus orbis*: he meant all the orthodox: for all of them suffered in the slander raised against their brethren, most of them as orthodox as themselves: so it affected them all, and all were amazed at the injurious aspersion. This place therefore of Jerome, rightly understood, is so far from saying, that the whole world was then Arian, that it in saying the contrary; namely, that the whole world was Anti-Arian: for by *totus orbis* he manifestly there means the orthodox, who had been slandered as Arian, and were really Anti-Arian. They were the whole world in his account, the Arians being but few in comparison.]

From what hath been said under the present article, it is manifest, that the impugnors of our Lord's Divinity have been all along condemned as guilty of heresy for the first three centuries and more; so that as far as the constant judgment and practice of the Church in their decrees and censures, during that time, can be conceived to bear weight, the doctrine of our Lord's true and proper Divinity, and of consequence, the doctrine of a real and coeternal Trinity, must be looked upon as a fundamental of the Christian faith.

III. Besides what has been pleaded upon the first topic relating to creeds, and upon the second relating to heretics;; there is yet a third head to go upon, namely, the sentiments of Ante-Nicene Fathers, such as they have occasionally delivered in their writings, distinct from what they have reported either of creeds or heresies. And these are what I am next going to produce, according to order of time, to show what they thought of the necessity or importance of faith in the ever blessed Trinity. Perhaps I may have anticipated some things under the last head, which might properly have come in here; or I may chance to take some things in here, which might properly have come in there: but it is of no great moment which head they are brought under, so long as both center in the same conclusion, and the two parts may be considered as supplemental to each other.

A.D. 107. *Ignatius*.

I begin with Ignatius, who writes thus: "Be not led aside by strange doctrines, nor by antiquated tales, which are unprofitable: for if we yet live according to Judaism, it is as much as declaring that we have not accepted grace [Ignat. act Magnes. s. 8.]; for the most holy Prophets lived according to Christ Jesus. And for that cause were they persecuted, being inspired by his grace, that the unbelievers might be convinced that there is one God who hath manifested himself by Jesus Christ his Son, who is his eternal Word, not proceeding from silence, [Ibid.] who in all things pleased him that sent him." The Judaizing heretics (whether Cerinthians, or Ebionites, or Gnostics at large) are the persons here pointed at without dispute [Pearson not. in loc. p. 43. Conf. Vindic. p. 55.]: and the Judaism here principally charged was, their denial of Christ's real and eternal

Divinity. The Jews would not own a proper Son of God, [Origen. contr. Cels. lib. i. p. 38. Ibid. lib. iv. p. 162. Ibid. c. 2. p.79.] an eternal subsisting Logos, but pertinaciously disputed that point with the Christians; as may appear sufficiently, besides other evidences, from Justin's celebrated Dialogue with Trypho. So here we may observe, how emphatically Ignatius expresses the Christian faith in opposition to those Judaizers, by asserting Christ to be God's Son, and his eternal Word, not proceeding from silence, as those Judaizers taught. I forbear to enter into the dispute about $\sigma\gamma\eta$, which has been already exhausted by Bishop Pearson, Bishop Bull, and other learned men. What I am most concerned to observe is, that Judaism was the common and just reproach thrown upon all the impugners or underminers of Christ's Divinity: for that was part of the distinguishing character of the Christian faith, as opposed to the Jewish, in those days.* As to Cerinthus and Ebion, the early impugners of Christ's Divinity, it is well known that they were Judaizers, and brought their heresy along with them, transplanting it from the Synagogue to the Church. Those that followed them in their heresy were judged so far to desert the Christian cause, and to side with the Jews. Tertullian, though directly pointing to Praxeas, yet makes the charge general against all that deny a real and divine Trinity. [Tertul. adv. Prax. c. 31.] Novatian passes the like censure upon as many as denied Christ's Divinity. [Novat. c. 15. ed. Welchm. alias c. 23.] Theodotus, though a Gentile Christian, is charged with Jewish blindness upon the same score. [Caecitatis Judaicae consors. Philastr. Haer. i. Conf. Epiphani. Haer. liv. lv.] Paul of Samosata is observed to have given up Christ's Divinity in complaisance to Jews. [Theodorit. Haret. Fab. lib. ii. c. 8. Athanas. vol. i. p. 386. Epiphani. Harr. lxv. 2, 7. Philastr. Hier. lxiv.] And the Arians afterwards, on the same account, are frequently censured by orthodox Christians, as revivers of Judaism. [Athanas. de Decret. Synod. N. p. 209, 233. Orat. ii. 484. Basil. Homil. xxiv. tom. ii. p. 189. edit. Bened. Greg. Nyssen. contr. Eunom. Orat. i. p. 15.]

*[I say, in those days. For that the ancients Jews were generally in like sentiments, is not probable, but the contrary. Of which see Allix's Judgment of the Jewish Church; and Considerations on Mr. Whiston's Historical Preface, p. 75, etc. and Primitive Christianity vindicated, p. 17, etc. and Stillingfleet on the Trinity, c. ix. p. 203, etc.]

I now return to Ignatius, who, after charging those impugners of Christ's Divinity with Judaism, intimates their thereby forfeiting the grace of the Gospel. Then he proceeds to lay down the true Christian doctrine of a Son of God, an eternal Word, not produced in time, or from silence. [Ittigius, Histor. Eccl. Soc. ii. p.118.] And since he asserts that the denial of that doctrine is Judaizing, and is renouncing the grace of the Gospel, it amounts to declaring that the article of Christ's Divinity is an essential of Christianity.

A.D. 155. *Justin Martyr*.

Justin Martyr, in a Fragment produced by Dr. Grabe, lays a very particular stress upon the article of Christ's Divinity, as the reconciliation of God and man is nearly concerned in it. The passage runs thus: "When man's nature had contracted corruption, it was necessary that he who would save it, should do away the principle of corruption. But this could not be done without uniting life by nature [or essential life] with the nature so corrupted, to do away the corruption, and to immortalize the corrupt nature ever after. Wherefore it was meet that the Word should become incarnate to deliver us from the death of natural corruption." [Grab. Spicileg. vol. ii. p. 172. Et in notis ad Bull. Judic. c. vii. s. 5. p. 344.]

Here Justin asserts that it was necessary for essential life (or life by nature) to be united with human nature, in order to save it: which is the same as to say, that it was necessary for God to become incarnate, in order to save lost man. So important did he take that article to be, conceiving that the redemption of mankind depended upon it. The phrase of life by nature, undoubtedly imports necessary existence and proper Divinity, as I have observed and proved upon another occasion, [Second Defence, vol. iii. p. 248. Compare Third Defence, vol. iv. p. 97.] and need not here do again. Bishop Bull brings some other passages from Justin of like import with this: but for brevity sake I choose to pass them over, and am content only to refer. [Bull. Judic. c. vii. s. 5. p. 344, 345.]

A.D. 176. *Irenaeus*.

Irenaeus has said much the same thing with Justin, in fuller and stronger words. After observing that the Son of God and Word of the Father became man, that he might give salvation to his own creature, or workmanship, [Iren. lib. III. c. 18, alias 20.] he proceeds as follows: "Therefore, as I said before, he united man to God: for if it were not man that should overcome the adversary of man, the enemy would not have been rightly vanquished; and again, if it were not God to give the salvation, we could not be firmly possessed of it: besides, if man had not been united to God, he could never have been partaker of incorruption. So it was meet that a Mediator between God and man should bring both together into amity and concord by his own proximity to both; that so he might present man to God, and notify God to men." [Irenaeus, *ibid.*] What we have here to observe is, that if Irenaeus believed it necessary for God to become man, in order to work man's salvation, he must of consequence judge the article of Christ's Divinity (in his high sense of Divinity) an essential of Christian faith, necessary to be believed by all to whom it should be revealed, under pain of forfeiting the benefit of it. Irenaeus's constant way of reasoning in other places shows that he

always carried that conclusion in his mind: and indeed he goes but one page farther on, before he formally draws it, in these strong and emphatical words [Iren. lib. iii. c. 19, alias c. 21.]: “They who make [Jesus] a mere man begotten of Joseph, remaining under the bondage of the first disobedience, are in a dead state, inasmuch as they are not yet conjoined with the Word of God the Father, nor have received freedom by the Son: according to what himself says; If the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed. [John 8:36.] While they acknowledge not him who of the Virgin is Emmanuel [God with us], they forfeit the benefit of it, which is life eternal. While they admit not the Word of incorruption, they continue in mortal flesh, and are bound over to death, for want of receiving the antidote of life.” This excellent writer has a great deal more to the same purpose, in the same chapter: but what I have cited may suffice for a summary view of his sentiments on this head. It is observable, that, according to him, the not receiving the Emmanuel, as Emmanuel, that is, as God incarnate, is in effect throwing up the privileges of it (viz. life eternal), and is remaining under the dominion of death and hell. Nothing can be stronger for the importance of the article of Christ’s Divinity; especially if this passage be compared with the author’s high and just sense of the name Emmanuel, importing that Christ is substantially, or essentially, God in one nature, as he is man in another. [Iren. lib. iii. c. 21, alias 26. Iren. lib. iv. c. 33, alias 66.] I know not whether I again need to take notice (having twice before done it [See above.]) how Irenaeus here mixes the two questions about the birth of a virgin, and about the Lord’s Divinity, as amounting to one, upon the foot of the then present controversies. For the point then in question was, whether Christ was conceived in the common way of human generation, or whether the divine Logos coming upon the Virgin, superseded and excluded human means? The question being so stated, the asserting a divine Logos in Christ was of course asserting the birth of a virgin; as the denying the birth of a virgin was of course denying any personal union of the Logos with man. Thus the two questions, at that time, resolved, in a manner, into one: which is the reason, as I hinted before, of their being intermingled together.

A.D. 177. *Athenagoras.*

Athenagoras, in his Apology for the Christian Religion, written at this time, [See Mosheim. Observat. Sacr. c. iv.] has more passages than one, [Vid. Bull. Defens. F. N. sect. ii. c. 4. p. 67, alias 71. Dr. Bishop’s Sermons, p. 186, etc. Nourrii Apparatus ad Bibl. Max. vol. i. p. 487, etc. My Sermons, vol. ii. p. 181. Second Defence, vol. iii. p. 72–78, 250, etc.] which plainly prove his belief of the truth of the doctrine of the Trinity: but as to the necessity, or the importance of such faith, he had the less

occasion to speak particularly, or to press it with any earnestness, since his immediate concern was not with heretics, or with Jews, but with Pagans only. Nevertheless, he occasionally drops some expressions, which intimate his high veneration for that sublime and tremendous doctrine, and show how much it concerned Christians to make it the subject of their most serious thoughts and most devout meditations. Speaking of Christians, he describes them [Athenag. Legat. lib. xi. p. 46. edit. Oxon.] “as men that made small account of the present life, but were intent only upon contemplating God, [[Greek] is an emendation of a learned foreigner, Godfr. Olearius, in his Dissertat. Theolog. de Spiritus Sanct. cum Patre et Filio Adoration, contr. Gul. Whiston, A.D. 1711. p. 2. The emendation has been taken notice of before by Dr. Bishop, Sermons, p. 188.] and knowing his Word who is from him; what union the Son has with the Father, what communion the Father has with the Son; what the Spirit is, and what the union and distinction are of such so united, the Spirit, the Son, and the Father.” From hence we may infer how important a doctrine that of the Trinity, as understood by Athenagoras (the same as we understand at this day), was conceived to be, that the then Christians made it one principal concern of their lives, to contemplate and adore the three divine Persons. I say, adore: for though that is not expressed in this passage, it is undoubtedly implied, and is the express doctrine of the author in other places. [Atheoag. c. x. p. 40. xxvi. p. 122.] Thus much we may undoubtedly collect from the present passage, that mysteries of faith were not then thought barren speculations, or matters of slight concernment. The reflection of a learned foreigner hereupon is very just and proper, and I shall give it the reader in the margin, [Godfr. Olear. in Dissertat. p. 1, 2.] as an useful comment upon this paragraph of Athenagoras. I proceed to other ecclesiastical writers in their order.

A.D. 209. *Tertullian.*

Tertullian has some very remarkable expressions relating to the faith of the Church in Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, one God, as being the sum and substance of the Gospel, the very life and spirit of the Christian religion. I have cited part of the passage before, but shall now give it entire. “It is mere Judaism to believe one God in such a sense as not to reckon the Son to him, and after the Son, the Spirit: for wherein is the great difference between them and us, except it be in this article? What is it that the Gospel has done, what is the substance of the New Testament, extending the Law and the Prophets as far as John, if from thence forwards Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, three Persons, are not believed to make one God?” [Tertul. adv. Prax. c. xxxi. p. 102. edit. Welchm.] I have taken a little liberty in translating, just enough to keep the English up, and not to alter the sense. Three Persons is barely a literal rendering of *tres*, in that place, which

cannot be otherwise so well expressed in English: besides, the word *Persona*, for the same thing, is common in Tertullian. [Tertul. contr. Prax. c. xi. p. 32, 34. xii. 35, 37.] As to what concerns the importance of the doctrine of the Trinity, it is impossible to invent anything fuller or stronger, in so few words, than this passage. I am sensible it will be pleaded in bar to his evidence that he was a Montanist. The fact is true, but there is no argument at all in it, as has been often shown by learned men; but more particularly by the learned and judicious Mr. Welchman, [Welchman. Praefat. ad Tertul. contr. Prax. p. 5–13. Conf. Mosheim, Disquis. Chronologico Crit. de vera aetate Apologetici a Tertulliano conscripti.] in his late very correct edition of the treatise against Praxeas. Tertullian was no Montanist in 198: but it has been sufficiently proved, both by Mr. Welchman and Mosheim, that his Apology (which contains the same doctrine) was as early as that year.

A.D. 256. *Cyprian*.

St. Cyprian has a remarkable passage which speaks full and close to our purpose. Arguing for the invalidity of heretical baptisms, he asks, how any person baptized by heretics, and thereby partaking in their heresy (so he must mean), can be presumed to obtain remission of sins, and to become the temple of God? “If he be thereby made the temple of God, I would ask, of what God [or divine Person] it is? Is it of [God] the Creator? he could not be so, if he believed not in him. Is it of Christ? neither can he be his temple, while he denies Christ to be God. Is it then of the Holy Ghost? But since the three are one, how can the Holy Ghost have friendship with him that is at enmity with either Father or Son?” [Cyprian. Ep. 73. ad Jubaian. p. 203. edit. Oxon.] Here it is observable, 1. That St. Cyprian gives the name or title of God to each of the divine Persons. 2. That to deny Christ to be God is interpretatively excluding one’s self from Christ, and declaring enmity towards all the three, who are one. 3. That therefore the acknowledging Christ to be God is necessary to salvation, and the impugning that doctrine is destructive of it: consequently, one is a fundamental article of faith, and the other a fundamental error. So far is plain. And now if there remains any room for dispute, it can only be about the true and full meaning of the word God in this place. But Cyprian’s declaring that salvation depends upon the article, is a strong presumption that he understood the word in its just and proper sense: his applying it indifferently to all the three Persons, without any mark of distinction, is a further presumption of the same thing: his saying, that the three are one [*unum*], one substance, one thing, makes it still plainer: and lastly, his applying the title of God to the Son, in the strictest and highest sense, in other parts of his works, sets it beyond dispute. [The passers are collected in Bishop Ball, Def. F. N. sect. ii. c. 10. p. 119, etc. and in my First Defence, vol. i. Qu. ii. p. 21, etc. Second

Defence, vol. iii. Qu. ii. p. 137.] I may observe, by the way, of Cyprian, as I have before hinted of other Fathers, that he went upon this maxim, that whosoever shall disbelieve the doctrines of salvation revealed to mankind, shall have no part in the salvation so tendered to them, ordinarily at least.

A.D. 257. *Novatian.*

Novatian expresses the same thought in very clear and strong terms. “If God the Father saves none but through God, then no one can be saved by God the Father, who does not confess that Christ is God; in whom, and by whom, the Father promises to give salvation: wherefore, very justly, whosoever acknowledges him to be God, is in the way to be saved by Christ, who is God; and whosoever doth not acknowledge him to be God, forfeits salvation, because he cannot otherwise have it but in Christ as God.” [Novat. c. xii. p. 36.] Words too plain to need any comment. Only, I may observe that Novatian, as well as Cyprian, understood the word God, as applied to Christ, to import proper and substantial Divinity; as I have abundantly proved elsewhere. [First Defence, vol. i. p. 9, etc. p. 97, etc. Second Defence, vol. iii. p. 59, etc. 120, etc. 139, 455, 459. Conf. Bull. Def. F. N. sect. ii. c. 10. p. 121, 122.] Besides which, it is certain, that the Novatians, his followers, were always orthodox in the article of Christ’s Divinity, as also in the doctrine of the whole Trinity. [The testimonies may be seen collected in a late pamphlet, entitled, An Answer to Dr. Clarke and Mr. Whitson, etc. by H. E. in the preface, p. 2; 3.]

A.D. 259. *Dionysius of Rome.*

Dionysius, Bishop of Rome, in a valuable Fragment, preserved by Athanasius, styles the doctrine of the Trinity, “The most venerable doctrine of the Church of God” [Apud Athanas. vol. i. p. 231.]; understanding the doctrine as we do at this day: it was not then looked upon as a speculative opinion, or as a matter of slight importance. But this is not all I have to observe from the same excellent writer: he goes on to speak of some who had the presumption to call the Son of God a creature, led to it by their indiscreet opposition to Sabellianism, as it was natural enough for weak men to run from one extreme to another. He rejects the notion with the utmost abhorrence, as every wise and good man would: and after censuring Marcion’s Tritheistic doctrine as diabolical, he proceeds to speak of the other, as follows: “Nor are they less to blame, who think the Son creature, and who suppose the Lord to have come into being, as if he were one of the things that were really made: the sacred oracles assign him a generation, suitable and proper, not a formation and creation. Wherefore it must be blasphemy of no ordinary size, but of the first magnitude, to say that the Lord

was a kind of handy-work. For if he began to be, he once was not: but he existed eternally, if so be that he is in the Father, as himself testifies, and if Christ be the Word, and Wisdom, and Power.” [Apud Athenas. vol. i. p. 231, 232.] There is more to the same purpose in what follows: what I have cited may suffice to show, that the doctrine of our Lord’s coeternal Divinity was then looked upon as an article of the highest importance, and that to deny it was to blaspheme in a most grievous manner, according to the sentiments of the Church at that time. For Dionysius speaks not his own sense only, but the sense of the Roman Synod, and of good Christians in general; as he himself intimates by his saying to those whom he addresses himself to, that he had no need to dwell upon that matter before persons so enlightened by the Spirit of God, and so well apprised, as they were, of the great absurdity of making the Son a creature. [Ibid. p. 232.]

A.D. 259. *Dionysius of Alexandria.*

The case of Dionysius of Alexandria is a famous case. He had written some things against the Sabellians, wherein expressing himself unwarily, he was suspected by some to lean too far towards the opposite extreme, as if he had not just notions of the Divinity of Christ. A jealousy being raised, the matter was thought considerable enough to be brought before the other Dionysius, Bishop of Rome: which probably occasioned his writing what I have just now cited from him. [See Athanas. de Sententia Dionysii Alex. p. 252. de Synod. 757.] The Bishop of Rome took cognizance of the cause, and the Bishop of Alexandria, though not inferior to him, nor under his jurisdiction, submitted so far as to put in his answer or apology: which alone shows, that it was looked upon by all parties as a cause of great moment; for in smaller matters, bishops were not obliged to give account to their colleagues. St. Cyprian well expresses both the cases, viz. where and when independent bishops were accountable to other bishops, [Cyprian. ad Steph. Ep. lxxviii. p. 178.] and where they were not. [Concil. Carthagin. apud Cypr. p. 229, 230.] The sum is, that in the ritual part of religion, such bishops were independent and unaccountable; but in the substantial part, in matters of necessary faith, they were liable to be censured by their brethren. Seeing therefore that Dionysius of Alexandria was accused in a cause of heresy, the Bishop of Rome could not decline hearing it, nor the other refuse to submit to have it heard and judged. The whole process of that affair shows that the Divinity of Christ (about which the question was) was looked upon by all parties as a cause of the utmost concernment to religion. The whole Christian world, in a manner, was in an alarm about it: complaint was brought from Egypt as far as to Italy: the Bishop of Rome, with his clergy in Synod, were in the greatest concern upon it, and sent their judgment of the matter in question to the Bishop

of Alexandria, requiring him to give an account of his faith: and that aged venerable Primate did so soon after, declaring in the face of the world, that he never intended the least injury to the Divinity of Christ, or to his consubstantiality, but himself believed it, as sincerely and fully as any man else could. This affair is recorded by Athanasius, [Athanas. de Sententia Dionys. p. 252. de Synod. 757, 758.] from whom I have collected what I have said: and it is a standing monument of the high regard paid to the doctrine of our Lord's Divinity, [See the whole thing more particularly drawn out, and vindicated from exceptions, in Bull. Def. F. N. sect. ii. c. 11. Thirlby's Answers to Whiston's Suspicions, p. 31, etc. Berriman, Hist. Account, p. 127, etc.] as a most important and fundamental article of Christianity in those days, sixty years and more before the Council of Nice.

A.D. 319. *Alexander of Alexandria.*

I shall close this account with the sentiments of Alexander and his clergy, among which were near a hundred more bishops of the province, upon the present question, at the first breaking out of the Arian heresy. In their synodical letter, after sentence of excommunication passed upon Arius and his adherents, they represent the Arians, or Eusebians, as fallen into an apostasy, and as forerunners of antichrist [Ap. Athanas. p. 397. et ap. Socrat. lib. i. c. 6.]: they compare them with Hymenaeus and Philetus, and the traitor Judas; and they stigmatize them as enemies to God, and subverters of souls. Such was their sense of the high importance of the doctrine of Christ's Divinity, which Arius had impugned. About two years after, the same Alexander, in his circular letter to the other Alexander of Byzantium, after declaring his faith in Christ, as truly and essentially God, of that and other articles of his Creed, he says: "These we teach, and these we declare: these are the apostolical doctrines of the Church, for which we should be content to die, making small account of them who would compel us to deny them: for though they should even torture us to comply, yet would we not cast off our hope in those [doctrines]: for the opposing of which Arius and Achillas, with their accomplices, being enemies to the truth, are ejected out of the Church, as deserters of our holy faith [godly doctrine]; pursuant to St. Paul's rule: If any one preach any other Gospel unto you than what you have received, let him be accursed, though he should pretend to be an angel from heaven." [Apud Theodorit. E. H. lib. i. c. 4.] Such were the sentiments of this good and great man, relating to the importance of the doctrine he taught; the same which was afterward confirmed by the general Council of Nice, summoned from out of all Christendom to decide so momentous a question.

The sum of what I have advanced in this chapter is, that by three several topics it is proved to be certain fact, that the doctrine of our Lord's Divinity, and

so of the whole Trinity, was looked upon by the ancient churches of Christ as one of the prime verities, one of the essentials of Christianity. This, I say, is proved from Creeds, and from censures upon heresies (public acts of the Church), and from particular testimonies of Fathers, declaring their own private sentiments of the weight and importance of the doctrines we have been considering. Now I proceed to inquire of what use and value this view of the ancients may be to us.

Chapter VII.

Showing the Use and Value of Ecclesiastical Antiquity with Respect to Controversies of Faith.

I intend not here to consider the use of the Fathers in its largest extent, but only so far as concerns articles of faith. I shall endeavour to set this matter in as clear a light as I can, for the impartial and discerning reader to judge of, avoiding all extremes. A certain writer, whom I should not perhaps have taken the least notice of, had it not thus fallen in my way, has been pleased to tell the world, that “Dr. Waterland and some others, who have appeared on the same side of the question, have only considered the Scripture in that light which a sober Turk or an Indian might discover in it. But Scripture has a much greater force in the hands of St. Athanasius and of St. Basil (who viewed it in its true, that is, in its original and traditionary sense, and under the lights of faith), than it has in Dr. Waterland’s; who ascends no higher than the bare letter, and that sense of which all men, who are sincere, may equally judge, whether they believe it or not. But when St. Athanasius and St. Basil argue from Scripture, they have a regard to faith, and those ideas which Catholics have always had concerning the Son and the Holy Spirit.” [An Answer to Dr. Clarke and Mr. Whiston, concerning the Divinity of the Son and Holy Spirit, with a summary Account of the chief Writers of the three first Ages. By H. E. Printed by Roberts, 1729. See pref. p. 4, 5.] The report which this gentleman has here made may be true in part: and, so far, what he intended as an article of blame may appear much otherwise to more equal judges. I doubt not to say that the Scripture is plain enough in this cause, for any honest Turk or Indian to judge of, who is but able to discern the difference between wresting a text, and giving it an easy and natural interpretation. Nor do I see why a man may not be as certain of the construction of Scripture in this article, from the words themselves, comparing Scriptures with Scriptures, as he may be of the sense of Homer or Aristotle, of Cicero or Caesar, in plain and clear passages. Nevertheless, if over and above this, any further light or strength may arise from comparing Scripture and antiquity together, it is an additional advantage to our cause, such as we are thankful for, and constantly make use of. All kinds of evidences are useful; and

there is so much weakness generally in mankind, that we have no reason to throw aside any assistances given us for relief or remedy. Antiquity therefore, superadded to Scripture, is what we sincerely value, and pay a great regard to; perhaps much greater than that gentleman himself really does: for if I be not very much mistaken in the drift and tendency of his censure, it is such as plainly discovers (notwithstanding his artful disguises) a much more affectionate concern for a modern corrupt Church, than for the pure and ancient faith. St. Athanasius and St. Basil pleaded the same cause, and exactly in the same way, as we of the Church of England do. They appealed to Scripture first, speaking for itself, and proving its own sense to the common reason of mankind, according to the just rules of grammar and criticism: after that, they referred also to the well-known faith of all the ancient churches, as superabundantly confirming the same rational and natural construction. Athanasius and Basil were wise and honest men, and would never have admitted what this writer meanly insinuates [An Answer to Dr. Clarke and Mr. Whiston, etc. pref. p. 6, 7.] (while he pretends to be an advocate on the same side) that Arianism would not be heresy upon the foot of Scripture, singly considered. Such unworthy suggestions are as contrary to the general sense of antiquity, as they are to truth and godliness, and tend only to betray the best of causes, for the sake of serving and supporting one of the worst. Athanasius's sentiments may appear from one single passage, which is all I need refer to at length in proof of a thing so well known. He observes, that the Arians, finding nothing in Scripture to countenance their heresy, were forced to have recourse to confident presumptions and collusive sophistry; and when they had done with those, their next attempt was, to abuse the Fathers also, [Athanas. de Sent. Dionys. p. 243.] who favoured them as little as the Scripture did. Athanasius appealed to Scripture in the first place, and laid the main stress there: which indeed is his constant way in his dispute with the Arians. No man speaks more highly of the perfection and sufficiency of Scripture than he does: namely, that it affords the fullest and strongest evidences for establishing the faith against the Arians [Vid. Athanas. p. 274, 720, 237. edit. Bened.]; and that it is in itself sufficient for everything. [Athanas. p. 1.] The like might be shown of Basil, were it needful. Therefore let not that gentleman hope to find shelter for his insidious conduct under those great and venerable names.

He proceeds to observe, that "Catholics (Roman Catholics I suppose he means) are so accustomed to join faith and reading the holy Scripture together, that they account this to be the natural signification of the words." [Answer to Dr. Clarke, etc. p. 7.] Which is artfully insinuating, that the sense which Trinitarians affix to Scripture is not natural, but made to appear so, through the prejudice of education, or through the lights of an infallible chair. And so he pleads, under

cover, for imposing a sense upon Scripture, instead of taking one from the natural force of the words. This never was the advice of the ancients, [Hilar. de Trin. lib. i. col. 777.] neither ought it to be the practice of moderns. We insist upon it, that our interpretation of Scripture is just and natural, and that one great use of antiquity is, to guard that natural construction against unnatural distortions. To do violence to Scripture, in order to bring it to speak what we have a mind to, or what we have preconceived, is making Scripture insignificant, and setting up a new rule of faith: and indeed this gentleman, afterwards, gives very broad intimations, that Scripture is not the whole rule of faith. [Answer to Dr. Clarke, pref. p. 17. book 22, 23.] So now the secret is out: and I suppose, by this time, it is manifest what cause he is serving; and that he has something else more at heart than the doctrine of the Trinity. However, to do him justice, though he has made too many concessions, and has not sufficiently considered his subject, [This appears from his lame and confused account of the word *person*, p. 5–11, 38.] he has yet given us a neat methodical summary of the doctrine of the ancients upon that head. Only it would grieve a man to observe, how disadvantageous circumstances he chooses to place those venerable saints in, as overruling the natural sense of words, and making that heresy which Scripture has not made so, having no authority for doing it, but what they are forced to borrow from a particular Church,* which gives the same to every article of the Trent Creed. But leaving this gentleman to take his own way, let us now proceed to the business in hand.

*[The very pious Mr. Nelson, in a Letter to a Popish Priest, has some reflections worth the inserting in tide place. “I am not ignorant that two of year great champions, Cardinal Perron and Petavius, to raise the authority of general councils, and to make the rule of their faith appear more plausible, have aspersed not only the holy of Scriptures, as incapable, by reason of their obscurity, to prove the great and necessary point of our Saviour’s Divinity, but have impeached also the Fathers of the first three centuries as tardy in the same point. – “Blessed God! that men should be so fond of human inventions, as to sacrifice to them those pillars of our faith, which are alone proper and able to support it; I mean Scripture and primitive antiquity. But to do justice to the memory of so learned a man as Petavius, the Bishop of Meaux told me, discoursing with him once on this subject, that in the last edition he made of his works, he refracted this opinion: which I am willing to believe upon the authority of that great man, etc.” Dr. Hiches’s Letters, etc. p. 334. Compare Chillingworth, pref. sect. 16, 17, 18.]

There is no occasion for magnifying antiquity at the expense of Scripture; neither is that the way to do real honour to either, but to expose both; as it is sacrificing their reputation to serve the ends of novelty and error. Antiquity ought to attend as an handmaid to Scripture, to wait upon her as her mistress, and to observe her; to keep of intruders from making too bold with her, and to

discourage strangers from misrepresenting her. Antiquity, in this ministerial view, is of very great use; which I shall endeavour to show as distinctly as may be.

But, first, let me premise a few things, in order to give the reader a clearer idea of the true state of the whole case. It is to be considered, that Scripture consists of words, and that words are but signs, and that common usage and acceptation is what must settle their meaning. And when any thing comes down to us in a dead language, as Scripture now does, the customary use of words in that language, at the time when they were spoken or written, must be the rule and measure of interpretation [See Rogers's Review, p. 41–51.]; only, taking in with it the drift and intention of the speaker, or writer, so far as it may be certainly known, or probably presumed from evidences or circumstances.

It is next to be considered, that there is something of equivocalness and ambiguity, for the most part, in words, or phrases, though ever so well and wisely chosen; and that many through ignorance, or inattention, or prepossession, may mistake or pervert their true meaning. Subtle wits may at any time take advantage of this natural imperfection of all languages, and may wrest the plainest expressions from their true and certain meaning, to a false and foreign one. The nature of language, I say, is such, that it may be done, and the depravity or weakness of mankind is such, that it often will be done: and then disputes will arise about the jarring and dissonant interpretations, all perhaps appearing severally possible, and all plausibly recommended, though amongst them all there is but one which is truly reasonable.

It may further be considered, that all languages abound with metaphors, tropes, figures, or schemes of speech; and it is allowable to interpret figuratively, allegorically, emblematically, as often as there is a necessity for it, or good reason to apprehend that the thing was written in the way of figure, allegory, or emblem. This allowable liberty may easily be extended too far, through want of judgment, or want of care, or want of honesty and sincerity. Indeed most of the abuses, with regard to interpreting of Scripture, when traced up to their fountain head, will appear to have been owing to this, that some will fancy the plain and obvious sense unreasonable, or absurd, when it really is not; and will thereupon obtrude their own surmises, conjectures, prejudices upon the word of God. For having taken their own conceits for certain truths, and having determined beforehand, that the letter of Scripture shall give way to them, they will of course rack and torture Scripture, as far as wit, learning, or invention can assist them, in order to contrive some construction or other, which may but seem to favour their preconceived opinions; unless they choose rather to reject or adulterate the texts which make against them, or to devise new Scriptures to

serve the purpose.

Add to this, that the art of torturing plain words has been advanced to great perfection in these latter ages, since the revival of learning and sciences; and especially since the Socinians [The Socinian management is elegantly described by Abr. Calovius. Vid. Wucherer. Vindic. adv. Whiston. p. 21. A.D. 1732.] and Romanists have taken almost incredible pains to make themselves complete masters in that way. There is nothing now almost, but what some or other will attempt (if there be occasion) to drag over into the service of any cause, and to wrest to what sense they please, though ever so contrary to the words themselves, or to the known intention of the authors or compilers. The ancient misbelievers most of them were young practitioners in comparison: for they commonly rejected or adulterated the Scriptures which they did not like, [The heretics, so charged, are Cerinthus, Ebion, Saturninus, Carpecrates, Cerdon, Marcion, Lucian, Appelles, Tatian, Ptolomaeus, Theodetus, Artemon, Manichaeus the Ophitae, Cainites, Sethoites, Alogi, Pepuxiaus, Severians, and perhaps some others.] not understanding, or however not trusting to quail, interpretations, which might steal away the sense, without injuring the letter.

Lastly, it should be considered, that God has provided no other general remedies against these and the like abuses, or against men's being imposed upon by them, than what he has provided against any other wiles of Satan, or any other temptations; namely, prayer and watchfulness, care and endeavour, and the use of proper means. We are no more secure against heresy, than we are against any other sins: but there are as strong temptations to it, (founded in natural pride, vanity, curiosity, emulation, ambition, or sometimes credulity, supineness, secular interest, or revenge,) as there are to other vices of a coarser kind.

These things considered, it will be highly expedient to take in all the helps we can procure, for the ascertaining the true and full meaning of sacred Writ, and for preserving, so far as in us lies, the doctrines of Christ. No proper means are to be neglected or set aside, lest we fall into error for want of the use of such means, or be found guilty of despising the gifts of God. Now we may come to the main question, whether antiquity may not be justly reputed one of the proper means, or how far it is so? In which inquiry I shall proceed by several steps or degrees, for the clearer and more distinct conception of what belongs to it, under its several views.

I. The ancients, who lived nearest to the apostolical times, are of some use to us, considered merely as contemporary writers, for their diction or phraseology. Any other coetaneous writers, Jewish or Pagan, are of use in that view: but some writers, Christian authors, will be so more especially, as conversant in the same subjects, and breathing the same spirit with the sacred

writers themselves. [Vid. Dodwell. Dissect. in Iren. in Praefat. sect. 15. et Dissert. 1.] This, however, is the least, and the lowest use of the ancient Fathers; besides that we have but few, and those very short tracts, which bear so early a date.

II. A further use of the ancient Fathers is seen, in their letting us into the knowledge of antiquated rites and custom, upon which some Scripture allusions may be formed, and upon the knowledge of which the true interpretation of some Scripture phrases or idioms may in some measure depend. [Dodwell. Dissect in Iren. i. c. 44.] But this general use is such as may also be answered, in a lower degree, by any as early writings, Jewish or Pagan; as likewise by Lexicons, or books of antiquities.

III. The ancient Fathers are further useful, as giving us insight into the history of the age in which the sacred books (of the New Testament, I mean) were written. For there is nothing which is apt to give so much light to any writing, as the well understanding and considering the historical occasion of it: a much surer and safer rule to go by, generally speaking, than mere criticizing upon words; as is manifest in the case of charters, statutes, records, and other ancient monuments.

IV. I come, fourthly, to mention some more peculiar and eminent views, in which the most ancient Fathers may be exceeding useful, for fixing the sense of Scripture in controverted texts. Those that lived in or near the apostolical times might retain in memory what the Apostles themselves, or their immediate successors, thought and said upon such and such points. And though there is no trusting, in such case, to oral tradition distinct from Scripture, nor to written, disagreeing with Scripture; yet written accounts, consonant to Scripture, are of use to confirm and strengthen Scripture, and to ascertain its true meaning. Ignatius, for instance, had been intimately conversant with the Apostles, [Chrysostom. Hom. in Ignat. tom. i. p. 499. Socrat. Eccl. H. 1. vi. c. 8.] and was a disciple of St. John [Act. Ignat. p. 9. edit. Grab. in Spicileg.]: and therefore he may reasonably be presumed to have justly represented the mind of the Apostles, in the doctrine he has left behind him, extant at this day. This the learned Mosheim has admitted, and even contended for, [Mosheim. Vindic. contr. Toland. sect. i. cap. 8. Compare Abp. Wake, c. x. p. 111, 114. 2d edit.] though otherwise no zealous admirer of the ancient Fathers.

The like may be said of Polycarp, who had been taught immediately by the Apostles, and had conversed with many who had seen our Lord. [Iren. lib. iii. c. 3. Euseb. E. H. lib. iv. c. 14.] He was also particularly acquainted with St. John, [Iren. Ep. ad Florin. inter Fragment. p. 340. Euseb. E. H. v. 20.] was one of his disciples, and ordained Bishop of Smyrna by his hands. [Hieronym. Catal. Scriptor. Eccl. 17. Tertullian. Praescript. c. 32.] His doctrine, so far as it reaches, and may be certainly

depended upon as his (whether we have it at first or at second hand), will be of great use for confirming the sense of Scripture, being a secondary attestation of the same doctrine: which Mosheim, before mentioned, does also allow, and plead for. [Mosheim. *ibid.* p. 237. Abp. Wake's *Apostolical Fathers*, c. x. p. 111.] Our most reverend metropolitan, speaking of the authority of the very early Fathers, sums it up in these several particulars. "1. That they were contemporary with the Apostles, and instructed by them. 2. That they were men of an eminent character in the Church, and therefore such as could not be ignorant of what was taught in it. 3. They were careful to preserve the doctrine of Christ in its purity, and to oppose such as went about to corrupt it. 4. They were men not only of a perfect piety, but of great courage and constancy, and therefore such as cannot be suspected to have had any design to prevaricate in this matter. 5. They were endued with a large portion of the Holy Spirit, and, as such, could hardly err in what they delivered as the Gospel of Christ. 6. Their writings were approved by the Church in those days, which could not be mistaken in its approbation of them." [Abp. Wake's *Apostolical Fathers*, cap. x. p. 110.]

Mr. Bayle allows that, "in the days of the Apostles, or their first disciples, it had been easy to discover those who gave the Scriptures a wrong interpretation, because the infallibility of the Apostles (who might have been consulted by word or by letter), and the fresh remembrance of the verbal instructions they had given their disciples and pastors, whom themselves had consecrated, was a ready means for clearing any doubt or disputed point." [Bayle's *Supplement to Philosophical Commentary*, p. 692.] It appears then to be on all hands agreed, that those most early Fathers are competent witnesses of the doctrine of the Church in their days; nay, and of the doctrine also of Christ and his Apostles, to whom they immediately succeeded: and therefore their general sense is of signal use (so far as it reaches) to ascertain the interpretation of Scripture, and more especially as being consonant to the easy and natural import of the words themselves.

The like may be said in proportion, and in a lower degree, of the writings of Justin Martyr, Athenagoras, Irenaeus, and Clemens Alexandrinus;* eminent personages, who flourished within fifty or sixty, or at most ninety years of the apostolical age. Their nearness to the time, their known fidelity, and their admirable endowments, ordinary and extraordinary, add great weight to their testimony, or doctrine, and make it a probable rule of interpretation in the prime things: but there is another consideration, to follow in its place, which will give it still greater strength of probability than what I have here suggested. As to later Fathers, the argument, in this view, loses its force more and more, the lower we descend. Yet it deserves our notice, that the Fathers of the third and fourth

centuries had the advantage of many written accounts of the doctrine of the former ages, which have since been lost; and therefore their testimonies also are of considerable weight, and are a mark of direction to us, not to be slighted in the main things. Neither indeed is this saying anything very highly of them, but may be thought rather to be setting them too low, and sinking them beneath their real value: for the testimonies of Jews, heretics, or Pagans, so far as we can depend upon them, must be allowed to carry in them the same use, where they testify anything of the general doctrine or practice of the Christian Church in their times. Pliny, Lucian, Celsus, and Julian (to name no more) are all useful to us in this view, as they give some light into the doctrine of the first and purest ages. They confirm the fact, that such doctrines were then generally taught, and they corroborate other evidences. Socinus seems to have allowed more to one testimony of Lucian, than to many Christian evidences. [Genebrardes, lib. i. et ii. de Trinitate. Socin. adv. Eutrop. c. xv. p. 698. Opp.] No doubt, but it was some advantage to it in his esteem, that it came from a Pagan: though still it had not weight enough to conquer his prejudices; for he never wanted evasions. But I pass on to what I intend farther. All kinds of evidences are of use, which can bring us any light as to what the doctrine of the Church was in the best and purest ages: and when we are once advanced so far as to come to any certainty about that fact, then we have ground whereon to stand, and can build our argument upon it.

*[Clemens of Alexandria, the latest of the four, yet testifies of himself that he had received his doctrine from several disciples of the very chief Apostles, who had truly preserved the tradition of the blessed doctrine as coming directly from the holy Apostles, Peter, James, and Paul. Strom. lib. i. p. 322. Conf. Grabe, Instances of Omissions and Defects, etc. p. 9.]

V. The next consideration therefore is this, that a very particular regard is due to the public acts of the ancient Church, appearing in creeds made use of in baptism, and in the censures passed upon heretics: and the observable harmony and unanimity of the several churches, [Iren. lib. iii. c. 3. Tertul. Praescript. c. 20.] in such acts, is a circumstance which adds irresistible force to them. It is not at all likely, that any whole church of those early times should vary from apostolical doctrine in things of moment: but it is, morally speaking, absurd to imagine, that all the churches should combine in the same error, and conspire together to corrupt the doctrine of Christ. [Tertul. *ibid.* c. 28.] This is the argument which Irenaeus and Tertullian insist much upon, and triumph in, over the heretics of their times: and it is obliquely glanced upon by Hegesippus and Clemens Alexandrines of the same second century, and by Origen also of the third. The argument was undoubtedly true and just, as it then stood, while there were no breaks in the succession of doctrine, but a perfect unanimity of the churches all

along, in the prime articles: though, afterwards, the force of this argument came to be obscured, and almost lost, by taking in things foreign to it, and blending it with what happened in later times. The force of it could last no longer than such unanimity lasted. I say, while the churches were all unanimous in the main things (as they were in Irenaeus's time, and Tertullian's, and for more than a century after), that very unanimity was a presumptive argument that their faith was right, derived down to them from the Apostles themselves. For it was highly unreasonable to suppose, that those several churches, very distant from each other in place, and of different languages, and under no common visible head, should all unite in the same errors, and deviate uniformly from their rule at once. But that they should all agree in the same common faith, might easily be accounted for, as arising from the same common cause, which could be no other but the common delivery of the same uniform faith and doctrine to all the churches by the Apostles themselves. [See this argument very well explained and enforced by Dr. Sherlock, in his Present State of the Socinian Controversy, cap. ii. sect. 2. p. 60, etc.] Such unanimity could never come by chance, but must be derived from one common source: and therefore the harmony of their doctrine was in itself a pregnant argument of the truth of it. [Sam. Basnag. Annal. tom. i. p. 742.] As to the fact, that the churches were thus unanimous in all the prime things, in those days, Irenaeus, who was a very knowing person, and who had come far east to settle in the west, bears ample testimony to it. [Iren. lib. i. c. 10, alias 3. lib. iii. c. 3, 4.] Tertullian, in the two passages last cited from him, testifies the same thing, as to the unanimity of the churches of those times in the fundamentals of Christian doctrine. Hegeppus, contemporary with Irenaeus, gives much the same account of the succession of true doctrine, down to his own time, in the several churches. [Hegepp. ap. Euseb. lib. iv. c. 22.] Clemens of Alexandria means the same thing, where he recommends the faith of the universal Church as one, and as more ancient than heresies. [Clem. Alex. Strom. vii. p. 898, 899. Conf. Strom. i. p. 322.] And Origen of the third century testifies the same of the Church in his time, and argues in the same manner from it. [Origen. in Apolog. Pamph. inter Opp. Hieron. tom. v. p. 223.] Irenaeus and Tertullian were both of them so strongly persuaded of the certainty, first, of the fact, and next of the inference from it, that they scrupled not to urge it as a very full and convincing proof of the apostolical faith, singly considered, [Iren. i. cap. 4.] and abstracting from Scripture proof. An argument which there is no need to be jealous of, if it be but rightly understood, and limited to such circumstances as it was grounded upon. For the meaning was not, that apostolical churches could never err, nor that tradition would be always a safe rule to go by: but such tradition as that was, which might easily be traced up to the Apostles, by the help of writings then extant (as easily as we may now

trace up the doctrine of our Church to the reign of Charles, or of James the First), such a tradition might be depended upon. Besides that the unanimity of the churches all the world over (which could not be rationally accounted for on any other supposition but that they had been so taught from the beginning) confirmed the same thing. The argument in this light, and in those circumstances, was a very good one. But when those circumstances came to be altered, and there had been several breaks in the succession of doctrine, and that too even in the apostolical churches, then there could be no arguing in the same precise way as before: only thus far they might argue, in after times (upon a supposition that their faith could be proved to be the same as in the former ages), that since their doctrine was still that very doctrine which the churches held while they were unanimous and had admitted no breaks, therefore it is such as was from the beginning in the Church of Christ. In this manner we can reason even at this day, and can thereby make Irenaeus's or Tertullian's argument our own [Tertul. Praescript. c. 32.]; provided we have first proved that the faith we contend for is the very same that obtained in the churches of that age.

But before I leave this head, I would observe something more particularly of Tertullian's manner of expressing himself in this cases he did not only conceive that an argument might be drawn from tradition alone, abstracting from Scripture, but he preferred that way of arguing, in disputes with heretics, as a shorter, easier, nay, and surer method of confuting them, than engaging with them upon the foot of Scripture. [Tertull. Praescript. c. 17, 18.] This may appear to us now an odd way of talking: but if it be taken as he meant it, and with a view only to the then present circumstances, I believe, it will be found to turn out right. He could not mean that the tradition of the sense of Scripture was more certain than the tradition of the words or kooks of Scripture: neither could he design to intimate that Scripture texts did not themselves afford as certain, or more certain proofs of a doctrine than tradition could do, among persons qualified to judge in a critical way: neither could he imagine, that Scripture should not be made use of, or should not be looked upon as the principal thing, in written debates against heretics; for no man makes more or better use of Scripture in that way than himself does. All he seems to have meant was, that in verbal conferences with heretics, in the presence of weak and infirm Christians, the wisest way would be, not to engage the adversaries on the foot of Scripture (to bring on a debate about the Canon of Scripture, and the strict meaning of words or phrases, and so to discuss the whole in a logical and critical way, tiresome to ordinary Christians, and commonly fruitless [Ibid. cap. 15. Conf. cap. 37.]), but to put the issue of the cause upon a few plain and short questions, such as common Christians could better judge of. It was easy to discern, what party of men had been successors to

the Apostles, and had in constant succession made up the body of the Church, preserving the same faith with great unanimity. This argument from tradition was an argument drawn from sensible fact, and was much more affecting, obvious, and popular, than dry altercations about the authenticity of the books of Scripture, or the precise meaning of words; and it was certain enough, at that time, to be depended upon: and therefore Tertullian recommended that method of debate, in such verbal conferences, rather than any other. Wherein to me he seems to have judged very well upon the prudential case, and like a wise and a sagacious man. [See Stillingfleet's Answer to several Treatises, Works, vol. v. p. 79, 80. Dodwell. Dissertat. in Iren. iii. sect. 30. p. 282, 283.] Nevertheless, as often as he employed his pen in controversy with heretics, and drew up polemical tracts, though he would not omit to mention the additional advantage he had [Vid. Tertullian. contr. Marc. lib. i. cap. 1. 20. lib. iii. cap. 1. contr. Prax. cap. ii.] in point of prescription or tradition, yet he chose to pass it off in short hints, and not to dwell upon it, but rather to rest the issue of the main cause upon Scripture and reason.

A learned foreign divine has indeed blamed Tertullian for his conduct in this affair, as derogating from the authority of Scripture, by laying such stress upon tradition: which appears not to be a just censure; but that learned writer runs into the other extreme, while he avers, that it is by Scripture only that the verity or antiquity of a doctrine may be proved. [Buddei Isagog. vol. i. p. 997.] There are two ways of proving the antiquity, and consequently the verity of a doctrine; namely, Scripture and Church history: and these two differ only in the manner of proof, or in the degree of moral certainty. Can we prove, for instance, what were the tenets of the ancient heretics, by the help of Church history and records; and cannot we as well prove what were the tenets of ancient Christians in the same way? It is true, we might more certainly prove what those heretics held, from their own books, if we had them; and so we may more certainly prove what was the faith of the first Christians, from Scripture, than from any Church records: but still the same thing is proved both ways, and by two kinds of evidences, differing only, as I said, in degree of probability, or moral certainty. And therefore the learned Mosheim, as I before took notice, [See above.] scruples not to assert in broad terms, that the antiquity of the Christian faith is proved from the writings of Ignatius and Polycarp [Mosheim. Vindic. adv. Toland. cap. viii. p. 221, 222, 223]: and he allows the same thing with respect to Clemens Romanus, and Hegesippus, [Ibid. p. 218.] and Caius, [Ibid. p. 224.] and Irenaeus, [Ibid. p. 238.] and, by parity of reason, to all other Church writers whose accounts may be depended upon.* The admitting such a secondary proof, in this case, is not derogating from Scripture authority, but is confirming and strengthening it in more views than

one: as it is accepting the same kind of proof here, which we accept, in another case, with respect to the Canon of Scripture; and as it is corroborating the Scripture account of the Christian faith with collateral evidences, both to illustrate and enforce it. Not that one would, at this time of day, presume to rest an article of faith upon Church records alone, or upon anything besides Scripture: but while the superior proof from sacred Writ is the ground of our faith,** the subordinate proof from antiquity may be a good mark of direction for the interpretation of Scripture in the prime doctrines. [Grotius de Jur. B. et P. lib. i. cap. 2. sect. 9. p. 60.] If we can prove from ancient records what that faith was which obtained so universally in the second century, and later, we can then argue from it in like manner as Irenaeus, Hegesippus, Tertullian, yea and Clemens also, and Origen did, and can make the like use of it against those that pervert Scripture. Only, indeed, there will be this difference, that the argument, as now urged, is become one of the learned kind, and therefore not so well adapted to common capacities as it formerly was: and it is somewhat weaker to us, in another respect, as we have not so many evidences now extant, as those writers then had, whereby to prove such constant succession of doctrine so long, and such unanimity of the churches in professing it. But notwithstanding, we have evidences sufficient to persuade rational men; and the argument is still a good one,*** though with some abatements.

*[It is observable of Polycarp, in particular, that he convinced and converted great numbers to the true faith, by the strength of tradition, being a sensible argument, and more affecting at that time, than any dispute from the bare letter of Scripture could be. [See Irenaeus, lib. iii. cap. 3. p. 177.] It was under Anicetus, about the year 145. See Pearson, Opp. Posth. cap. xiv. etc. Dodwell, cap. xiii.]

**[Scripture is the ground of our faith, considered as the infallible word of God: but then that it is really the word of God, and that such is the sense of this or that text, ordinarily stands only upon moral proof; so that our faith at length resolves into moral evidence, as it is a known rule, that the conclusion follows the weaker of the premises, and can be no stronger than that is. But then again, it is to be considered that the strength of moral evidence, in the general, resolves at last into divine veracity and faithfulness; since God has so made us as to lay us under an inevitable necessity of submitting commonly to such evidence, and he cannot be supposed (without manifest absurdity or blasphemy) to have thus exposed the wisest, and most pious, and most considerate men to fatal and endless delusions. So then, in the last result, faith again resolves into, or rests upon, the truth and goodness of God.]

***[“This is an unanswerable argument, as long as we can suppose the tradition of the Catholic faith, and the communion of the Church was preserved entire: which it visibly was, at least till the first Nicene Council. And had we no other ways to know it, we might learn the faith of the Catholic Church, by its opposition to those heresies which it condemned.” Sherlock’s Present Stale of Socin. Controv. p. 64.]

VI. There is one consideration more, tending still to strengthen the former, and which must by no means be omitted: namely, that the charismata, the extraordinary gifts, were then frequent, visibly rested in and upon the Church, and there only. I have occasionally hinted something of this matter before, [See above.] so far as concerned Irenaeus, and shall now throw in some additional evidences to make good the same thing. Justin Martyr is a witness of the frequency of the miraculous operations in his time: and he makes use of it, in his dispute with Trypho, [Justin Martyr. Dial. p. 308, 315. edit. Par. alias 315, 329.] as an unanswerable argument in behalf of Christianity against the Jews; which St. Paul himself had done before him. [Gal. 3:2.] Irenaeus, as observed above, made the like use of it against heretics: and so does Tertullian, though in remote hints, and somewhat more obscurely. [Tertullian. Praescript. cap. xxviii. xxix.] Those extraordinary gifts continued in a good measure, though decreasing gradually, for the three first centuries at least. [Vid. Spencer in Notis ad Origen. contr. Cels. p. 5, etc. Dodwell. Dissert. in Irenaeum, ii. Dissert. Cyprianic. iv. Remarks on Christianity, etc. part continued, p. 51, etc.] So then, besides oral tradition for the faith of the ancient churches, which was least to be depended upon, or lasted but a little time; besides written accounts, which might more securely be confided in; besides the unanimity of doctrine in all the churches, which was itself an argument that it had been from the beginning; I say, besides all these, the testimony of the Spirit visibly residing in the Church, and discovering itself in supernatural operations, that was a further evidence of the truth of the doctrine then generally held. For it is by no means probable, that those primitive churches, so highly favoured from above, so plentifully enlightened and comforted by the Holy Spirit of God, should be permitted to fall into any dangerous errors, or should not preserve, at least in points of importance, the true and ancient faith derived from Christ and his Apostles. But that this argument may appear to greater advantage, I shall take leave to borrow the excellent words of an abler hand, [Dr. Knight's preface to his Eight Sermons, p.4, 5, 6. Compare Dr. Berriman's Historical Account, p. 2, 3, etc.] which has set it forth in a very true and strong light.

“It is, I think, impossible, in a moral sense, that those good men should successively concur to impose upon the Church a false interpretation of notorious passages of the sacred writings, for the following reasons.

“1. That the Spirit of God was given to the Church, to guide and instruct it in necessary truth.

“2. That, according to the records of those early ages, the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit of God, continued in the Church, were undoubted evidences of his presence with it.

“3. That it cannot be supposed, while the Spirit of God was present with

the Church in so remarkable a manner, and the Church itself so little removed from the times of the Apostles, that the letter of Scripture, especially in matters of greatest concern, should be generally understood in another sense than what was agreeable to the Spirit of God, and to that which the Apostles had taught and delivered.

“4. That the Doctors of the Church, through the difficulty of the times, and the dangers they were exposed to on account of religion, were more concerned to prepare for the blessings of another world, by recommending truth to the consciences of men, than to provide for the, flesh, and the enjoyments of the present, by dividing the Church, and seducing the simple with pernicious doctrines.

“5. That their writings suppose, or expressly affirm, that Scripture was received in an uniform sense, in the churches of Christ.

“6. The consequence of which is, that whensoever it appears, that the doctrines of the Church successively “ agree, from the very beginning, in an uniform [Iren. lib. iv. ow. 35, alias 69.] interpretation of certain passages of the sacred writings, relating to the chief and fundamental articles of revealed truths; such interpretation ought to be received as the mind of the Spirit in the aforesaid passages: and conclusions drawn from such expositions are not founded on the doctrines of men, but the mind of the Spirit contained and conveyed in the letter of Scripture.”

This reasoning I apprehend to be just and solid, and to carry much greater weight with it, than any the most ingenious conceits and surprising subtleties of the Polonian brethren, whereby they have laboured to give something of a gloss or colour to their novel constructions of the sacred oracles. But to be a little more distinct and particular, I proceed to build upon the foundations here laid, for the more fully demonstrating the use of antiquity.

VII. The least that we can infer from what hath been already said is that the sense of the ancients once known is an useful check upon any new interpretations of Scripture affecting the main doctrines. It has a negative voice, if I may so call it, in such a case: and it is reason sufficient for throwing off any such novel expositions, that they cross upon the undoubted faith of all the ancient churches, or contain some doctrine, as of moment to be received, which the ancients universally rejected, or never admitted. [Gretius, Rivet. Apologet. Discuss. p. 685. Conf. 724.] This negative way of arguing is, I think, generally allowed, and can hardly bear any controversy. Bishop Stillingfleet observes to this purpose, “that it is sufficient prescription against anything which can be alleged out of Scripture, that if it appear contrary to the sense of the Catholic Church from the beginning, it ought not to be looked upon as the true meaning

of Scripture. All this security is built upon this strong presumption, that nothing contrary to the necessary articles of faith should be held by the Catholic Church, whose very being depends upon the belief of those articles which are necessary to salvation.” [Stillingfleet’s Rational Account, cap. ii. p. 59.]

The famous Daillé, whom no man can suspect of partiality towards the ancients, acknowledges as much as I have here mentioned, where he says, “What probability is there that those holy Doctors of former ages, from whose hands Christianity hath been derived down unto us, should be ignorant of any of those things, which had been revealed and recommended by our Saviour as important and necessary to salvation? – That they should all of them have been ignorant of any article that is necessarily requisite to salvation, is altogether impossible: for, after this account, they should all have been deprived of salvation, which, I suppose, every honest mind would tremble at the thought of.” [Daillé, Use of the Fathers, cap. vi. p. 188. Engl. edit.]

Dr. Whitby, who was not prejudiced on the side of the Fathers, seems to carry the point rather farther, in these words.

“In such doctrines as were rejected by the universal Church as heresies, Austin saith truly, that it was sufficient cause to reject them, because the Church held the contrary, they being such as did oppose her rule of faith, or symbol, universally received; and that it was sufficient to persuade any man, he ought not to embrace any of the doctrines of heretics, as articles of faith, because the Church, who could not be deficient in any point of necessary faith, did not receive them. This way of arguing negatively, we therefore, with St. Austin, do allow: the universal Church knows no such doctrine; ergo, it is no article I am obliged to receive as any part of Christian faith.” [Whitby’s Treatise of Tradition, A.D. 1689, part ii. cap. 12. p. 131.] Thus far he at that time: and in another treatise which he published in Latin, twenty-five years after, when it is certain he had no very friendly disposition towards the Fathers, yet still he thought himself obliged to admit such a negative argument [Whitby, Dissertat. de Scriptur. Interpretatione, Praef. p. 94.] as he had before admitted. A negative argument therefore being allowed (as indeed there is plain reason for it), it must be allowed also that the Fathers are of use to us, so far as such an argument can be of use: and that the ancients may be of great use in the Church, in this view, is very apparent, being that they serve as an outwork (which Daillé takes notice of) for the repelling the presumption of those who would forge a new faith. [Daillé, Use of the Fathers, p. 190.]

For example, they are of use, in this view, against the Romanists, with respect to the novel and supernumerary articles of the Trent Creed, or Creed of Pope Pius IV imposed upon the consciences of men as necessary to salvation.

The ancients are likewise of use to us, under the same view, against the Socinians, who innovate in doctrines of the highest importance, teaching things contrary to the faith of all the primitive churches; things wherein Christian worship, as well as faith and hope, are very nearly and deeply concerned. It is sufficient reason for rejecting such novelties, and the interpretations which they are founded upon, that the Christian world, in the best and purest times, either knew nothing of them, or rejected them.

The like may be said with respect to the Arian doctrines, if any man should presume to obtrude them upon us as articles of faith. It is a sufficient reason for not receiving either them, or the interpretations brought to support them, that the ancients, in the best and purest times, either knew nothing of them, or, if they did, condemned them.* It has indeed been pretended, that the ancients, in general, supposed God the Father to be naturally Governor over the Son and Holy Ghost: but no proof has ever been made of it, nor ever can be. On the contrary, it will appear upon a careful inquiry, as I have particularly observed in another place, [Third Defence, or Farther Vindication, vol. iv. cap. 5. p. 96, etc.] that the ancients never did, never consistently could intend any such thing; but that Arius and his confederates innovated in maintaining that doctrine, and were condemned for it immediately, upon their first introducing it. But it is needless to urge here (had not the course of my argument led to it) that Arianism was no matter of necessary faith, in the esteem of the ancients, having proved in these papers that the contrary to it was. Only, I was here to observe the use which might be made of the negative argument, supposing we could go no farther, or had nothing more to plead from antiquity.

*[“In the doctrine of the Deity of Christ, or of the Trinity, though the subtlety of such modern heretics as oppose either of those, may so far prevail on persons, either not of sufficient judgment, or not sufficiently versed in the Scriptures, as at present to make them acknowledge the places are not so clear as they imagined them to be; yet their being always otherwise interpreted by the Catholic Church, or the Christian societies of all ages, lays this potent prejudice against all each attempts, as not to believe such interpretations true, till they give a just account why, if the belief of these doctrines were not necessary, the Christians of all ages since the Apostles’ times, did so unanimously agree to them, that when any began first to oppose them, they were declared and condemned for heretics for their pains.” Stillingfleet, Rational Account, cap. ii. p. 58.]

VIII. I would next advance a step farther than the mere negative argument can directly carry us: for, I conceive, that a just inference may be drawn from that concession, which will extend our views somewhat beyond what I have just now mentioned. If the ancients could not be universally ignorant of any necessary doctrine, since it is morally absurd that they should be deficient in necessities; by parity of reason it must be allowed, that they could not generally

fall into fundamental errors, because that also would be failing in necessities, inasmuch as nothing can be more necessary in our religious concerns than to stand clear of all pernicious or dangerous mistakes. From whence it follows, that whatever the ancient churches universally admitted as a necessary article of faith, must, at the lowest, be safe doctrine. [Scrivener. contr. Dal. p. 222, 223.] And because it is hard to conceive how such a doctrine as we are now upon could be safe, if it were not true, we may reasonably infer that it is true, as well as safe. Thus far I have been pursuing the consequences which appear to follow from the concession made by Daillé and others.

But I apprehend withal, that the same conclusion will more directly and closely follow from the principles before laid down; namely, that morally speaking, it is absurd to suppose that the primitive churches should so universally maintain one and the same doctrine, if they had not received it from the beginning; especially considering the important nature of the doctrine, and how near they lived to the apostolical age, and how remarkably they were blessed, all the time, with plentiful effusions of God's Holy Spirit. These considerations taken together do afford, as I conceive, a positive argument to prove that what the ancients so held as true and important (Scripture also, in its easy and most natural sense, countenancing the same), ought to be received by us as Scripture doctrine, [Bevereg. Cod. Can. vindicat. in Proem. sect. iii.] and valued accordingly. Any other pretended sense of Scripture, as implying a kind of moral absurdity, ought to be rejected; unless it can be proved to carry with it such a degree of moral certainty as is more than sufficient to countervail such prescription or prejudice against it. But now as to the Arian or Socinian interpretations, in this case, they carry no moral certainty at all, to counterpoise the moral absurdity which stands against them: therefore the judgment of the universal Church (were there nothing else) ought to overrule their interpretations. For it was morally impossible that the primitive churches should err, in doctrines of that high importance, so soon, or so universally [Tertul. Praescript. cap. xxi.]: but it is not morally impossible, nor at all unlikely, that those later gentlemen should mistake in commenting upon sacred Writ.

The sum then of the whole case, in few words, is this: 1. We assert that the received doctrine of the Trinity is proved directly to be true, and consequentially to be important, from Scripture itself, according to the known rules of grammar and criticism: and such proof cannot be evaded, or eluded, without doing the greatest violence imaginable to the texts. 2. In the next place, we maintain that the ancient churches taught the same doctrine as an essential, and condemned the contrary opinions as pernicious and dangerous: which consideration makes it now doubly absurd to interpret Scripture in contradiction to that doctrine.* 3.

The result of the two foregoing considerations is, that since we have thus proved the truth of our doctrine, and the importance of it, both ways (directly from Scripture, and indirectly from the ancients), I say, the result is, that this is the faith which we ought to contend for: we are morally certain every way, that it is true, and if true, important of course. And since we have such moral certainty as things of this nature can be conceived to admit of, and such as God has obliged us to submit to and follow in other like cases, it is therefore infallibly certain (that I may once more copy after the great Chillingworth) that, in true wisdom and prudence, we ought to accept this doctrine as revealed by God, and to maintain it with a conscientious care and zeal; and consequently to decline communion with all such as openly impugn it.

*[“The unanimous consent of so many distinct visible churches, as exhibited in their several Confessions, Catechisms, or Testimonies of their own or forefathers’ faith unto the Council of Nice, was an argument of the same force and efficacy against Arius and his partakers, as the general consent and practice of all nations, in worshipping a divine power in all ages, is against Atheists. Nothing but the engrafted notion of a Deity could have induced so many several nations, so much different in natural dispositions, in civil discipline and education, to effector practice the duty of adoration: and nothing but the engrafted word (as St. James calls the Gospel) delivered by Christ and his Apostles in the holy Scriptures, could have kept so many several churches as communicated their Confessions unto that Council, in the unity of the same faith.” Bishop Patrick, Discourse about Tradition, p. 21. printed A.D. 1683.]

Here I thought to have concluded this chapter, having offered what appeared sufficient for supporting or illustrating the use and value of ecclesiastical antiquity: but I considered that some perhaps might think it an omission, if I should take no notice of sundry objections, which have been frequently urged against the use of antiquity, particularly in controversies of faith. Now, though I apprehend that a clear and just stating of the case (which is what I have been labouring) is the best way of removing objections, as it is leaving them no foundation to stand upon, or none considerable; yet rather than be thought wanting in any respect to a very important subject, I shall endeavour to return particular answers to the most noted objections which have fallen within my observation. The doing it may help to illustrate the subject; as it is considering it under various views, turned and tried every way: and sometimes just answers to objections have the force almost of new proofs, for confirming the positions before asserted. I incline the more to it, because great pains have been taken by many to depreciate the value of antiquity, and to throw contempt upon the primitive Fathers: which is a very unjustifiable practice, and is wounding Christianity itself through their sides; though some that have done it might be far from intending it. But I proceed to particulars.

I. It has been sometimes pleaded, that the Scriptures are in themselves a perfect rule of faith: what need therefore can there be of Fathers, with respect to the fundamental articles? [Whitby, Dissertat. de Scriptur. Interpret. in Praefat. p. 8, 9.] To which we answer, that we produce not Fathers to superadd new doctrines to Scripture, but only to secure the old; not to complete the rule, but more strongly to assert and maintain both its true sense and whole sense. The more perfect the rule is, the more care and circumspection it demands, that we may preserve it entire, both as to words and meaning. For if either of them happens to be stolen away, or wrested from us, Scripture so maimed or castrated is no longer that perfect rule which Christ has ordained. It is much to be suspected, that many pretend a zeal for Scripture, who mean nothing by it, but to have its fences taken down, that they may deal the more freely or rudely with it. They would exclude the ancients, to make room for themselves, and throw a kind of slight upon the received interpretations, only to advance their own. Such commonly has been the way, and therefore there is the less regard to be paid to magnificent words. They complain sometimes, that interpreting Scripture by the ancients is debasing his majesty, and throwing Christ out of his throne. [Whitby, *ibid.* p. 9.] But we think that Christ never sits more secure or easy in his throne, than when he has his most faithful guards about him; and that none are so likely to strike at his authority, or to aim at dethroning him, as they that would displace his old servants, only to make way for new ones; who may either obtrude themselves without call, or may be unfurnished for the employ, or not well affected to his person and government. But to speak out of figure, and to come closer to the business, the perfection of Scripture is a point allowed, and is no part of the question between us: the main question is, how we may be most secure of reaping the full benefits of that perfection, whether with the light of antiquity before us, or without it? We know how Faustus Socinus, under colour of extolling the perfection of Scripture, studied nothing so much as to blazon the perfection of his own parts and abilities, deserting the ancients, and trusting only to himself and his uncle Laelius. [Socin. Ep. ad Squarcialipum, App. tom. i. p. 362.] He presumed to set up his own fond conceits as the measure of all truth: which, in effect, was advancing a new rule of faith, and forcing Scripture to a compliance with it; preferring the rovings of his own imagination before the wisdom of Heaven. It might be shown on the other hand, that those who have least indulged their own fancies, but have adhered strictly to antiquity, in the prime things, have done most honour to the perfection of Scripture, and have kept the rule of faith entire: this therefore is the way, rather than the other.

I may add, that when we say that Scripture is perfect, we mean, generally, as to the matter of it, which is full and complete to be a rule of life and manners,

without taking in any additional rule to join with it. But if we speak of Scripture being perfect in regard to words, or style, we can mean only, that it is as perfect as words can be, and words (to us now) of a dead language. Whatever imperfection necessarily goes along with all languages, must of course go along with Scripture language; which though dictated from heaven, or conducted by the Spirit of God, is yet adapted to the manner of men, and must take its construction from the common rules of interpretation agreed upon among men. Now if the Fathers, as living nearer the fountain, had some opportunities which we want, and might know some things much better than we at this distance can pretend to do, why should we neglect or despise any light or help which they can give for our direction, in settling the sense of Scripture? In human laws, as I have hinted above, it has been always thought a good rule of interpretation (not excluding any other good rule) to observe, upon what occasion the laws were made, what was their general scope or view, and how they were understood at their first framing, or immediately after, and to recollect how the practice ran: hence it is, that reports, and precedents, and adjudged cases are so highly useful in interpreting human laws. The case is not much different in divine laws, being that they also are written in human language, and their sense is to be investigated and cleared up by the like human means. If the Fathers were fallible, so also are we: and if they, with all their advantages, might misconstrue Scripture, so may we much more. Therefore there is no prudence in throwing off their assistance as useless or superfluous. Even fallible men may be useful instructors to others as fallible: and in a multitude of .counsellors, especially such counsellors, there is safety. [Prov. 11:14.]

II. But it is further pleaded, that Scripture is plain in all necessities, and therefore needs no illustration from the ancients. [Whitby, Dissertat. in Praef. p. 10, 19.] We allow, that Scripture is plain in necessities; yea, it is what we urge and contend for: and there is nothing which offends us more, than that many persons will endeavour notwithstanding, by violent contortions, far-fetched subtleties, and studied evasions, to elude and frustrate these plain things. Such conduct on the adverse side makes it the more necessary to have recourse to antiquity, for the greater security against all such attempts. For while Scripture is plain, antiquity is plain also; and two plain things are better than one. God himself hath taught us, by adding his oath to his promise, not to think any confirmation superfluous, which he is pleased to afford us. His word alone might be safely depended upon, being certain and infallible: but two immutable things afford the stronger consolation [Heb. 6:17–18.]; and God considers the infirmities of mankind. in like manner, though Scripture be very plain to reasonable men, so far as concerns necessities, yet by taking in antiquity to it, the evidence, upon the whole, becomes both plainer* and stronger. There is so much weakness commonly in human nature, and so much reluctance shown to the reception of divine truths, that we have need of all the plain things we can anywhere procure: and had we twenty more as plain as these, we could make use of them all, and indeed should be obliged to do so, lest otherwise we should be found guilty of despising the blessings of Heaven. It is certain, that there is something very particular in the concerns of religion, that plain things there have not the same force or weight as they have anywhere else. It is the only subject in the world, wherein a man may dispute the most certain facts, and most indubitable proofs, and yet be allowed to be in his senses: for if anyone, in the common affairs of life, were to make it a rule to believe nothing but what he sees, or were to reject the faith of all history, he would undoubtedly be despised or pitied by everybody, as not well in his wits. Seeing then that the case of religion is so widely different from all others, and that the plainest evidences there often lose their effect, we can never be too solicitous in accumulating evidence upon evidence, and testimony upon testimony, to do the most we can towards relieving the weakness, or conquering the reluctance of men slow to believe. And when we have done the best we can, and have pursued every reasonable method we can think of, we are yet to look upon it as sufficient, only because we can do no more. Wherefore, no plainness of Scripture can ever be justly thought to supersede the use of antiquity; unless it could be supposed, that no additional light nor strength can be borrowed from it: which is too extravagant a supposition to need any confutation; besides that I have already obviated every suggestion of that kind in the former part of this chapter.

*[N.B. It should be observed that the word plain is an equivocal word, and of indeterminate meaning, till it be carefully distinguished. It is a relative, and means plain to some or other. To God all things are plain: to angels more things than to man. Doctrines plain to some men are not so to others, on account of ignorance, inattention, prejudice, or any infirmity, natural or contracted. Things also may be plain by the help of means, which are not so without the use of such means. Moreover, there are degrees of plainness, for it consists not in a point, but admits of a latitude. Besides, the plainest things in the world, taken in a right point of view, may tease to be plain, when put into a wrong one; when industriously obscured, embroiled, and entangled, by snares and fallacies, by involving many things in one (which should be kept separate), or by expressing them in ambiguous equivocal terms, or by perplexing them with captious and sophistical questions. There are degrees also of attention, upon which the degrees of plainness do very much depend: and attention depends upon the will, and the will is variously influenced by motives, external or internal.

But though plainness be really a relative, and often varies according to the person, and his degree of attention, capacity, inclination, etc. yet we have formed some kind of idea of an absolute plainness, abstracted from particular persons; and we mean by it, as to the point now in hand, such a plainness in the thing itself, or in the words expressing it, as any one of tolerable capacity, with a reasonable attention, and by the use of the ordinary helps, or means, may competently understand: in this sense, or by this standard, fundamentals are commonly said to be plain.]

If it be said, that common Christians, at least, can reap no benefit from antiquity, nor make any use of it; that will not be reason sufficient for throwing it aside, so long as the learned may. But even common Christians do enjoy the benefit of it, if not at firsthand, yet at the second, third, or fourth; and that suffices here, as well as in other cases of as weighty concernment. How do they know, for instance, that Scripture is the word of God? They know it immediately or proximately from their proper guides, or other instructors; who in the last resort learn it from the ancients. So then ordinary Christians may thus remotely have the use of antiquity (not to mention other nearer ways [See this matter considered more at large in Bishop Hare's Scripture Vindicated, p. 111, etc.]) with respect to the sense of Scripture, as well as with regard to its authenticity: and their faith may be both strengthened and brightened by this additional reinforcement. "The people are to understand the grounds of their faith, and to judge, by the best helps they can, what doctrine is agreeable to Scripture: but among those helps, we take in, not barely the assistance of their own guide, but the evidence he brings, as to the sense of the teaching Church, in the best and purest ages." [Stillingfleet's Answer to J. S.'s Catholic Letters, p. 58.] But to return.

We admit, as I before said, that Scripture is very plain in necessities: as, for instance, nothing can be plainer from Scripture, than that Christ is God, and over all God blessed forever, true God, great God, Jehovah, and the like; and that

divine attributes are ascribed to him, and divine worship also, to make everything clear, and to cut off all reasonable handle for dispute. But notwithstanding that all these things are so plain, yet considering that we are not the first men that ever looked into Scripture, but that others, who had as good eyes as we, and as upright hearts, and a competent measure of common sense (besides some peculiar advantages beyond what we can pretend to), have perused the same Scripture before us; I say, considering these things, it would be something of a mortification to us, or would appear somewhat strange, if stich persons should not have found the same doctrines then, which we have the pleasure to find now. For whatever is really plain to moderns, and necessary, must, one would think, by parity of reason, or for a stronger reason, have been plain to the ancients also, and necessary to them as well as to us. Accordingly, upon examining, we find that the same doctrine was plain to them, even so far as to be looked upon as an essential: a consideration which adds the more strength to what we had before proved from Scripture, as the want of such concurring suffrage would have been a perplexing difficulty; I mean, while we have such ancient monuments to look into, and to compare. Indeed, if they were all lost, burnt, or otherwise extinguished, our Scripture proof (supposing Scripture itself to want no proof) would stand firm without them: but when we have the ancients to compare with Scripture, and know that, in the very nature of the thing, they ought to tally with each other; the ancients now, of consequence, must be either a very strong confirmation as to any doctrines held for articles of faith, or as strong an objection. They are considerable disadvantages where they run counter, and as considerable advantages where they favour.

III. It is sometimes pleaded, that Scripture is its own best interpreter, by comparing texts with texts, and therefore there is no need of Fathers in the case; for in the best we have all. [Whitby, Dissertat. praef. p. 12.]

In reply to which, we are very ready to allow that comparing Scripture with Scripture is a very good method of interpretation, yea, and the best and most satisfactory of any, to every rational mind: but still we do not see reason why it should be thought to supersede any other that is good. For, after we have thereby obtained all the home light we can get, where will be the harm of admitting still further light, if we can procure it, from abroad? The more we have of both kinds, the better: every additional increase or improvement, though it were but small in comparison, yet has its use, either for confirming the weak and wavering, or for comforting them who are strong in faith, or for confuting and confounding novelists; but most of all for reclaiming those who are over apt to be led by authority and great names, perhaps of mere moderns. For certainty, if authority, or great names, or even numbers, are of any weight; ancients are

preferable to moderns, considered as such, Fathers and Councils to private dogmatizers, and the Christian world to a few gainsayers. Such being the manifest and constant use of the argument drawn from antiquity, superadded to Scripture, there is great reason for taking it in after Scripture, that we may have the benefit of boat.

The excellent Buddeus, otherwise a very judicious writer, appears not so clear, or not so accurate in his account of this matter, as might be wished. He gives his judgment, “that neither natural reason nor tradition “ should be the rule of interpreting, but Scripture itself, and the analogy of faith.” [Glaseii Opera, edit. Lips. A.D. 1725.] Had he said, neither one nor other, but all together, I think he had said right: but as he has taken in only two of the things, excluding the rest, as it seems, from bearing a part in the interpretation of Scripture, he appears to me to have judged wrong upon the case, or at least to have fallen short of his wanted accuracy. For certainly he ought to have allowed something to natural reason, and something also to antiquity, though not everything. There is a great deal of difference between admitting either of them to govern absolutely, and throwing them quite out: and there is a just medium between giving each of them a negative, and making either of them sole umpire. There are many considerations to be taken in, for the proceeding rightly in the interpretation of Scripture; and all of them respectively must have their share, as they have their weight. To exemplify what I mean; true interpretation of Scripture cannot, in any case whatever, run counter to any plain certain principle of natural reason (inasmuch as truth can never be contrary to truth), nor, in any case whatever, to Scripture itself rightly interpreted; nor, in any case whatever, to the analogy of faith before proved (which amounts nearly to the same with the preceding); nor, without the utmost necessity, to the natural, usual, unforced sense of the words; nor, so far as concerns fundamentals, to the universal judgment of the first and purest ages of the Church. These, as I conceive, are the butts and boundaries within which every true interpretation is confined: and whenever any pretended interpretation is found to break through them, or through any of them, there needs no more to pronounce it false. To express the same thing affirmatively, which before I have negatively, when any interpretation of Scripture has all those five characters (viz. natural reason, parallel places of Scripture, analogy of faith, propriety of language, and countenance of antiquity) to vouch directly for it, then it is as strongly supported as it is possible for an interpretation to be. If it has only some of those positive characters, or one only, the rest not interfering, it may be a good interpretation; but the more it has, so much the surer.* For example: the doctrine I am here defending has four of the said characters positively for it (viz. tenor of Scripture, analogy of faith, propriety of language, and antiquity), and the

fifth, which is natural reason, is not against it: therefore it is a very just and reasonable interpretation. So many plain legible characters of truth ought, in all equity, to overrule any seeming or conjectural repugnancies as to the nature of the thing confessedly mysterious, so long as there is no plain contrariety to any known truth.

*[Dr. Rogers, in one of his Sermons, (Posth. Serm. iv. p.95, etc.) explains .this whole matter somewhat differently, but agreeing in the main with what I have here offered. His thoughts upon the point are comprised in the particulars here following, which I shall produce in his own words, as nearly as an abridgment will permit.

“1. Many places of sacred Writ are so plaited that no man who reads or “hears them, in a language he is acquainted with, can doubt of their meaning.

“2. The sense of other places we collect from rational deductions, comparing one Scripture with another.

“3. Other places there are which require the knowledge of history, of ancient facts and customs, of early tradition, and primitive acceptation, to determine their sense.

“4. The inspiration of the Scriptures supposed, we cannot consistently with such supposition, either from the construction of the words, or from deductions of reason, or from authority, admit any proposition, as the intended sense of Scripture, which contradicts any manifest truth.

“5. Neither can we admit contradictory expositions of the same or different places of Scripture.

“In the two last cases, we conclude negatively with the clearest assurance: but when we go on to ascertain the meaning positively, the sense of Scripture which we receive in the first way, by an immediate view, appears to us with greatest evidence: and the sense we collect in the second way, by rational deductions, is more evident than what we receive in the third way, from the affirmations of authority.”

So this excellent writer resolves the positive characters of true and just interpretation, into immediate view, rational deductions, and authority, all having their proper weight of evidence respectively, but in different degrees. The two negative characters are checks upon all the positive ones, to ascertain their application, and to prevent the pushing any of them too far. This account, in substance, differs so little from what I have offered, that it appears to contain much the same thoughts placed in another light, or differently ranged. It may be of use to a reader to take the same thing in two views, and so to form his own judgment, as he sees beat, out of both: and therefore I have here presented him with both.]

Hitherto I have been answering those objections which aim at setting the Fathers aside as needless, being superseded (as is thought) by the perfection, or plainness, or fullness of sacred Writ. The remaining objections, which I am to take notice of, are of another kind, striking more directly at the reputation of the Fathers, in order to insinuate that they are by no means qualified to serve the purposes they are brought for, being more likely to perplex than to instruct a reader, more apt to mislead and draw us aside, than to set us right.

IV. The obscurity of the Fathers makes up one half of the learned Daillé, Treatise upon that subject. I need not be very particular in examining into that plea here, because it will come up again, in ten, under another article lower down, where I shall consider it more distinctly. For the present it may suffice to observe: 1. That Mr. Daillé, in some instances, applies rhetoric upon the subject, and has frequently overstrained. 2. Many things have been cleared up since he wrote that piece (since the year 1631); some by himself, more by others after him: so that what might appear to be of some force then, can have little or none now. 3. Particular answers have been returned to the several articles on the head of obscurity, by those who have professedly undertaken it, [Scrivener. adv. Dallaeum. par. i. per tot. Reeves's Preface to the Apologists, p. 37, etc. Natalis Alexander, Hist. Eccl. Saec. ii. xvi. c. 22. p. 537, etc. Beverege's Cod. Can. Vindicat. Procem. sect. viii.] besides what has been done occasionally in new editions of Fathers, or in bibliothèques, or in critical dissertations. 4. Whatever truth there may be in the objection, as to sundry controverted points of inferior moment, yet it affects not the cause now before us: for Daillé himself allows, that the Fathers are generally clear enough in points fundamental, whereof this is one, in his judgment at least. He writes thus: "You shall there meet with very strong and solid proofs of those fundamental principles of our religion, touching which we are all agreed; and also many excellent things laid open, tending to the right understanding of these mysteries, and also of the Scriptures wherein they are contained. In this particular, their authority may be of good use to you, and may serve as a probable argument of the truth." [Daillé of the Right Use of the Fathers, part ii. p. 184. Cave, Ep. Apologt. p. 19.] So then, whatever obscurity may otherwise be found in the Fathers (like as in Scripture itself), the cause which we have now in hand appears to be but little concerned in it, according to the judgment of that learned man, who made the most of the objection, as to other matters. For though he sometimes points out some obscure passages, as he conceived them to be, relating to things fundamental, yet, upon the whole, he apprehended, that those doctrines might be plainly enough traced up to the very days of the Apostles, and that the Fathers might be exceeding useful to us in that view, and for that purpose.

V. It has been frequently objected, that many of the Fathers have erred, and sometimes grossly: and large collections, of their real or supposed mistakes, have been drawn out, and presented to public view. [Daillé, part ii. c. 4. p. 60, etc. Whitby, Dissertat. in Praefat. sect. iv. p. 15, etc.] Now, indeed, if any man should presume to say, that the Fathers were inspired, or infallible in what they wrote, such a collection of errors might be of use for the confuting the false presumption: but how it affects their credit or character as witnesses of the

Church's prime doctrines, in their times, appears not. It is not uncommon for those very Fathers, where they give a wrong and false opinion, to make a true discovery of the Church's sentiments, in that very instance, contrary to their own. Therefore a reader should know how to distinguish between delivering an opinion, and reporting a fact; as also between appealing to the Fathers as unerring judges, and appealing to them as faithful witnesses.

But to speak more directly to the charge of errors, it may be justly pleaded in abatement, that upon a careful review, many of them have been found to be purely imaginary, mere mistakes or misrepresentations of the too precipitate correctors: and of those that are real, most will be seen in things only of a problematical kind, and of a slight nature. [Cave, *Epist. Apologet.* p. 48.] Or if they be of a more grievous sort, they were the mistakes of some few, and were either not universal, [See Grotius *de Jur. B. et P. lib. i. c. 2. s. 9.* p. 60.] or not ancient, and never insisted upon as articles of faith and terms of communion. So that whatever errors are discovered in any Father or Fathers, they do not invalidate the argument drawn from the universal agreement of the ancient churches in the prime things. However, there have not been wanting, upon occasion, learned hands [Thorndicius *de Rat. et Jur. Fin. Controv. c. 25.* Scrivener. *adv. Dall. par. ii. c. iv.* p. 185. *Cavil Epistola Apologetica.* Reeves's Preface, p. 67, etc. *Remarks on Christianity as old etc. with regard to Primitive Antiquity, part i. continued,* printed for Crownfield, 1733.] to draw up apologies for the Fathers, either in separate discourses, or in prefaces to new editions, or by way of note, or the like; by which means most of those unworthy aspersions have been happily removed, and the black catalogues much reduced. A learned foreigner, [Inter *Opuscul. Sac. tom. i. A.D. 1709. Gi__e Hassorum.* p. 659. *edit. Nup. A.D. 1731.*] not long ago, being justly sensible of the mischievous tendency of that unnatural practice of some Christians, in throwing contempt upon the brightest ornaments of the Christian Church, took the pains to consider the particular articles of doctrine upon which the Fathers have been wrongfully suspected, or charged, and to do them justice against their indiscreet or over censorious accusers.

Since that time, I do not know a warmer or keener adversary that the Fathers have had, than Mons. Barbeyrac, Professor of Civil Law at Groningen, and known to the learned world by his French translations of Puffendorf and Grotius, and his learned notes upon both. He attacks the Fathers principally upon the head of morality (as his subject led him to do), and seems to exert his utmost endeavours to sink their reputation for sense and conduct, and even for conscience too, in some measure, in order to strike them out of all credit or authority. [Prefatory Discourse to his French Version of Puffendorf; since rendered into English, and prefixed to the English edition of 1729, *sect. ix. x. p. 18, etc.*] His work has

twice appeared in English (as well as in French), and: may therefore deserve some notice in this place, as much as I may have room for, not to make too long an excursion.

That satire upon the Fathers (for it deserves no better name) had not long been abroad, before Mr. Ceillier, a learned Roman Catholic, drew up a formal answer to it, of which I have seen little more than the title, [Apologie de la Morale des Pères de l'Eglise contre les injustes Accusations du Sieur Jean Barbeyrac. Paris, 1718.] and a few extracts. Afterwards, the learned Buddeus animadverted pretty largely upon him, detecting some of his mistakes, but with great tenderness; moderating, as it were, between Mr. Ceillier and him, in respect of several particulars. [Buddaeus, Isagog. vol. i. p. 620–642.] Buddeus was himself not the most zealous admirer of the Fathers; and therefore what he says in their favour may be justly thought not to exceed in any respect, but to fall within compass. Some officious gentleman amongst us, having met with Mons. Barbeyrac's French Treatise, published it separately in our language, prefixing a kind of boyish title [The Spirit of Ecclesiastics of all Sects and Ages, etc. 1723.] to it, and recommending it with some airs of insult, such as are frequently incident to little minds. Not long after, an ingenious gentleman printed a reply, [The Spirit of Infidelity detected. By a Believer. 1723.] to rebuke the translator, for his rude nest:, and at the same time to defend the Fathers against the injurious accusations of the author himself: which he has effectually performed, with good learning and solid judgment.

Now, seeing that so much has been done already, I may content myself with a few strictures, or brief reflections. In justice to the Fathers, and to primitive Christianity struck at through their sides, it ought to be told, that the learned civilian has not dealt fairly with the public in that article. He has not been careful about the facts upon which he grounds his censure, but has often, taken them upon trust from others, transcribing their oversights, or partial accounts. Indeed he makes a kind of apology for his taking so much at second hand: for he says, be “designedly pitched upon examples which had been already remarked and produced by others, and are extant in books most common and easy to be had.” [Prefatory Discourse, sect. x. p. 33] But then he should have inquired whether those examples had not been already replied to, and competently cleared up, and whether, at least, they were not capable of it. And he should have considered further, whether the authors whom he copies from were all persons to. be entirely relied upon in what they say, as men of known learning, judgment, candour, and modesty; not prejudiced against the Fathers, nor otherwise apt to be censorious, and over severe in discovering imaginary faults, or exposing real ones. Before one determines anything as to the character of the Fathers from second-hand reports, it would be, proper to inquire whether their accusers were.

themselves men of clear and unexceptionable characters. It is no excuse to a person of learning and abilities, that he suffered himself to be imposed upon by others, in a matter which required care and faithfulness.

Besides his too often deceiving himself or others with false facts, even those that are true, in part, or in the main, are yet seldom placed in a true light. Every real or seeming fault of the ancients is rhetorically aggravated, the hardest construction commonly put upon it, and no favourable allowances are brought in to qualify: but after saying the unkindest things which he had any colour for, and a great deal of art used to contrive such colour, he forgets to afford them their due praises in anything, to counterbalance the obloquy. So that were a reader to form his idea of the Fathers only by what he finds in that representation, he would go near to make it the very reverse of their trite and just character. I cannot here take upon me to criticize the whole work; that has been done already by abler hands: but I shall mention a few particulars, to give the readers a taste of his way and manner, whereby they may competently judge of the rest.

The author falls first upon Athenagoras, and charges him with “seeming to establish the worship of angels.” [Prefatory Discourse, sect. ix. p, 18.] But this is a false report. Athenagoras neither says its nor seems to say it. Indeed Dupin, whether to favour the Romish cause, or whether by mere forgetfulness or oversight, had said the same thing: but Mons. Barbeyrac understands the nature of evidence too well to apprehend, that the retailing a misreport can amount to a proof. He has another complaint against the same. Athenagoras for disallowing second marriages. The fact is true in some sense or other; but what second marriages, is the question. Might not Athenagoras mean, marrying again after wrongful divorce? A very learned man [Suicer. Thesaur. p. 895.] has pleaded much, and well, for that construction: and it is favoured by Athenagoras’s [Athenag. Legat. p. 130.] grounding his doctrine upon our Lord’s own words [Mark 10:11. Matt. 19:9. Luke 16:18.] relating to such second marriages.

And though he speaks against the marriage as not good after the death of the wife, yet he may be understood only of such wife, wrongfully divorced before. For he thought that the adultery before incurred, by marrying in her lifetime, did not cease by her death. The marriage contracted in adultery, like an error in the first concoction, could never be fully corrected, but would still retain its primitive impurity, as having been null, and wrong from the first. If his words may admit that sense, it is sufficient: for an accuser is bound to make good his allegation, and the old rule is, *in dubiis benigniora semper praferenda*. I may add that Athenagoras has been always reputed a man of the Church: and yet it is certain that the doctrine here charged upon him was condemned by the Church in the Montanists and Novatians. Which is a further presumption in his favour,

and seems to justify the mild and candid construction of the words in question.

The next man Mr. B. falls upon is Clemens of Alexandria, whom he uses more unkindly than he had before used Athenagoras. He charges him with three special faults. [Prefatory Discourse, p. 19.] 1. With teaching stoical paradoxes for Christian doctrine. 2. With maintaining that "Christ and his Apostles had not any passions at all." 3. With "justifying the idolatry of the Pagans." The first article appears captious and frivolous. For what if Clemens, whether the better to reconcile the Stoics to Christianity, or whether to turn their own artillery upon them, made use of their language and phraseology to recommend true and sound Christian principles by [See Spirit of Infidelity detected, p. 31.]; where was the harm? Or what was there in it, which might not well become so wise and so good a man? Let Mr. B. put himself in Clemens's place, and then consider, whether he could do anything better or more commendable in those circumstances.

The second article is founded in nothing but misconstruction, and was cleared up long ago by the learned Dr. Cave, [Cave, Epist. Apolog. p. 50, etc.] and by others [Natal. Alexand. E. H. sect. ii. dissert. 8. p. 395. Nourrii Apparatus ad Biblioth. max. vol. i. p. 968.] after him: not to mention what the Benedictines have said more largely in defense of Hilary against the same accusation. [Praefat. General. sect. iii. p. 30, etc.]

The third article is entirely without grounds; a conclusion drawn without premises to support it, [Vid. Buddaei Isagog. p. 623. Spirit of Infidelity detected, p. 33.] a false inference charged upon very innocent words, in contradiction to the whole tenor of Clemens's writings. Is this dealing fairly with the ancients or with the public?

Besides these particular charges upon Clemens, he has some others, more general, which are either injurious or frivolous. He blames him for want of method and coherence, for being full of declamation and mystical allusion; and the like. [Prefatory Discourse, p. 19.] Which kind of discourse is itself declamatory and detracting, not becoming a person of candour or gravity, who would make allowances for circumstances and times, and weigh things in an equal balance. Why must every author walk in trammels, and be confined to rules of art? Immethodical collections are useful in their kind, and ought to have their proper commendation. But it is further said, as from Le Clerc, that "Clemens's Pedagogue abounds with maxims excessively rigid, and far remote from anything now in practice." We might except to Le Clerc, as to a person of uncommon delicacy, known to lean generally to the severer side, and none of the best natured or most happy in his censures,* but prejudiced, by his principles, against the primitive Fathers; jealous of a reputation which, he saw, stood in his way, and much afraid of their superiority. Perhaps, after all, he mistakes

Clemens's meaning: or if he does not, his censure may be more an argument of the present degeneracy, than of Clemens's excessive rigour or austerity. I shall only add, that before we blame the ancients for too strict a morality (an error, if it be one, on the right hand), we ought to be well apprised of the circumstances of those times: for diversity of circumstances requires a diversity in the application of the same general rules, and prescribes as different a conduct.

*[Vid. Perizonius in AEgypt. Origin. Praefat. p. 8. Curtius Vindicat. p. 10–23, 185–191. Jenkins, Defens. Augustin. adv. Phereponum. Praef. p. 9. Reflections on Learning, p. 235, etc. Continuation of the Answer of the Hist. of Oracles, Praef. p. 47, etc. Cave, Epist. Apologet. p. 9, 10, 11, 12. Cum multis aliis.]

I shall not go on to the other Fathers whom this worthy gentleman has animadverted upon: I have given enough for a sample in the two first. But I shall proceed to observe something with respect to his general manner of carrying on the impeachment. After he has done with the particulars, charged upon the Fathers man by man, he pretends to have demonstrated clearly, that the most celebrated Doctors of the six first centuries were but bad masters, and very poor guides in matters of morality. Here we see what it was that he aimed at; though he has demonstrated nothing, but a strong inclination to detract from true and great worth. There is an artificial confusedness in his throwing six centuries together: three or a little more will be enough for us to insist upon, so far as our argument from antiquity is concerned. Everybody knows that corruptions came in gradually, more and more every day, after the world, as it were, crept into the Church [Hieronym. Vid. Malch. Opp. vol. iv. p. 91.]: we make a distinction between the elder and the later times. It will not be easy to persuade us, that in those best and purest ages, when Christian practice was in the height of perfection, that the theory of it was so very lame and defective, as he is pleased to intimate; or that the guides and masters were so exceeding low, or bad, when the scholars or disciples were, for the most part, eminently good. If any one doubts of the fact, he may satisfy himself by looking into the accounts given both by Christians and Pagans [The testimonies are collected into one view, by Cave, in his Primitive Christianity; Bingham, in his Christian Antiquities, b. vi. c. 1. Fabricius, Salutaris Lux Evangelii, c. x. p. 194, etc. Baltus's Answer to Fontenedle's Hist. of Oracles, vol. ii. p. 97.]; such as make it evident, that the morals of that time were the admiration and envy of the heathen world then, as they are an excellent pattern* for the Christian world since. The author may conceive as highly as he pleases of modern morality, but impartial judges will think it no commendation of it to have it set at variance with primitive Christianity: to differ from that standard, in anything material, is to come short of it, supposing circumstances to be the same. Neither is want of artificial method any more an objection against the ancients, than against

Scripture itself, the best ethics of any.

*[Dr. Wotton, in a treatise where he intended to extol the moderns, and to adjudge them the preference as often as he could, yet took care to give this testimony to ancient Christianity: "It is certain, that many of the ablest of the ancient Fathers were excellent casuists; as indeed every man who has a right judgment, an honest mind, and a thorough acquaintance with the design of our blessed Saviour revealed in the Gospel, must of necessity be. And if at this distance many of their decisions seem over severe, there is as great at least (if not greater) reason to suspect, that the complaints nowadays raised against them, may arise from our degeneracy, as from their unwarrantable strictness." Wotton's Reflections on Ancient and Modern Learning, p. 369.]

But to proceed with our author, he runs off for a while into declamatory invective against those who are "jealous of the honour of the Fathers": he "pities them with all his heart," thinking it "inhuman to insult them" [Prefatory Discourse, p.25.]; but doing it all the time. Then he gravely tells his reader, a formal untruth, that they tacitly suppose the Fathers to have been infallible [Ibid. p. 25.]; as if he had intended only to guard against a false notion of the infallibility of the Fathers. [Ibid. p. 26.] But there is a very wide distance between supposing them infallible, and representing them as bad masters, very poor guides, etc. This learned gentleman, I presume, does not pretend to be infallible; and yet he might think himself ill-used, if represented as a bad master, or a very poor guide: there is a medium between the extremes.

He brings up again, soon after, the charge of gross errors, most profound ignorance of what they ought to have known; adding, that most of them, more or less, were led by passion, and that their conduct frequently was neither regular nor justifiable. [Prefatory Discourse, p. 26.] Well then, surely this is something more than barely saying, they were fallible men; and one may presume to contradict such a misreport of them, without maintaining that they were infallible. How will this learned gentleman be able to prove that the character he has here given is their true general character, such as will suit the three first centuries? Church history is flatly contrary, and the Christian world hitherto has been used to honour them with the title of the best and purest ages. He refers us twice [Ibid. p. 18, 34.] to some tart reflections of Gregory Nazianzen upon some of the clergy in his time, about A.D. 381. Perhaps Nazianzen himself might be led by resentment to aggravate in some measure; for he was a man of spirit, had some warmth, and might drop too severe a censure, under a sense of the ill-usage he had met with. But supposing his censure to be strictly just, what argument is there in it? The clergy about A.D. 381 were guilty of many and great faults, therefore the whole order were as guilty all along, for two hundred and eighty years together; reckoning from the apostolic age. I see not by what rules of reasoning such consequence can be drawn. [Cave, Epist. Apologet. p. 25.] Everybody knows how

miserably the Church had been rent asunder by parties and factions, from the time that Arianism broke out; that is, for sixty years backwards, or thereabout: by means whereof, men's passions were inflamed, and their tempers soured. But how does this affect the elder times, when all the bishops of the Christian Church were in the main unanimous, and held amicably together against Jews, Pagans, and heretics? Allow that heats and animosities prevailed much among Churchmen, towards the end of the fourth century, and that the state of the Church at that time was become very corrupt, according to the accounts given by Nazianzen: but then allow also, that such corruptions were of recent date, and that the like had not been seen in elder times, before the rise of Arius, as Nazianzen himself testifies. [Nazianz. Orat. xxi. p. 380.] And he had a vast esteem of one council, at least, the Council of Nice, older than what he speaks of. So then, if Nazianzen is a competent evidence to found the objection upon, let him be so also on our side, to supply us with a proper answer, as far as our cause can be concerned in the question.

The author proceeds to contest the right which the Fathers have been thought to have, to the very modest title of propagators of the Christian religion: he thinks it should be given to the Apostles only. [Prefatory Discourse, p. 26, 27.] But certainly the Fathers succeeded to the Apostles in the great work of propagating Christianity, and therefore were as properly (though not altogether so eminently) propagators of it, as the Apostles themselves. Yea, they also were eminently such during the time that miracles lasted, that is to say, for three centuries at least. But he is pleased to ask, a little lower in the same page, "Why must the Fathers of the three or six first centuries have been men of true piety and knowledge, rather than those of the tenth or eleventh?" But why does he insert, or six, except it be to blend and confound what should be kept distinct, and to put a fallacy upon the reader? Let the question be asked about the three first centuries, and we can assign many and good reasons why they must have been, in the general, better men than those of the tenth or eleventh: or if the reasons should not satisfy, we appeal to testimony, to certain fact, which supersedes all reasons. As to the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries, they might decline in proportion, and did so, though there were some excellent men in all: which however I have to need to consider.

A little after, he falls again to softening, and now he asks, "Must the Fathers have been liable to no failings, no passions, no errors, no ignorance at all?" [Prefatory Disc. p. 28.] But was that the question? Why all this shifting and shuffling, if a man were not conscious of a bad cause, and of his acting an unhandsome part? The Fathers of the three first centuries (that golden age of Christianity, tried and purified in the fire of persecution), though not exempt

from failings, nor infallible, were yet men of a higher character than those of the tenth or eleventh; and were not bad masters, nor very poor guides, but the contrary: that is what we say, and what we abide by. He goes on to tell us, that he does “not pretend to say,” that they were all “a pack of profligate wretches” [Id. *ibid.*] No; God forbid. I know not whether Celsus, Porphyry, or Julian would have said such a thing, in the greatest extremity of their rage: they had some regard to truth, and to public report. And to their own characters.* But though he does not say that, what will he at length say? “There were some among them who were, in some measures men of piety and knowledge.” [Ibid. p. 28.] How hard to extort the slightest compliment upon those great and good men! Though he can be lavish enough elsewhere towards Confucius, a Pagan, [Pref. Disc. sect. xv. p. 44.] and towards Hobbes, [Ibid. sect. xxix. p. 80.] a reputed Atheist. He proceeds again to pass a decretory sentence upon the Fathers, in the same detracting way; that “their virtues were, for the generality, far from being any way considerable, and their knowledge commonly false and confused” [Pref. Disc. p. 33.]: and he appears to be much offended with those who would bring him back to the primitive food of husks and acorns. [Ibid. p. 35.] Yet the illustrious Grotius was plentifully fed with those husks, or else he had never been Grotius. And he had a very great esteem and value for them: which, as it appears in all his works, so more particularly in that admirable treatise of his, his System of Morality. He understood the valuable use of them to that very science, has intimated it over and over in express words, [Grotius. de Jur. B. et P. Proleg. n. li. p. 32, 33. ed. 1720. Conf. lib. i. c. 2. s. 9. p. 60.] and exemplified it quite through that excellent performance. I am aware that Mons. Barbeyrac, in his edition of Grotius, and in his French version, has notes of correction upon those passages of his author, and condemns even his master Grotius now, as well as the Fathers before. But Grotius was a wise man, and knew what he said; besides that the thing speaks itself. I may add that this gentleman himself, who has profited so much by Grotius and Puffendorf (who profited by the Fathers) has been in some measure obliged to the Fathers, though it were only at second or third hand. But the first hand is undoubtedly the best:* and if any man would expect ever to come up to Grotius, it must be, not merely by reading Grotius; but by reading as he read, and doing as he did. [The learned Buddeus, a judicious and moderate man, and not prejudiced on the side of the Fathers, does justice to them and to Grotius, both at once. Budd. *Histor. Juris Naturalis*, p. 16.]

*[“The heathens themselves, even such as were the greatest enemies to the Christian religion, could not forbear often to do justice to their great knowledge and eminent sanctity.” So says F. Baltus in answer to Fontenelle. *Continuation*, p. 97. And he instances in Porphyry, and the heathen philosophers of his time; he mentions Libanius

also, and Longinianus, and Maximus Madaurensis.]

**[“Constant reading of the most perfect modern books, which does not go jointly on with the ancients in their turns, will, by bringing the ancients into disuse, cause the learning of the men of the next generation to sink by reason that they, not drawing forth those springs from whence these excellent moderns drew, whom they only propose to follow, nor taking those measures which these men took, must for want of that foundation which their modern guides first carefully laid, fail in no long compass of time.” Wotton’s Reflections, etc. pref. p. 3.]

The conclusion which the author makes is suitable to the rest, and runs thus: “Notwithstanding that great inaccuracy of the Fathers, which has often caused them to commit considerable errors; notwithstanding that fancy they had for vain subtleties, which made them neglect things of greater importance; notwithstanding all this, I say, the fundamental doctrines of religion and morality have still been preserved amongst Christians, even in the most dismal ages of darkness and vice.” [Prefatory Discourse, p. 34.] Now, though here he is pleased to attribute no more (in respect of fundamentals) to the best and purest times, than to the “most dismal ages of darkness and vice” (as before he had been pleased to compare the tenth and eleventh with the three first), yet one might have expected to find, that he had agreed however with those first ages in all those fundamentals, and have acknowledged his obligations to them for their care and zeal in handing them down to us. But he refers us, for explication of fundamentals, to a famous treatise of Le Clerc’s, at the end of Grotius de Veritate Religionis Christianae, A.D. 1709. A treatise so indefinite and loose, that one scarce knows what it aims at; except it be, that nothing should pass for a fundamental which has been ever disputed by men calling themselves Christians, and professing Scripture, however interpreted, to be their rule. [See that treatise of Le Clerc’s briefly examined by Buddeus, in his Miscellanea Sacra, par. i. p. 320. Compare Turretin. de Articulis. Fundament. p. 13.] Which is judging of important truths, not by the Word of God, soberly understood, nor by Catholic tradition, nor by the reason of things, but by the floating humours and fancies of men; as if all Christian doctrines were to be expunged out of the list of necessities, which have had the misfortune to be disputed amongst us, and a short creed were to be made out of the remainder. But what if others, with Baron Herbert of Cherbury, or with the author of the Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina, building upon the same principles of latitude, and willing to compound all differences, should advise us to admit nothing for a fundamental, but what all mankind have hitherto agreed in, and for the future shall agree in, Atheists only excepted; where will then at length these presumptuous schemes end? or when will weak men leave off dictating to an all-knowing God, preferring their own fond devices to the

wisdom of Heaven?

To be short, that treatise of Le Clerc's, while wholly intent upon discharging unnecessaries (as he supposed them), takes no due care for preserving the vitals of Christianity; but is much such another cure for our religious ferments, as bleeding a man to death would be for a fever. I presume, one principal view was, to throw out the doctrine of the Trinity (though it might lead a great deal farther); and it was that consideration chiefly, which induced him, and many others, to vilify the ancient Fathers of the Christian Church. [Cave, Epist. Apologet. p.17. Conf. p. 23.] But I proceed.

Mr. B. besides his ill-will towards the Fathers, appears to discover something of an unfriendly disposition towards ecclesiastics at large, in more instances than one. But he is particularly offended with the public sermons, as seeming to him not fiery instructive on the head of morality. [Prefatory Disc. sect. xi. p. 35.] His translator here, sensible of the indecency of the reflection, endeavours to excuse and soften it by a note; suggesting that he might intend it only against sermons and books in French, not against the compositions of the English or Dutch. It was kindly offered: but I find not that the author himself has anywhere made the exception, or insinuated that he intended any. However, admitting that he had a view to the French only, yet the reflection can hardly be acquitted of some degree of immodesty: for, surely, the French Protestant Divines have deserved a better treatment. He quotes Placette and Ostervald to give some colour to his invectives: but neither of them will bear him out in any such general aspersions upon their whole body. And what if Divines ordinarily (as Civilians also) fall short of Grotius and Puffendorf; or what if they do not follow the same laboured method (any more than the Sermon on the Mount did), yet their discourses may be very instructive, and the more so for their artless simplicity, being better adapted to the capacities of common hearers. There are many instructive ways of inculcating moral precepts; and it is by no means serving morality, to disparage all others for the sake of one which a man chooses to be fond of, perhaps as thinking it his own. It is natural enough for any person to applaud his own taste, and to prefer his own way: but still it must be acknowledged, that there is more of human infirmity, than there is of equity or justice in it. Ancients ought to have their due praises as well as moderns; and Divines as well as Civilians: and it is not fair dealing to monopolize esteem, or to affect to draw all into one channel, where a man has placed himself to receive it, disregarding his neighbours.

It is very true, what this gentleman says, that it "was not any of the ecclesiastics, or professors of Divinity," [Ibid. p. 36.] who drew up that vast system of morality which Grotius is so justly famed for. It was a work proper for

so large a genius, and so accomplished a Civilian and Statesman. Ecclesiastics, I am confident, are so far from envying him the great honour, which he thereby acquired, without seeking it, that they would be heartily glad if every other writer of his profession were like him, and equal to him, in learning, candour, capacity, gravity, sincerity. This gentleman does not make a just report, when he says, that “the ecclesiastics, instead of returning thanks to Grotius for his excellent work, everywhere declared against him, and that many even Protestant Divines laboured to cry it down.” [Prefatory Discourse, p. 36.] He should have been content to say that the Romanists condemned it, [Buddaei Histor. Jur. Naturalis, p. 31, 32. Conf. Bayle, Diction. in Grotius, note o.] while the Protestants in general, Divines and others, justly esteemed it, and the reformed Universities paid suitable regards to it. [Buddaeus, ibid. p. 39. Conf. Bayle in note o.] It was not a Divine, but a Civilian, [Johannes a Felden, A.D. 1653.] who first appeared against it: and why may I not add, that Divines at this day, probably, have a greater esteem of the work, and a truer value for it, than the last Civilian who translated it, and who has animadverted sometimes too freely upon it. Who is it that has told the world, that the incomparable Grotius was “not thoroughly acquainted with the art of thinking justly?” Is it not this very gentleman [Prefatory Discourse, p. 79.] detracting from Grotius, to compliment the author of the Parrhasiana, who had said the same thing before. [Le Clerc’s Parrhasiana, p. 247, 248. Engl. edit.] It was Grotius’s misfortune, it seems, to fall half a century short, in the art of just thinking. But what pains will not some men take to draw reputation to their own apartments: first, disparaging ancients in comparison of moderns, to bring it so much nearer towards themselves; next, excluding Divines at large, to fix it among critics or civilians; then highly extolling two or three very eminent personages, to beat off rivals, and, as it were, to devolve all repute upon them for a season; lastly, giving broad intimations, that there are yet greater men than those, as to true reasoning (a prime excellency), and the perfection of just thinking: and who should these at length be, but the same that sit as judges upon them, as upon all the rest? Various are the windings and turnings of self-love, and its illusions many: but I forbear. These reflections, if not capable of the strictest proof, yet have most undoubtedly greater appearances of truth, [Perizonius, Q. Curt. Vindicat. p. 192.] than most of those unworthy aspersions cast upon the primitive Fathers.

After all, we take not upon us to acquit the Fathers of all kinds of mistakes, or of human frailties; for we very well know that they were men, though excellent men. All we desire is that no errors may be imputed more than belong to them, nor that those which they really gave into, be aggravated beyond reason; nor that that wherein any of them singly offended, be collectively thrown upon them all. In short, we desire no favour in their behalf, but truth, justice,

equity, candour, and humanity, which are due to all men, living or dead; and much more to persons of such exemplary virtues, and so exalted a character in the churches of Christ. [Rivet. Tractat. de Patr. Autoritat. cap. x. p. 65.] I shall only add, that had the Fathers, several of them, really fallen into as many errors of doctrine, as some would make us believe they did, yet our two main positions would stand firm as before: viz. 1. That from the writings of the Fathers, taken with other collateral evidences, we may competently learn as to matter of fact, [A proper distinction should be made (as I before hinted) between the reasonings of the Fathers, and their testimonies as to fact. Of which see Dodwell. Dissert. in Iren. i. sect. xliii. p. 77, etc. Bishop Smalbroke's Vindicat. of Miracles, etc. vol. i. p. 123.] what was the general sense of the three first centuries, in the important articles of faith. [Bevereg. Cod. Can. Vindic. in Proem. s. vii.] 2. That the historical knowledge of the fact so testified, may be of very great use to us, for the interpreting of Scripture, so far as concerns those articles, and for guarding the word of God against any novel and dangerous misconstructions.

VI. It has been sometimes objected, that the Fathers were but very indifferent critics upon Scripture, and that they frequently misinterpreted particular texts. A learned writer has been at the pains to draw up a moderate octavo, full of supposed examples of that kind, beginning with Genesis, and descending regularly through the Scripture, almost as far as the Revelations. [Whitby, Dissert. de Script. Interpret.] He had a wide field to range in, four or five whole centuries, and more. And if anything amiss, by way of comment, happened to drop from any Father, in all that time, perhaps in some very hasty composition, some extempore homily, or the like, that must be brought in to swell the account: and whatsoever anyone singly has offended in a single place (somewhere else perhaps making us amends for it), he is to bear the odium of it; and not only he, but all his predecessors and successors for so many centuries, all that pass under the name of Fathers: for the design is to show, that the Fathers in general were very weak men. It would be tedious to enter into a detail of the texts said to be misinterpreted. Therefore I shall only observe, as follows, upon the examination I have made. 1. That some of the interpretations found fault with, are true and just interpretations, blamed without reason, and brought in for show, or to make bulk. 2. Several others are doubtful, and may claim candid allowances. 3. Some are misreported, or represented otherwise than the good Fathers intended. 4. Most of the blamable ones are of the allegorical kind: and they very often are not so properly interpretations (for the Fathers generally admitted a literal interpretation besides, of the same texts), as a kind of moral or spiritual use; or improvements raised upon the texts, for the practical edification of the people. The design seems to have been much the same (only employed

upon a nobler subject) with what several pious persons have attempted, in endeavouring to turn every common incident of life, everything they hear, read, or see, to some spiritual improvement, by apposite reflections or meditations. The reader may find a specimen of such spiritual exercises as I speak of, in the very pious and ingenious Mr. Boyle, in his treatise entitled, *Occasional Reflections upon several Subjects*. Such a kind of exercise I take many of those allegorical comments (those especially of the tropological kind) to have been. They were well meant, and had their use, though often carried too far; but, in strictness, they were not interpretations of Scripture, but rather pious meditations upon Scripture. I am sensible that some of them were intended as interpretations: but, in the general, and for the most part, I conceive, they were rather what I have said. 5. But supposing that the Fathers sometimes, or often mistook in their interpretations of Scripture (in such texts more especially upon which no fundamental doctrine of the Church depended, nor perhaps was concerned in), what can be supposed to follow from such a concession? Nothing, to far as I can yet apprehend, that will at all affect our present question. It may be allowed, and cannot indeed justly be denied that modern Critics and Divines, of the first rank, having the light of the Fathers before them, and greater skill in the languages, and many additional helps which the Fathers wanted, are better textuaries, upon the whole, [Dodwell. *Dissert. in Iren. in pifat. sect. 15.*] than the ablest of the ancients were, or than all the Fathers together, because they contain them, in a manner, or the best things in them, with additional improvements. But admitting all this, it concludes nothing against the use or value of the ancients, but supposes it all the time. Besides, the stress is not laid upon any critical acumen of the Fathers in interpreting every particular text, but upon their faithfulness in relating what was the doctrine of the Church, as to the prime things, in their times, or before, and upon their interpretation of some remarkable and leading texts (such for instance as John 1:1) upon which chiefly the fundamental doctrines were conceived to rest. From whence it is manifest, that the learned collector of erroneous comments (supposing his representations just, which they often are not) has shot wide of the mark: and indeed he was sensible of it [Whitby, *Dissert. Praef. p. 19.*]; however notwithstanding he thought fit to publish his collection. He acknowledges our meaning to be no more than this; that Scripture be interpreted by the general doctrine of the ancient Church, in the prime things. [This matter is very clearly and accurately expressed by M. Thorndike. *Thorndike de Ration. Fin. Contr. p. 147.* Compare Sherlock, *Socin. Contr. p. 78.*] But then he runs on to call it imposing a sense upon Scripture, instead of taking one from it; making the Fathers speak for Christ, instead of permitting Christ to speak for himself, and the like. Now indeed, if every man that should undertake to interpret Scripture out of his own

head, were infallibly certain to make Christ speak for himself, and were in no manner of danger of imposing a sense upon him, there would be some weight in such reasoning: but did Socinus, did Arius, did Sabellius, did Valentinus, or an hundred more, succeed so well in that way, that that should be recommended as the only safe way of delivering the mind of Christ? It is granted on all hands, that Scripture should speak its own sense, and that no foreign sense ought to be imposed upon it: but then one of the best rules we can think of to secure to it its own sense, and to exclude all foreign senses, is to keep to the old sense (while the words will bear it, much more if they require it) which obtained from the beginning, among the churches favoured in a very particular manner by the illustrious presence of the Spirit of God. [The very judicious and learned Ger. Vossius speaks excellently well on this head. Voss. Epist. ad Forbes. prae. Histor. Instruct. A.D. 1645.]

VII. It has been sometimes objected, that there have been Fathers against Fathers, Councils against Councils, and warm contests amongst the ancient Doctors themselves; particularly about the time for observing Easter, and about heretical baptisms. All which we allow, but further plead, that the more they differed in rituals, or matters of discipline (things of slighter concern), the more regard is to be paid to them in the greater matters wherein they all agreed. For if they would not suffer any innovation, or the appearance of any, even in the smaller matters, but were exceeding jealous of everything that looked new, and were prepared to oppose any person or persons, how considerable soever in station, age, or dignity, rather than admit a novelty; how can we imagine that they should all so unanimously agree in the doctrine of our Lord's Divinity, if it were not old doctrine, the faith which was once delivered unto the saints? Their differences in inferior matters serve to strengthen the plea drawn from their unanimity in this, and so are an argument on our side, rather than any objection against us. [Daillé himself argues in like manner as we hers do. "As for those differences in opinion which are sometimes found amongst them, touching some certain points of religion, some whereof we have formerly set down; these things are so far from taking off anything from the weight of their testimonies, as that, on the contrary, they add rather very much to the same. For this must acquit their consenting, of all suspicion that some persons might have, that it proceeded from some combination, or some correspondence and mutual intelligence." Dallé, Use of Our Fathers, part ii. c. 6. p. 186. Conf. Bevereg. Cod. Can. Vindicat. in Proeme. s. 5.]

VIII. It has been objected [Whitby, Dissert p. 4.] that our sixth Article condemns the method of interpreting Scripture by antiquity, or, at least, supersedes it; because it says, *Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation; so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of faith, or*

necessary to salvation. The Article says nothing but what is perfectly right, and perfectly consistent with all we have been pleading for. We allow no doctrine as necessary, which stands only on Fathers, or on tradition, oral or written: we admit none for such, but what is contained in Scripture, and proved by Scripture, rightly interpreted. And we know of no way more safe in necessities, to preserve the right interpretation, than to take the ancients along with us. [So the great Casaubon, speaking both for himself and for the Church of England; and at the same time for Melancthon, and Calvin also. Casaub. Epist. 744. Dan. Heinsio, p. 434. edit. 3. Roterodami.] We think it a good method to secure our rule of faith against impostures of all kinds; whether of enthusiasm, or false criticism, or conceited reason, or oral tradition, or the assuming dictates of an infallible chair. If we thus preserve the true sense of Scripture, and upon that sense build our faith, we then build upon Scripture only; for the sense of Scripture is Scripture.* Suppose a man were to prove his legal title to an estate; he appeals to the laws: the true sense and meaning of the laws must be proved by the best rules of interpretation; but, after all, it is the law that gives the title, and that only. In like manner, after using all proper means to come at the sense of Scripture (which is Scripture), it is that, and that only, which we ground our faith upon, and prove our faith by. We allege not Fathers as grounds, or principles, or foundations of our faith, but as witnesses, and as interpreters, and faithful conveyers.

*[“We reverently receive the unanimous tradition or doctrine of the Church in all ages, which determines the meaning of the holy Scripture, and makes it more clear and unquestionable in any point of faith, wherein we can find it hath declared its sense. For we look upon this tradition as nothing else but the Scripture unfolded: not a new thing which is not in the Scripture, but the Scripture explained and made more evident.” Dr. (afterward Bishop) Patrick’s Discourse about Tradition, p. 18. Printed A.D. 1683.]

That the Church of England has a very particular regard to antiquity, may sufficiently appear from a Canon set forth in the same year when our Articles were first perfected and authorized by act of Parliament, namely, in the year 1571. By that Canon it is provided, “that preachers shall not presume to deliver anything from the pulpit, as of moment, to be religiously observed and believed by the people, but that which is agreeable to the doctrine of the Old or New Testament, and collected out of the same doctrine by the Catholic Fathers and the Bishops of the ancient Church.” [Sparrow, Collect. p. 238.] A wise regulation, formed with exquisite judgment, and worded with the most exact caution. The Canon does not order that they shall teach whatever had been taught by Fathers; no, that would have been setting up a new rule of faith: neither does it say, that they shall teach whatsoever the Fathers had collected from Scripture; no, that would have been making them infallible interpreters, or infallible reasoners: the

doctrine must be found first in Scripture; only to be the more secure that we have found it there, the Fathers are to be called in, to be, as it were, constant checks upon the presumption or wantonness of private interpretation. But then again, as to private interpretation, there is liberty enough allowed to it. Preachers are not forbidden to interpret this or that text, or hundreds of texts, differently from what the Fathers have done; provided still they keep within the analogy of faith, and presume not to raise any new doctrine: neither are they altogether restrained from teaching anything new, provided it be offered as opinion only, or an inferior truth, and not pressed as necessary upon the people. For it was thought that there could be no necessary article of faith or doctrine now drawn from Scripture, but what the ancients had drawn out before, from the same Scripture: to say otherwise, would imply that the ancients had failed universally in necessities, which is morally absurd.

From this account it may appear that the Church of England is exactly in the same sentiments which I have been pleading for. And indeed, if there be any church now in the world, which truly reverences antiquity, and pays a proper regard to it, it is this Church. [Hammond contr. Blondell. in praelim. cap. xiv. sect. 13. Casaubon Epist. ad Perron. 838. p. 493. A.D. 1612. Idem ad Salmas. Epist. 837. p. 489. A.D. 1612.] The Romanists talk of antiquity, while we observe and follow it. For, with them, both Scripture and Fathers are, as to the sense, under the correction and control of the present Church:* with us, the present Church says nothing, but under the direction of Scripture and antiquity taken together, one as the rule, and the other as the pattern or interpreter. Among them, the present Church speaks by Scripture and Fathers: with us, Scripture and Fathers speak by the Church. I have before thrown in some testimonies of the high regard which our Church pays to antiquity: and if the reader desires more of like kind, he may please to consult such as have collected them, some of which I refer to at the bottom of the page.**

*[Vid. Rivet. Tractat. de Pate. Autoritate, cap. vii. p. 40, etc. Patrick on Tradition, p. 41. Stillingfleet's Rational Account, part i. cap. 5. p. 80, etc. N.B. In the fourteenth article of the Creed of Pope Pius IV, the words run thus. "I do receive the holy Scriptures in the same sense that holy Mother Church doth, and always hath – neither will I receive and interpret them otherwise than according to the unanimous consent of the Fathers." Here are two contradictory things blended together, the sense of their present Church, and the unanimous consent of Fathers: which are no more to be reconciled than light and darkness; except it be by making antiquity as much a Lesbian rule, as they make the Scripture. I follow the copy of that Creed given in Latin and English at the end of Dr. Hickeys's Letters, published A.D. 1705.]

**[Scrivener adv. Dallaeum, par. i. cap. 9. p. 57, etc. Dr. Puller's Moderation of the Church of England, p. 80, etc. Bull. Apolog. pro Harmon. Sect. i. p. 634. Grebe,

Spicileg. vol. i. in praefatione. Saywell. Praefat. Apologet. Praefix. Launoii Epist. A.D. 1689. "It is a calumny to affirm that the Church of England rejects all tradition: and I hope, none of her children are so ignorant, as when they hear that word, to imagine they must rise up and oppose it. No, the Scripture itself is a tradition: and we admit all other traditions which are subordinate and agreeable to that; together with all those things which can be proved to be apostolical, by the general testimony of the Church in all ages." Patrick on Tradition, p. 48.]

IX. It may still be objected that the appealing to antiquity may be both fruitless and endless, and can never decide differences, or silence disputes, because all parties almost have or may put in their claim to it; and as it will be hard to decide among the several claimants, so the whole will terminate in confusion [Whitby, Dissert praef. p. 28, 75, 80.]: therefore the shortest and best method is to throw off antiquity, and to abide by Scripture alone. This objection does, in some measure, fail in with others before mentioned: but because it contains in a manner, the sum and substance of several, I shall return a distinct answer to it, in so many particulars.

1. I would observe, that since all parties almost have put in their claim to antiquity, it is a certain sign that they bare a value and esteem for it, and think it of some force. They appeal to Scripture also, because it is of weight: one has a plea from it, and another a pretense. Whatever is worth the having, where it is to be had will be also thought worth the counterfeiting, where it is not: therefore, we may expect, in such cases, counterfeit Scripture and counterfeit antiquity to give colour to false claims, as well as genuine Scripture and genuine antiquity to support true ones. All this shows that it is generally thought a great advantage to have antiquity on one's side, and, as great a disadvantage to any cause to want it. Men would never contend about it, were it worthless or insignificant: they would not take pains to adulterate the coin, if the coin itself were not valuable. Therefore let us not too hastily part with anything which all parties either openly speak well of, or secretly covet and admire.*

*[It is remarkable of Socinus, who condemned tradition and all the ancients, undertaking to coin a new religion from Scripture alone; I say, it is remarkable of him that when he found that his disciples would not submit to worship Christ, after all he could bring from Scripture to persuade them to it, he reminded them of the ancient and universal practice of saints and martyrs, as an argument to prove that such was the sense of Scripture. ... [Ad Matt. Radec. Epist. iii. p. 391.] An argument which, if he had uniformly attended to it, ought to have given some check to his most exorbitant wantonness and self-sufficiency in other matters.]

2. As to deciding differences, or silencing disputes, it is granted that antiquity will not always be effectual, neither will Scripture; neither indeed will anything but what would be effectual to make all men humble and modest, wise

and good. That so many several sects and parties differ so widely from each other, and from the truth is not generally owing to this, that their different interpretations of Scripture have led them into different opinions in religion, but their different opinions have led them into different interpretations. All must of necessity pretend colour, at least, from Scripture (if they would not be taken for madmen, or infidels), and if true interpretation will not answer the purpose, false must come up of course. So, it is in vain to cast about for any rules of interpretation, as certain remedies for the healing differences, or ending all disputes: the disease lies deeper, and is too stubborn for human means. There is no infallible preservative, no irresistible expedient against heresy, any more than against any other vices: neither ought there to be any; for then a right belief would be no matter of choice, nor faith any longer a virtue, as God designed it should be. We pretend not therefore to infallible cures by any means whatever. But though we cannot expect to work miracles by the help of antiquity and Scripture together (for heresies there will be notwithstanding, and Scripture itself intimates there must be [1 Cor. 11:19.]), yet they are both of them of very great use, and may have their effect, in a human way, among reasonable men; which is sufficient. We are very sensible, that they who study to pervert Scripture, will pervert tradition too, and will often turn those weapons against the truth, which were intended only for defense of it. That is an inconvenience common to a thousand other cases besides this: we must be content to bear with it, and to conduct as prudently as we can, under direction from the word of God. And when we have so done all that is proper, or required, and without effect, the appeal must be to the common reason of mankind; and there it must rest till the cause comes to be heard before a higher tribunal.

3. But though Scripture and antiquity may both of them be resisted, or both perverted, and are not certainly factual, nor intended to be so, yet both together are of greater force than Scripture singly can be; and that is reason sufficient for superadding antiquity. Two witnesses at better than one, though one be superior; and two proofs of the same thing (though one be as primary, and the other secondary) amount to more than either of them singly can do. Every additional light contributes some luster, and every accessional weight helps to turn the scale. A man may be able to evade Scripture alone, who may not be able to evade both Scripture and antiquity; or if he can evade both, yet perhaps not so easily: therefore, if the taking in antiquity is of service, as it reinforces truth, and bears the harder upon error, [Gerard. Voss. Epist. ad Forbes.] it is worth the urging, for the same reason as all kinds of arguments or dissuasives against sin and wickedness are to be urged in due place.

4. Lastly, I must observe that there is no such great difficulty as some

persons may fancy, in distinguishing false claims from true, of in pointing out among the several, claimants, where the right lies. Men of ready wit and invention may draw up a catalogue of innumerable difficulties, taking in all such as might possibly happen in an case, and throwing them together, so as to make up one large and floating idea of difficulty, for the reader to apply to every ease: but if one looks a little closer into any particular instance, he will be surprised to find how easy it is, after all, to form a judgment of it, and that not a hundredth part perhaps of that general confuse idea of difficulty does really belong to it. If a man were inclined to hear what fine harangues might be made upon the uncertainty of the reports of sense, how often, and how many several ways his eyes or ears, or other senses might deceive him (which may be illustrated with great variety of instances from history, embellished with all the ornaments of wit had fancy), he might be apt, for some time, almost to mistrust his senses, and to take life itself for a areas. But notwithstanding all, when he comes to consider use and experience, he will soon find that his senses may, for the most part, be securely trusted to, without danger of deception, and that it is scarce once in a thousand trials that they lead him into error. The like may be said with regard to the studied harangues drawn up by some writers, about the uncertainty of all tradition, and the obscurity of the Fathers, and the danger of deception: they amount only to loose, general discourse, which may seem at first to have something in it, [Zornius, p. 665.] but is soon confuted by use and experience, the safest criterion to judge by. The truth of what I say may best appear by an induction of particulars; and therefore I shall next briefly run over the most observable pretenses to tradition, ancient and modern (such as at present occur to me), that we may judge from the particular instances how that case stands.

Basilides, of the first or second century, and his partisans pleaded antiquity and put in their claim to tradition, deriving it by one Glaucias, from St. Peter himself. [Clemens Alexandria. Strom. vii. p. 898. ed. Oxon.] But the vanity and folly of the plea was apparent at first sight: and no sensible man could ever think it at all reasonable to give credit to a wandering tale, or to that obscure Glaucias, rather than to certain fact (appearing in Scripture, and in the churches founded by St. Peter), that St. Peter's doctrine was quite another thing from what Basilides had fathered upon him.

Valentinus, of the second century, and his disciples, pleaded antiquity also, as well as Scripture, and fetched their doctrines, by one Theodades, as they said, from the Apostle Paul. [Clemens Alexandrin. *ibid.*] A likely matter! that Theodades, whoever he was, should know more of St. Paul's mind, than all the churches founded by that blessed Apostle. The silliness of such a plea betrayed itself at once; and but to name it, was to expose it.

The Marcionites, along with the Basilidians and Valentinians, pretended also to derive their common doctrines down by tradition from the Apostle Matthias. [Clem. Alex. Strom. vii. p. 900. Conf. Dodwell. Dissert. in Iren. i. p. 48.] But their plea was mere artifice and pretense, and was effectually confuted by the standing doctrine of all the apostolical churches. By their common doctrines, I mean such as they all agreed in, as about the origin of evil, and the denial of Christ's real humanity, or the like.

The Artemonians, of the third century, pretended tradition for their heresy, from the Apostles themselves, and by the apostolical churches. [Euseb. Eccles. Hist. lib. v. cap. 28.] Which was saying something, had they been able to make out the fact: but the falsity of the report was palpable, and a child might see it. For they had contrived their story so oddly, and brought it down so low, that besides ancient records in great numbers, there might be thousands of living witnesses, who could contradict it, and expose it as a shameful imposture.

The Arians after them in the fourth century claimed tradition equally with the Catholics, but not with equal reason. They pretended to derive their doctrine down by the Fathers that lived before them; particularly by Origen, and Theognostus, and Dionysius Alexandrinus: but Athanasius easily detected the iniquity of their claim, and effectually confuted it. [Athanas. de Decret. Synod. Nic. p. 230, etc. de sententia Dionyaii, 243, etc.]

The Macedonians also, in their turn, pleaded tradition for their rejecting the Divinity of the Holy Ghost. But the great St. Basil laid open the falsity of their pretenses that way, and demonstrated that tradition was on the contrary side. [Basil. de Spiritu Sancto.] Afterwards (A.D. 383) when both they and the Arians were solemnly called upon, and asked if they would admit the common suffrage of the ancients, and be concluded by it; they shrunk, and would not stand the test, choosing rather to rest the issue of the cause upon logical disputation, [Socrat. Eccles. Histor. lib. v. cap. 10. Sozom. E. Hist lib. vii. cap. 12. See my Second Defence, Preface, vol. iii.] their usual refuge, and which they thought their safest retreat. It seldom happens, but that those who make false pretenses to antiquity, do by their own conduct (by their evading, or shifting when pressed, or some other as significant marks) betray their own cause; insomuch that a stander by, of ordinary sagacity, may often, without entering into the heart of the dispute, give a shrewd conjecture how the case stands. Having considered some of the most noted instances of unjustifiable claims among the ancients, let us next descend to moderns, for farther illustration of what we are upon.

The Romanists are great pretenders to Catholic tradition, or primitive antiquity: and yet the fact is so full and plain against them, that we can point out to them in every age, when, and where, and how every corruption almost

commenced, and every innovation crept in [See more particularly Bishop Bull's Answer to the Bishop of Meaux; and Bishop Stillingfleet's Council of Trent examined and disproved by Catholic Tradition, A.D. 1688. and Dr. Whitby's Treatise of Tradition.]: or can prove, at least, that it was not from the beginning. And it gives ground for suspicion, that they are themselves conscious of the nullity of their claim, when they decline fair disputation. They screen themselves under modern infallibility, and take sanctuary commonly in their own authority, as sole judges of everything, rather than rest the issue of the cause upon a strict and fair inquiry into ancient fact. I may further add, that it can scarce be thought a very difficult matter, to discern how antiquity stands, as to that controversy, when a single writer of our own (our excellent Bishop Jewel) was not afraid, though a very modest man, to challenge them publicly upon a great many articles, twenty-seven in number, and to give them six whole centuries to look out in, only to produce any one sufficient sentence out of any old Catholic Doctor or Father, or general Council, that should be found to declare clearly and plainly on their side, in any of the said articles. He made the challenge, and upon trial was sufficient to stand his ground. [Ger. Voss. ad Forbes.] The like challenges, with respect to the first three or four centuries, have been offered by others, [See Dr. Hicks's Letters to a Popish Priest, p. 188, 189.] and may be easily maintained by any man of competent learning or judgment [See his Epistle Dedicatory prefixed to his Right Use of the Fathers; as also his Preface to the same.]; so little difficulty is there in tracing tradition, or in distinguishing pretense from reality. Wherefore one can scarce forbear lamenting, that so able a writer as Daillé should take the pains he did to depreciate the use and value of the Fathers, only for fear the Romanists should take advantage of them. [Vid. Scrivener in Praefat.] He wanted at that time either the spirit or the penetration of Jewel: otherwise he might have considered, that the Protestant cause could not desire any fairer, or greater advantage, than to join issue upon the point of genuine antiquity, and to be concluded by it. Indeed, it seems, that he did perceive it afterwards, and made very good use of it, when years and experience had more enlarged his views.

The modern Socinians, though their way has been for the most part to reject antiquity, or to undervalue it (finding it run against them), have yet many of them, and of late more especially, thought it policy to set up a claim to tradition, deducing it from the Apostles, by the Ebionites and Nazaraeans (whom they ignorantly or artfully confound), down as far as to the days of Justin Martyr, where they are pleased to imagine a break in the descent, making him the first innovator. The story is better laid, than that of their predecessors the Artemonians, before mentioned: for they confine us within fifty years from the apostolical age; and they know, that we have but few records, within that

compass, to confute their tale by. However, by laying all our evidences together, and making the best of them, means have been found to demonstrate, so far as a matter of fact can be demonstrated, the falsity and nullity of their pretended tradition. And indeed it must look very odd, at first sight, to every considering man, that a tradition from the Apostles should be brought down by Ebionites, men condemned by all the apostolical churches; nay, and by the apostles themselves, as may appear from what I have offered above.

There remain now only the modern Arians to be spoken to. Some of whom do with great assurance lay claim to ancient tradition [Bull. Primitiva et Apostolica Traditio. per tot. Mosheim. Vindic. Antiq. contr. Joan. Toland. Stillingfleet's Vindication of the Trinity, cap. iii. p. 15, etc.]; while others fluctuate and hesitate upon it, as upon a point which they neither know how to abide by, nor how to give up. As to those who put on the greatest assurance, it is a strong presumption of their consciousness of something wrong, that they are unwilling to acquiesce in the Canonical Scriptures, without superadding another Gospel to them, a new book of Constitutions, spurious and interpolated pieces of the third, fourth, and fifth centuries [See Mr. Turner on the Apostolical Constitutions. Printed A.D. 1715.]: which, whatever else they be, are undoubtedly no part of the oracles of God. Another circumstance, which looks suspicious, is, that this pretended tradition is confined within two centuries. The reason is, because the evidences afterwards come in too full and strong to be eluded: besides that Clemens of Alexandria, and Tertullian, who are both within the compass, but happen to speak too broad and clear, are excluded from giving their testimony. [Whiston, Primitive Christianity Revived, vol. iv. p. 2. Compare Grabe's Instances of Defects, etc. p. 8, etc.] And yet, after all, even those which are taken in, as Justin, Irenaeus, Athenagoras, etc. furnish out evidence enough to confute the ill-contrived claim, and to prove it a figment.

As to other more prudent and cautious abettors of the same cause, though they decline not testimonies from the ancients, when any can be made to look favourable to that side, yet they endeavour, more ways than one, to sink the value of antiquity, and to lessen the just esteem which we ought to have for it. The testimonies of the ancients are depreciated under the low name of bare illustrations, [Clarke's Script. Doctr. Introduct. p. 24. third edit.] because they are not proofs in the highest sense, as the Scriptures themselves are. But there is a medium between proofs in that strongest sense, and mere illustrations: for subordinate proofs of the Church's doctrine from the beginning, drawn from Church writers, are proofs of something, (though not foundations of our faith), proofs in the moral kind, second only to Scripture, [See my First Defence, vol. i. p. 321. Second Defence, vol. iii. p. 445, etc. See also above.] and such as ought at least to have a negative, so far as concerns fundamentals, in the interpretation of

Scripture.

Another instance of the low esteem which those gentlemen have of the Fathers is seen in this, that while they quote passages from them, such as they can most easily warp to their own hypothesis, yet they undertake not, so far as I have observed, to reconcile the other numerous passages, or to make the Fathers, upon the whole, consistent evidences on their side, as we do on ours: this, I say, is another presumptive argument that they are themselves, in some measure, conscious how precarious and unsupported their claims to antiquity are.

I may add that some amongst them have taken all possible pains to expose the Fathers to the utmost, [Dr. Whitby's Dissertation, [de Scripturar. Interpret.] is entirely on this subject, and written with that view.] on purpose to render their suffrage, in this cause, useless and insignificant: a plain sign that they take them not for friends, since they do not use them like friends. From this single mark, a man of ordinary discernment may competently judge (without looking farther) whom the Fathers belong to, as Solomon, by a like direction, knew whose was the child.

Enough hath been said to show that it is no such very difficult matter, as some would represent, to judge between the claimants, or to distinguish the rightful possessor from the false challenger. I believe it is, at least, as easy (generally speaking) as it is to judge in a critical way upon texts: for that is what the plainest texts imaginable must at length be brought to, [Le Clerc very well observes that "to men governed by their passions, and conceited of their prejudices, the most evident things in the world are obscure; and that there is no law so clear, but a wrangler may raise a thousand difficulties about it." Le Clerc. Causes of Incredulity, p. 172.] if one has a subtle adversary to deal with, who has learned to play the whole game. Much learning commonly will be spent on both sides, before the plainest cause can be brought to a full hearing, and argued quite through. I need but instance in the rounds which Artemonius has led us, upon John 1:1 mentioned above.

X. There is one objection more, which though sufficiently obviated already, may yet perhaps deserve to have something more distinctly said to it in this place. It is pleaded that men ought to judge for themselves, to make use of their own understandings, and to admit no human authorities. I allow the plea: but, I presume, it is not hereby meant that we should receive no human explications of texts; for then we must receive none at all. If I interpret Scripture for myself, my explication is human to me: or else, how it should become human to others who may take it of me, I do not see. No doubt but Socinus's, or Crellius's, or Enjedine's explications were human, as it is certain that many of them were false: and therefore they that talk in the general against all human explications seem not to consider what they say, or they forget themselves to be men.

As to authority, in a strict and proper sense, I do not know that the Fathers have any over us: they are all dead men. Therefore we urge not their authority, but their testimony, their suffrage, their judgment, as carrying great force of reason with it; and reason we should all submit to.* Taking them in here, as lights or helps, is doing what is reasonable, and using our own understanding in the best manner, and to the best purposes: it is judging rightly for ourselves. If it were not so, what prudent man would advise it, or endeavour to persuade others to it? But, says an objector, do not you follow the Fathers? Yes, as far as reason requires, and no farther; therefore this is following our own reason: and he that deserts the Fathers in this instance, deserts himself and his own reason. Their sentiments, so ancient, so universal, carry the force of an argument** along with them, and a very strong argument too, all things considered.*** Therefore the being conducted by those sentiments, along with Scripture, is the same thing with being convinced or persuaded by argument; which is hearkening to right reason, which is submitting to God (who gave us reason for our guide), and not to human authority. It is following the safest and best light which divine Providence has graciously afforded us: for, as a great and good Prelate has observed, “the general tradition of the Church, next to Scripture, is the best and surest confirmation of this great point now in question between us; and that which gives us the greatest and truest light for the right understanding of the true sense and meaning of Scripture, not, only in this, but in most other important doctrines of the Christian religion.” [Archbishop Tillotson, vol. i. Serm. xliv. p. 456. fol. edit.]

*[Reason is that faculty whereby a man must judge of everything nor can a man believe anything except he have some reason for it; whether that reason be a deduction from the light of nature, or a branch of divine revelation in the oracles of holy Scripture, or the general interpretation of genuine antiquity, or the proposal of our own Church consentaneous thereto, or lastly, the result of some or all of these; for he that will rightly make use of his reason, must take all that is reasonable into consideration. And it is admirable to consider how the same conclusions do naturally flow from all these several principles: and what, in the faithful use of the faculties that God hath given, men have believed for true, doth excellently agree with that revelation that God hath exhibited in the Scripture; and the doctrine of the ancient Church with them both.” New Sect of Latitudemen, in the Phoenix, vol. ii. p. 706. written A.D. 1662.]

**[“It is a good argument for us to follow such an opinion, because it is made sacred by the authority of councils and ecclesiastical tradition: and sometimes it is the best reason we have in a question; and then it is to be strictly followed. But there may be also at other times a reason greater than it, that speaks against it; and then the authority must not carry it. But then the difference is not between reason and authority, but between this reason and that, which is greater: for authority is a very good reason, and to prevail, unless a stronger comes and disarms it, and then it must give place. So that in this

question, by reason I do not mean a distinct topic, but a transcendent that runs through all topics.” Taylor’s Liberty of Propheying, sect. x. p. 220.]

***[“Since we know what the Catholic faith was, and how the Catholic Fathers expounded Scripture, if the words of Scripture will naturally and easily admit that sense (much more if they will not admit any other sense, without great force and violence), let any man judge which is most safe and reasonable, to expound Scripture as the Catholic faith and Catholic Fathers expound it, and as Scripture most easily and naturally expounds itself, or to force new senses and old heresies upon Scripture, which the Catholic Church has always rejected and condemned.” Sherlock’s Present State of Soc. Controv. p. 80.]

What I have said, appears sufficient to show that the taking the ancients in, for the assisting or informing our judgments in this question, is judging for ourselves in the most rational way that can be thought on. Nevertheless, I take the liberty to observe that those who talk most of men’s using their own understandings, often mean little by it, but to get the direction of their faith and consciences to themselves, or to make them change a reasonable veneration of the ancients, for a blind admiration of some modern preceptors. They very well know that the generality of mankind (such as read little, and think less) will scarce judge for themselves at all, except it be as to the choice of some leader or leaders, whom they may suppose it safest to confide in. And it is among such as these, commonly, that new teachers seek proselytes; obtruding themselves as guides, and at the same time assuring them that they need no guides: which, in effect, is leading them about what way soever they please, artfully telling them that they go by themselves, when, in truth, they only change their leaders. To say all at once, the true and the whole meaning of the incredible pains which some persons have taken to set the Fathers aside, has been generally neither more nor less than this; to remove as much of the evidence which stands against them, as they can with any decency attempt to remove. They cannot, they dare not pretend to throw off Scripture itself, unless they were resolved to throw up Christianity with it, and to declare openly for infidelity: but there may be colours invented for throwing off the Fathers; and therefore thus far they can proceed, in opposing the ancient faith, and at the same time save appearances. There lies the whole of this matter, as I conceive, generally speaking: otherwise, it is manifestly against all sense and reason to make the least question either of the use or the value of ecclesiastical antiquity.

The sum of what I have been endeavouring through this whole chapter is that Scripture and antiquity (under the conduct of right reason) are what we ought to abide by, for the settling points of doctrine. I have not put the case of Scripture and antiquity interfering or clashing with each other: because it is a case which never will appear in points of importance, such as that is which we

are now upon. However, as to the general case, we may say, that those two ought always to go together, and to coincide with each other, and when they do so, they stand the firmer in their united strength: but if ever they clash, or appear to clash, then undoubtedly there is an error somewhere; like as when two accountants vary in casting up the same sum. In such a case, a wise man will not rest satisfied (if the thing be of moment), till he finds out, if possible, the reason of the difference, and discovers where the error lies. For either it must lie on the Scripture side (when a man takes that for Scripture which is not Scripture, or that for true interpretation which is not true interpretation), or it must lie on the tradition side, through some misreport made of the ancients, or some mistake of the ancients themselves. Then the question will be, which of the two suppositions is most likely to be true in that instance: and the resolution at length must turn upon a due weighing and considering all circumstances, with the reasons offered here and there, and then balancing the whole account.

Chapter VIII.

Showing that what has been lately offered in favour of the Arian Interpretation of John 1:1–2 and of Heb. 1 is of no Force or Validity.

The author of *Sober and Charitable Disquisition* had been pleased to say, that an honest mind, inquisitive after truth, and willing to weigh the matter impartially; and to examine the evidence on both sides thoroughly, might be long in suspense before he could determine to his full satisfaction: and that several men of equal sense, learning, capacity, probity, and piety, may after such examination make different determinations upon the matter.” [Sober and Charitable etc. p. 42, 43.] He refers to his appendix for proof, which appendix contains two opposite views of John 1 and of Heb. 1. I would here previously remark something of his manner of wording the thing, and then proceed. Might it not as well have been said, that there is as much reason on one side of the question, as there is on the other? Why should an invidious turn be given to what we are doing, that if we maintain our point, and insist upon it as true and just, it shall be interpreted to be as much as saying, that our adversaries have not equal sense, learning, etc. with ourselves? We design not, we desire not to make any such comparisons: we leave persons out of the question, and desire only to come to the truth of things. It is natural for many to admire the founders of their sect, or the leading advocates of their party [Vincent. Lirinens. c. xv.]: and it might look like rudeness, to say a word reflecting on their sense, learning, capacity, or probity. Neither indeed is there any occasion for detracting from their general character, since it is certain that men of as great sense, learning, and piety, to all outward

appearance, as any in their times, have sometimes fallen into heresy (as they might into any other great sin), and have perverted the Gospel of Christ: "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." It is a wrong way to judge of faith by the men, [Tertull Praescript. c. iii.] rather than of the men by their faith and conduct. There is no sense however in going against truth, no learning in contradicting the wisdom of Heaven, no piety nor probity in departing from God. Persons must be tried by the rule, and not the rule by their character, be it otherwise ever so high or commendable. [Tertul. Praescript. c. iii.] Men may behave unworthy of themselves; and God permits even wise men and good men (as Solomon and David) sometimes to fall, when they grow secure or assuming, for a punishment to them, and for a trial to others, [Vincent Lerin. c. xv.] and for a warning to all, that they may learn to be humble and watchful, and not to trust so, much to their own worth or parts, as to their care and circumspection, and God's blessing upon it.

Thus much being premised for the taking off all undue admiration of any man's person, and for the preventing any invidious comparisons (foreign and useless to the point in hand), as well as for the putting the cause upon a right issue; I now proceed to examine the merits of the debate between the Arians and the Athanasians, so far as concerns John 1:1 and Heb. 1:10.

I. The author of *Sober and Charitable Disquisition* undertook to represent the Athanasian and Arian constructions of John 1:1 fairly and impartially, as indeed common equity and justice required. He begins with the Athanasian: but how soon does he discover marks of partiality and unequal dealing. He smooths over the Asian construction with all affectionate tenderness, covering even its red and greatest faults, as we shall see presently but does he show any favour at all to the other? When he is interpreting for us, *The Word was God*, he presently throws in, the selfsame Being with the Father. [Sober and Charitable Disquisition, p. 51.] He must have known how ambiguous and equivocal [See my First Defence, vol. i. p. 119, 232.] that expression of selfsame Being is, and that in one sense of it, it is not our doctrine, but the Sabellian heresy. Might it not therefore have sufficed to have said, the same God with the Father, or one God with the Father? That is a doctrine which we inviolably maintain and adhere to, because Scripture forbids us to admit two adorable Gods. As to the question about calling them the selfsame Being, it is a question about a name, or a phrase, and a scholastic question, invented several ages, after our doctrine had stood secure, and independent of it. And when the Schoolmen undertook to consider this verbal affair (for it is no more), they either rejected or admitted the expression with proper distinctions; not scrupling to say *tres res*, or *trio entia relativa*, always meaning that the union was too close to admit of the name of Beings in the

plural, [See my Second Defence, vol. iii. Query nail'. p. 415–433.] without a softening epithet: and therefore Being of being, or Substance of substance (not beings or Substances), has been the Catholic language. Let but those who object sameness of being, define the terms, and tell us what constitutes sameness, and then it will be very easy to tell them how far we suppose the three Persons to be the same Being. All the difficulties about sameness, or individual, or numerical, etc. resolve only into this, that we know not precisely, in all cases, what to call same, individual, numerical, and the like. The general notion of the Trinity is clear, but the meaning of those terms is loose, confuse, and indeterminate: so that the perplexity (if there be any) lies not in the thing, but in some dark names, which many use without any certain meaning. Say but what those words or names precisely signify, and it will be very easy to determine how far they are applicable to the true notion of the Trinity. But to proceed:

I have observed how unfairly the gentleman has dealt with our doctrine: let us next take notice, how tenderly he deals with the Arian construction of the same Words. The Word was God, viz. a divine Person, a most God-like Being. [Sober and Charitable Disquisition; p. 54.] He should have said, another God, a creature of the great God, [See my First and Second Defence, vol. i. and ill. Query v.] which is their plain and certain meaning; though they are very reserved and bashful in the wording of that article, as they have always been, dreading to speak it out in broad terms. However, if God the Son be God, as the text plainly says, he must be either another God, or one God with the Father: so that if our doctrine of one God be rejected; two Gods is the consequence directly. Besides, since they must own, and do own, that he was God before the world was made, they should tell us, whether he was God by nature, or by office. He had no office so early that I know of: it seems then, he was God by nature. So there are two Gods by nature upon the Arian principles. Therefore let any sober Christian judge which is the true interpretation of the text, theirs or ours, thus far. Now let us proceed.

The *Word was in the beginning with God*. That is, say we, before anything was made. And we say it for these two plain reasons: because the order of the sentence* requires it, since the account of the creation follows after; and because all things were made by the Word: therefore he was before all creatures. The Arian construction, as this gentleman represents it, [Sober and Charitable Disquisition, p. 54, 55.] is, “*In the beginning*, when God created the heavens and the earth.” Now if heaven and earth are words which signify all creatures, we admit the exposition: but if they mean anything less, they are short of St. John’s exposition of his own phrase, which he interprets to mean all things that ever were made, that is, all creatures.

*All things were made by him, and. without him was not anything made that was made.** Now we interpret and say that if all things were made by him, then he himself must be unmade: and since *made by him* amounts to declaring him Maker of all creatures (as we shall see upon Heb. 1:10), we again conclude he is no creature; because a creature creator, if at all reconcilable with reason,* is however utterly irreconcilable with Scripture, which everywhere makes creative power the distinguishing character of God most high. [See my Sermons, vol. ii. p. 53, etc.] The Arian construction is, “All [other] things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was [then] made.” So by inserting *other* there, and *then* here; that is, by altering St. John’s most express most emphatic propositions, a new sense is made for him which he had doubly excluded, as far as words could do it. For our construction we have, 1. Express text. 2. The order and coherence of the sentence. 3. The tenor of Scripture, appropriating creative powers to God supreme. 4. The reason of the thing: for it is not reasonable to suppose that one creature should create another. 5. The universal judgment of the first and purest ages of the Christian Church. What is there now, on the other hand, to counterbalance these reasons, or to oblige us to run cross to so many evident marks of a true interpretation? The author of *Sober and Charitable etc.* pleads on the other side that the Apostle, if he had intended to teach that the Logos was God, Creator of all things, might have said it more plainly, and with less circumlocution. [Sober and Charitable Disquisition, p. 55.] But we think St. John has done it in chosen and expressive words, and could not have made use of better, to express what he intended, all things considered. [See the whole explained above. Compare Tillotson, Sermon xliii. vol. i. fol. edit.] He might have said, adds this gentleman, that “in God are three personal distinctions, the Father, the Word, and the Spirit.” But St. John was wiser than to teach Sabellianism, as it has been since called: the blessed three are not personal distinctions, but distinct persons; as is proved from St. John in this very place, because the Word was with God.

*[One may observe the force of this text even upon those that came very unwillingly (and upon the whole not sincerely) into the doctrine it contained, since it obliged Eunomius himself, one of the grosser kind of Arians, but the shrewdest man of the sect, to admit thus much, that Christ must be as much superior to his creatures, as the Maker must be to the things he has made; and that he was really invested with creative powers by the Father. A remarkable concession, and such as ought to have made a modest man renounce all his metaphysics; I which alone hindered him from coming entirely into Church principles. The place I speak of is in his Apologetic (which was answered by St Basil). Eunom. Apolog. p. 281. Fabr. Bibl. Graec. lib. v. c. 23. Basil. Opp. tom. i. p. 623. edit. Bened. Conf. Basil. contr. Eunom. lib. ii. p. 255. edit. Bened.]

**[A late ingenious writer argues the point, in a very rational manner, thus: “Creation, or the bringing a thing into being which before had none, or was once nothing,

is undoubtedly the proper act of an almighty or infinite power: and, as must be granted, infinite power is an incommunicable attribute or perfection. Besides, if a power of creating could be communicated, then the being on which it is conferred, having the same power, might endue a creature of its own with such a power; and this creature might make another such creature, and so on infinitum; which is so shocking an absurdity that no one can bear the thought or imagination.” Essay concerning Rational Notions, p. 159. printed for W. Innys, 1733.]

It is asked, could either Jew or heathen guess that he did not mean a distinct being? [Sober and Charitable etc. p. 56.] I answer, neither Jew nor heathen, who knew that St. John believed the Old Testament, could be so weak as to imagine that he meant to teach another God, or two Gods. However, the Christian Church are the most proper interpreters of St. John’s meaning: why must Jews or heathens, as such, be appealed to, [See my Sermons, vol. ii. p. 21, 22, 23.] rather than Christ’s disciples, for the understanding Christian doctrine? The objector here twice [Sober and Charitable, etc. p. 56, 57.] confounds personal characters (as he had before done personal distinctions) with persons; which is not fair towards our side, nor so prudent for the other side, because it is tacitly confessing, that our notion wants to be misrepresented, in order to afford some colour far disputing against it.

He asks, “Why is it doubled over, *The same was in the beginning?* To be the more emphatic against heretics, or the better to connect the sentence, and to introduce what follows.

“And why so minute, as to inform us, not one is to be excepted?” [Sober and Charitable etc. p. 57.] Perhaps to foreclose, condemn, and put to shame all those who, notwithstanding such his minuteness, would yet be bold enough to foist in other there, and then here, to elude and frustrate his meaning: experience shows, that all his guards are useful, none superfluous. But if the reader desires a fuller account, he may please to look back to what I have said above. [See above.] I have answered all the questions: and now let the reader judge, whether they have weight enough to bear down the Christian interpretation founded upon the reasons before recited. Yet the author is pleased to recommend the other, in very high terms: “Not a word is lost, in that way, everything has a plain, proper, and obvious sense.” [Sober and Charitable, etc. p. 55.] Is it possible? Has the word God, for instance, its plain, proper, and obvious sense, [As to the strict sense of the word God, in that place, see my Sermons, vol. ii. p. 20, 21.] when it is made to signify a Godlike creature? And is there not a word lost, when the very strongest expressions which the Apostle could use, to exempt the Logos from being one of the things made, are defeated and frustrated, by forcing the words other and then upon him, which he never wrote, and by obtruding a sense, which, it is likely, he

abhorred? Have the words, all things, and was not anything, their plain and obvious sense assigned them, when they are violently wrested from their absolute meaning to a limited one; and are arbitrarily clogged with reserves and restrictions, though, according to the plain letter, and other plain circumstances, they form universal propositions, affirmative and negative? If such liberties as these are to be taken with plain texts, and without any apparent necessity, it is in vain to prescribe any sober rules of interpretation, or to attempt to prove anything from dead writings. But if words can be of any weight or significance, these texts of St. John are plainly definitive on our side of the question: which I have shown more at large elsewhere. [Sermons the first, second, and third, at Lady Moyer's Lecture.] Or if the reader pleases to peruse Professor Frank's Treatise, lately translated from the German into English, [Frank's Nucleus, or Christ the Sum and Substance of Scripture, p. 93–173.] he will there find the Divinity of our blessed Lord solidly demonstrated by six several arguments drawn from this single chapter, but compared with other texts.

I may over and above advance one more argument, fairly deducible from the distress which the impugners of Christ's Divinity have all along been in, with relation to this proeme of St. John, and the difficulties they have lain under in contriving to evade its force. The Alogi [Epiphan. Haer. i. i. 3. Philaster. Haer. lx. Damascene. Haer. li.] (who appear to have been a branch of the Ebionites), as also Theodotus, [Epiphan. Haer. liv. 1.] took the short and plain way, which was to reject the whole Gospel, as not being of St. John's inditing.

The Arians were so distressed with the same passages, that they knew not how to evade them but by a new invention of a twofold Logos, [Vid. Athanasii Opp. 260, 282, 398, 409, 413, 503, 505, 620. edit. Bened.] one considered as an attribute, quality, or operation of God (after the Sabellian way), the other considered as a creature, made by the former. And here they were under a dilemma which they could never get clear of: for either all things were made by the Logos in the former sense, and then how was the Logos *made flesh*? Or all things were made by the Logos in the latter sense, created by a creature, who must also, if the word all be strictly taken, have created himself; which is palpably absurd. It seems that they inclined most to the former: and if we may trust to Anastasius Sinaita, that was the very construction which Arius himself espoused. [Arius's interpretation of the place, according to Anastasius in his Hodegus. Anastas. Hodeg. p. 330.]

Next let us inquire, whether the modern impugners of Christ's Divinity have succeeded any better, or whether they also have not betrayed the like confusion and distress. I need not say anything of Socinus's wild and extravagant interpretation, which has long been exploded by his own disciples, and which stands now only as a monument of the wonderful virtue of strong

prejudices and self-admiration. Zwicker came after, and he took the surer way, which was to deny the authenticity of the proems, and to strike it out of the Canon of the New Testament. Artemonius (alias Sam. Crellius) is a later instance, and which comes as fully up to my purpose: he has been moving heaven and earth (as I have before [See above.] intimated) to persuade us into a different reading of one of the critical words in St. John, on which much depends. He has ransacked all antiquity [Initium Evangelii S. Joannis en Antiquitate Ecclesiastica restitutum. Per L. M. Artemonium, A.D. 1726.] for authorities to justify an alteration; and because he could find none, he has made as many as he pleased, by mere dint of wit and fancy. Certainly St. John had some direction extraordinary, or was otherwise a very sagacious person, that, after the utmost improvements made in the art of chicanery, and wire-drawing of words, yet nothing can effectually do the business, even at this day, but altering the text; though, after all, there is no manner of countenance from any copies for doing it. One thing however I may observe of Artemonius, which, as it shows his acuteness, betrays at the same time a consciousness, or a tacit acknowledgment, that we are in the right to interpret the word God in the strict sense, as we do. He argues, that it was by no means proper that the Word should be called God, lest that appellation, taken with so many other plausible circumstances, should lead men into a snare, and make them believe Christ to be God most high. [Artemonius, par. it. p. 296.] Now what is this but confessing, that such an inference is natural and obvious, upon the supposition that Christ is called God in Scripture? He saw the force of it, and the inevitable necessity we are under of so interpreting: and that consideration made him take such immense, but fruitless pains, to defeat all those texts where Christ is expressly called God. But if that single consideration struck this gentleman in so sensible a manner, what can we think of all the other texts, which over and above ascribe to Christ divine perfections, and divine worship also? It is plain, that Artemonius could not have been against us, had he not set out at first upon a false principle, that human imagination is the measure of divine truths.

II. From John 1, I now pass on to Heb. 1, in order to examine whether what we find there be not altogether as definitive as the former. Here the author of *Sober and Charitable etc.* undertakes to give a fair and impartial account of both parties. Notwithstanding which, in his very first setting out, he represents us as direct and manifest Sabellians, against all reason and justice, and common equity. He puts these words upon us, as expressing our sense: “God may be said to make all things by his Son, as a man to understand by his reason.” [Sober and Charitable Disquisition, p. 59.] This is not our way of speaking or thinking on the subject (it was Sabellius’s, it was Arius’s), and therefore ought not to be reported

as ours. For what if we do not call Father and Son two substances (the union being too close to admit of such expressions), yet we scruple not to say, Substance of substance, like as God of God. We contrive our expressions so as to suit the Scripture idea of a real distinction without division, and of an union also without confusion. We maintain, that there may be a real diversity consistent with real unity, and that what is multiple in one respect, may be one in another. And thus we stand clear, as of Sabellianism on one hand, so likewise of Tritheism on the other. [See my First Defence, vol. i. Query xxii. p. 233, etc. Second Defence, vol. iii, p. 421, etc. Farther Vindication, vol. iv. p. 51–54.] The author proceeds to set forth [Sober and Charitable Disquisition, p. 59–65.] a summary of our reasonings upon Heb. 1. And he has indeed brought together a great deal more than can ever be fairly answered. But without replying to what was offered on our side, and without so much as endeavouring to show how the force of those many strong expressions can be evaded, or the words accounted for, he contents himself barely with representing the pleadings on the other side, producing our antagonists not as respondents, but opponents only. But supposing that the adversaries had ever so much to urge in that way, yet unless they could reconcile it with the words of the texts, and give a clear account of the whole, it is doing the work by halves, and can, at most, be esteemed but as a lame defense. However, by this means all our arguments from Heb. 1 are left standing in full force, and it remains only that we remove objections, to clear the whole thing. Two considerations are suggested by this author; first, that the chapter here under inquiry makes the Son another being from God; secondly, it makes him also an inferior being. [Ibid. p. 66.] Let us now examine how these pretenses are supported.

1. As to the first suggestion, it is to be observed, that it amounts only to a metaphysical subtlety about being and person, as if the words were convertible terms; which though it has been tried a thousand times over, could never yet be made out. But here we may perceive, who they are that run into metaphysical and logical niceties, to evade plain words of Scripture, [How common and constant the practice is, I have often observed elsewhere. First Defence, vol. i. Query xxii. p. 214, 231, 340. Second Defence, vol. iii. p. 4, 64, 109, 143, 212, 311, 396, 404, 447, 472, 474, 479.] instead of keeping close to sacred Writ, and what it teaches in full and express terms. But I would further remark, though I have occasionally hinted it before, that all this discourse about being and person is foreign, and not pertinent; because if both these terms were thrown out, our doctrine would stand just as before, independent of them, and very intelligible without them. So it stood for above one hundred and fifty years, before person was heard of in, it: and it was later before being was mentioned. Therefore, if all the objection be against those,

however innocent, expressions, let the objectors drop the names, and accept the thing. They may express the doctrine thus, if they please; that the Father is God, the Son God, the Holy Ghost God, and all one God; and yet the Father is not the Son, nor Holy Ghost, nor either of them the Father: this is plainly the doctrine of Scripture, let them express it in what terms they please. Each is Jehovah, and yet they are not three Jehovahs: this is truth (if Scripture can prove a truth), and we need no more. But if anyone has a mind to express this doctrine in such words, as Justin Martyr, and Athenagoras, and Irenaeus, and Theophilus, and Clemens Alexandrinus expressed it in (before person or being was heard of [See my Second Defence, vol. iii. p. 412.]), he is at liberty as to words, while he admits the sense: for we are not bound down to names, but to things. These considerations premised, I now proceed with our author.

He objects, that the “Son is distinguished from God.” [Sober and Charitable etc. p. 66.] From God the Father, he means: and so he should be, because God the Son is not God the Father. He adds, if “God means God the Father, he only must be God, for he says of himself, he is *God alone*.” Here I might run out into a particular explication of what concerns exclusive terms: but because I have often done it before, choose to refer. [Vol. ii. Sermon iv. per tot. Second Defence, vol. iii. p. 30, 53, 54, 79, 92, 183, 356. Third Defence, or Farther Vindication, vol. iv. p. 32.] But in the meanwhile, if the exclusive terms are so strict, how come the Arians of with their doctrine of two Gods? We can give a good reason why the exclusive terms should yet tacitly suppose and include what so intimately belongs to God: but certainly all creatures are forever excluded.

The author goes on to observe, that Father and Son must be two things. [Sober and Charitable etc. p. 67.] One would hope, he does not mean two Gods, equal or unequal: as to anything else, we are unconcerned; we allow that the Mather is not the Son, and so vice versa. He says further, the Son is “not the selfsame individual substance.” [Ibid. p. 68.] Here again the reader may observe what kind of arguments we are attacked with c no regard to the proper, obvious, natural sense of the texts, but all the dispute is made to turn upon logical niceties, or metaphysical subtleties about the nature of things confessedly mysterious, or rather upon the meaning of technical terms and names, such as individual, [See my Second Defence, vol. iii. Query ix. p. 300. Query xxiii. p. 412.] etc. It is sufficient again to say that the Son is not the Father, and yet each is Jehovah, and Jehovah is one. Either deny this to be Scripture, or say that no Scripture can prove the point: and then what signifies arguing from John 1, or from Hebr. 1, it is all but empty amusement.

It is asked, can a person begotten be the express image of a person unbegotten, when the properties are so unlike? [Sober and Charitable etc. p. 68.] That

our Scripture has so taught, [Col. 1:15. Heb. 1:3.] it as plain as the sun: therefore the question should have been put, whether the texts shall be allowed, or shall be struck out of the Canon? As to begotten and unbegotten, they are relations only; and (to compare small things with great) Adam unbegotten and Seth begotten were exceedingly: alike, and one the express image of the other, notwithstanding: so there must be something more than the circumstance before mentioned, to prove a dissimilitude or inequality. [See my Answer to Whitby, vol. ii. p. 218, 219.] But this way of prying into what is unsearchable, in order to evade plain Scripture texts, is not treating the Scripture reverently: neither is there any argument in it, any more than in a blind man's reasoning about the nature of colours. A very acute and judicious writer well says, "It is certain we cannot speak of God with too great moderation. It is better to rest satisfied with an imperfect knowledge of him, by being content with general ideas, than to run the hazard of thinking unworthily of that great Being, by our rashness in proceeding to determinate ideas." [Crousaz, New Art of Thinking, vol. ii. p. 80. English edit.] That is to say, by attempting to determine the modes, about which we have properly no ideas; or by turning ideas of pure intellect into ideas of imagination, which is equally absurd. Hitherto we have been considering whether the Son be another being (by which the author means another God) different from God the Father: which the objector has not proved.

2. We are next to consider whether the Son be inferior, in nature, or perfections, or can be proved to be so from Heb. 1. It is pleaded, that God "appointed him heir of all things." [Sober and Charitable etc. p. 69.] Therefore (for that must be the consequence, or none) he is an inferior God. Why then is it not said that they are two Gods? However, to answer more directly, but withal very briefly; the Son's voluntary condescension neither supposes him inferior, nor makes him so.

It is further objected, that since God made the worlds by him, the Father only is efficient, and the Son the instrument. [Id. *ibid.*] It must be owned, that the Arians, formerly [Vid. Athanas. Orat. i. p. 430. Orat. ii. p. 498.] as well as since, have suggested as much: but it is all fiction and fancy, without support from Scriptures confuted in this very chapter, as we shall see presently. There is no foundation in the text for any such unworthy thought of God the Son. The preposition *by* proves nothing of it; for it is frequently made use of in Scripture, when the Father himself is the person to whom it is applied. [Basil. de Spir. Sancto, Opp. Tom. iii. c. 5. p. 6, etc. edit. Bened. Taylor's True Script. Doctrine, p. 347. Alexander's Essay on Irenaeus, p. 148. Frank's Nucleus, p. 118.] But what room is there for further dispute here upon that head, when the text itself expresses the proper efficiency of God the Son, as fully and clearly as it is possible to be expressed? *Thou, Lord,*

in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands. [Heb. 1:10. Compare Psalm 102:25.] This is said of God the Son, [See my Defence, vol. i. p. 67. Sermons, vol. ii. p. 37. Compare Bull. Judic. Eccl. c. v. s. 8. p. 319. Dr. Knight's Sermons, p. 51, etc.] who is also Jehovah in the Psalm from whence these words are taken: could there be any words thought on, either plainer or stronger, to express a proper efficiency than those are? And if those are not sufficient to ground our doctrine upon, what can we think of sacred Writ (with reverence be it spoken), but as of a book overspread with traps and snares, to deceive the Christian world? It is true, there are tropes, figures, and metaphors in holy Scripture, as when Christ is called a door, a vine, a way, and the like; or when God is said to have eyes, hands, mouth, heart, etc. And, in such cases, every sensible man knows, that a literal construction would be absurd: but in the instance now before us, here is no mark at all of any trope, figure, or metaphor, nor any reasonable objection against interpreting up to the letter. So far from it, that the whole tenor of Scripture confirms us in it, that Christ is Jehovah, and properly Creator: and the worship ascribed to him is another concurring circumstance to complete the demonstration. In short then, those, Arian salvos come too late: the text itself has, in express words, precluded them.

The author goes on to object: "Upholding all things, but by the word of God's power." Dr. Clarke interprets it Father's power: which is a possible, not a certain construction. The text may as probably, or more probably, be understood of the Son's own power. However, be it Father's or Son's, it is all one power, and he and his Father are one. The author [Sober and Charitable etc. p. 69.] adds, "Seating himself not in God's throne, but at his right hand." [What the phrase of sitting at God's right hand imports is very judiciously and carefully discussed by Vitringa, Observ. Sacr. lib. ii. c. 4, 5.] And what then? Is he not a second Person? But, it seems, that if he had been seated in the same throne, the author would then allow the equality. Turn we therefore to the book of Revelations, and there we find them both in one throne. It is *the throne* (not thrones) *of God and of the Lamb* [Rev. 22:1.]: and Christ himself declares that he was in his Father's throne. [Rev. 3:21. Compare Zech. 6:12-13, and Vitringa, *ibid.* c. 5. p. 310.]

It is asked, why should angels be called upon to worship him, if he were God equal to the Father? "Can they be supposed ignorant, if that were the case?" [Sober and Charitable etc. p. 70, 71.] To which I reply that though angels were fully apprised of his high perfection and dignity, yet as to the particular times, places, and circumstances, when, and where, and in what manner, they should pay their homage or devotions, they might wait for special orders. The Father's manifesting his Son to the world was a new and extraordinary occasion: and how should the angels know in what manner they were to behave upon it, without

particular direction? They were ordered thereupon to repeat or renew their solemn exercises of devotion towards the Son, now become man, and clothed in flesh: as they had also special directions for celebrating his nativity, or incantation, in devout doxologies. [Luke 2:13–14. Compare Rev. 12:11–12.]

It is further pleaded that the words, *God, even thy God*, argue some inferiority of God the Son. Yes, of the Son considered as man [Chrysost. in loc. And in other Greek Fathers, Basil, Theodoret, Theophylact, OEcumenius.] and in his state of humiliation, in which God the Father anointed him with the oil of gladness, with the unction of the Spirit, above his fellows; his partners in the same nature, [See Dr. Bennet on the Trinity, who explains the text at large, and very justly; excepting that he dislikes the ancient notion of the unction of the Spirit, which yet seems to be the true one, p. 31–35.] partakers of the same flesh and blood; on which account “he is not ashamed to call them brethren.” [Heb.2:11.]

The author asks, why should not the Apostle roundly assert that Christ was Jehovah, if it were his purpose to set him forth as such? [Sober and Charitable etc. p. 73.] Had he done it ever so roundly, a contentious adversary might still have found fault, and might have required somewhat further. The Apostle has said what is sufficient for the conviction of any reasonable man, by applying what is directed to Jehovah in the Psalm, to God the Son in this chapter. This is saying the thing roundly enough: and we are not obliged to give reasons why he has said no more, if he has said what may suffice with men of ordinary discernment. But I may hint further that a very probable reason may be assigned why he did not take that precise method which the objector fancies he should have done. It was the Apostle’s direct design, as it seems, to prove that the Son was above the angels, in opposition, very probably, to the Simonians or Cerinthians of that time, who attributed the creation of the world to angels, and who looked upon Jesus as a mere man, and as such inferior to angels [Vid. Bull. Judic. Eccl. c. r. s. 8. p. 329.] Therefore the Apostle chiefly labours these two points, namely, to prove that Christ was really Creator, [Heb. 1:2, 10.] and that he is vastly superior to angels. What he further insinuates of his being Jehovah comes in by the bye: and it would not have been directly to his purpose, to have insisted more particularly upon it: because even that would not have proved him (in the opinion of the heretics. then prevailing) superior to angels, since they looked upon Jehovah, the God of the Old Testament, as no more than angel. [Pseudo-Tertull. Prascript. c. xliiii. Conf. Epiphan. Haer. xxviii. 1.] However, though I assign a reason, which appears not improbable for the Apostle’s saying no more, yet we have a right to insist upon it, that there is no need of assigning any reason at all for his not saying more than was sufficient for every purpose. There is no end of cavils when men are disposed to indulge them. The Jews sought after a sign, but had none more

given them, after they had had enough. They demanded that Christ should come down from the cross for their satisfaction: but in, finite wisdom would not condescend to satisfy them in their way, when they would not submit to other very sufficient and better evidences. The question therefore is not whether the Apostle in this place has said all that had been said, but whether he has said as much as was needful. We conceive that he has; and let those who think otherwise, consider how they can fairly evade the force of what they here find, before they require more. Let them think how it is possible to elude what St. Paul has here said to prove that Christ is Jehovah, though he has proved it only by the bye, and has not largely or directly insisted upon it.

I shall only add, that if the point is to be decided by the asking of questions in this way, let leave be given to the orthodox also, to ask a few questions in their turn. If Christ be a creature, why is it not roundly asserted either in Old or New Testament? And if he and the Father be two Gods, supreme and inferior, why is not that also roundly asserted, in some part of Scripture at least? We have the more reason to expect it should, because otherwise the contrary doctrine hath so many and so plausible appearances of truth, that the most serious and conscientious persons are under inevitable danger of deception by them. And therefore, if we may be allowed to reason and argue with the tremendous Deity, upon the subject of his revelations, or dispensations towards mankind, none, we imagine, can with more justice, or with better grace, ask; why has not Scripture somewhere or other dropped a hint or two about Christ's being a creature, or about his being an inferior God, admitting two Gods, two adorable Deities, to prevent our falling into an otherwise unavoidable delusion? I doubt not, if that were the truth, but that our Lord himself (whose humility is so justly celebrated), and his Disciples after him, would have openly proclaimed it; and that we should have as plainly found it in the New Testament throughout, as now we find the reverse. Can we imagine that a truth of that moment (if it were a truth) should be left in obscurity, to be drawn out, at length, after more than 300 years, by Arius, Aetius, and Eunomius [Fabric. Bibl. Graec. lib. v. c. 23. p. 272. Conf. Basil. contr. Eunom. lib. i. p. 224. Theodorit. Haeret. Fab. lib. iv. C. 3. Cyrill. Alex. Thesaur. p. 260. Chrysost. Hom. xxvii. tom. i. p. 307. Philostorg. lib. i. p. 468, 470. ed. Vales. Gregor. Nazianz, Orat. xxxiv. p. 539.]; and that by the help chiefly of logical conceits and metaphysical speculations, far above the reach of common capacities? Certainly, Divine Wisdom could not be so much wanting to the bulk of mankind, but would have provided better for them, in a scriptural way; and by plain words that so they might be more beholden to Christ and his Apostles for their faith, than to the Dialectics of Aristotle; or Chrysippus's subtleties. [Vid. Basil. contr. Eunom, lib. i. p. 214, 221.] But I forbear to press this further: and having briefly run through all

that the author of *Sober and Charitable Disquisition* had to urge in favour of the Arian interpretation, both of John 1, and Heb. 1. I must now leave it to the impartial readers to judge, whether any thing has been offered on that aide, which can be thought sufficient to counterbalance our plain and direct evidences brought from express words, fixed to a certain meaning by all the approved rules of grammar and criticism, and confirmed by the universal suffrage of the first and purest ages. Thus far I was obliged to enter into a small part of the other controversy, which affects the truth of the doctrine, rather than the importance; because, as I hinted in the entrance, the author I am concerned with had mingled them in some sort together. But they who desire fuller satisfaction in that other question may please to consult those treatises which are professedly written upon it. What comes in here amounts only to slight touches, and so far only as related to the texts mentioned: which though justly reckoned definitive on our side, are yet but a very slender part of what the whole Scripture affords us in that cause.

Addenda.

Additional illustrations referring to the respective pages above.

[Although page numbers no longer apply in web layout – searches being done electronically – the references to the original printed pages have been here retained for order and distinction.]

Page 14. *Ideas of intellect*, etc. The distinction between ideas of intellect and ideas of imagination is much insisted on by Des Cartes in his *Metaphysics*, [Cartesii Meditat. vi p. 36. Object. v. p. 45. Respons. v. p. 78.] and is explained more clearly and to better advantage in a late judicious treatise written by Mr. Crousaz in French, and now rendered into English. [Crousaz, *New Treatise of the Art of Thinking*, vol. i. p. 16, etc.]

P. 57. *The same with denying his eternal existence*. I should have omitted the word *denying*, or else have said, the same with denying the necessity of believing his eternal existence. All I meant to say was that Episcopius (which is true also of Limborch) did not distinguish in that instance between the eternal generation of the Logos and the eternal existence; as some of the ancients did. [See my *Defence*, vol. i. Q. viii. p. 116, 117. *Second Defence*, vol. iii. Q. viii. p. 296.]

P. 80. *Such effects might last beyond the apostolic age*. I might have expressed myself with greater assurance, and said that they actually did last as far down as to the Cyprianic age [See Dodwell. *Dissertat. in Iren.* ii. 54. p. 191–194.]: nay, and if we may believe Paulinus, [Paulin. in *Vit. Ambros.* p. 9.] who reports it as an eyewitness, they continued down to the latter end of the fourth century. From whence may fairly be accounted for, the long continuance of the phrase of

delivering over to Satan in excommunications. [See Bishop Hare, Scripture Vindicated, p. 69, 70.] Indeed, the use of the form remained afterwards, when such miraculous effects had entirely ceased: because the form had been customary from the beginning; and because it might still be understood in a sense not altogether foreign to its first intention, such as I have expressed above.

P. 90. *He may be in some measure hurt in his reputation by it, and that, is all.* I would be understood here of the general case only, [See Basnag. Annal. tom. ii. p. 481.] abstracting from particular cases and circumstances; as of ministers, suppose, whose maintenance also may be accidentally affected by it. An inconvenience common to ecclesiastical offices or civil, as often as men disable themselves from serving, either by refusing to give the legal securities, or by opposing the public measures.

P. 91. *Or to pay them so much as common civilities.* That is to say, when such civilities were likely to be interpreted as an approbation of the men and of their principles. But see this rule of the Apostle considered more at large, under its proper restrictions and limitations, by an able hand. [Dr. Berriman's Sermon, in the Appendix to his Boyle's Lectures, vol. ii. p. 339.]

P. 110. *A wicked life the worst heresy, which is scarce sense, etc.* At the best, it is a strong figure, or a turn of wit, and the thought not just upon the whole. But something of it may be traced up as high as to St. Bernard of the twelfth century, who argued that vicious persons were seducers by their bad example, and therefore were a kind of heretics in practice, corrupting more by their ill lives, than heretics, properly so called, could do by their bad doctrines [Bernard. Serm. ad Pastores, p. 1732.]: and he applies it particularly to vicious clergymen; not to extenuate the guilt of heresy, but to enhance the guilt of such bad example. The thought was not much amiss, if he had not carried it too far. He should not have suggested, that bad example is worse than heresy, properly so called. It is true, that bad example commonly will do more harm than sound preaching will do good; because such example runs in with corrupt nature, and the other is contrary: but if the doctrine be on the same side, it will do infinitely more mischief; and one loose casuist will debauch more than a hundred others shall do who are only loose in their lives. Bad example under the check and discountenance of sound doctrine taught by the same person, carries its antidote along with it. But bad doctrine is a very dangerous snare: it is not merely breaking a law, but loosening the authority of all.* Therefore Bernard strained the thought too far: and so did Dean Colet after him;** who is the first man I have met with, that ventured formally to say (for Bernard had not expressed the figure so boldly) that a bad life was a heresy, and the worst heresy. However, neither of them intended to extenuate the guilt of heresy at all, but to magnify

another kind of guilt, as still greater according to their way of reasoning, or rather rhetoric.

*[“Who will maintain that a prince would do better in changing the laws according to his present passions, than to let them subsist, and break them every hour? Nobody. For if he observes not the laws as he should, he leaves them their authority however, with respect to his subjects and such other princes as are willing to observe them; which is absolutely necessary to society. – If it be asked then, which carriage is most dangerous and blamable, that of such as violate the laws of the Gospel which they believe to be divine, or that of the incredulous who reject the Divinity of those laws, because they have no mind to obey them; it is plain that the latter is much worse than the former, supposing the laws of the Gospel to be beneficial to society, which cannot be doubted.” Le Clerc Causes of Incredulity, p. 88, 89. The ease which Le Clerc here puts is not precisely the same with the other, but the reason is the same for both.]

**[“He sheweth plainly that there be two kinds of heresies, one arising from perverse teaching, and the other from a naughty life: of which two this latter is far worse and more perilous, reigning now in priests.” Colet’s Sermon before the Convocation, .A.D. 1511. Reprinted in the Phoenix, vol. i. p. 7.]

Archbishop Tillotson glances upon the same thought,* but gives a very different turn to it; and cannot, I think, be reasonably understood of heresy strictly and properly such, but of what some have wrongfully called so. Bishop Taylor, a very moderate man, in a treatise written on the side of liberty, may be a very proper arbitrator, to clear and determine the whole dispute.

*[Tillotson’s Sermons, vol. i. p. 402. fol. edit. His reflection upon those who were too censorious in charging heresy upon others, and at the same time too indulgent to their own vices, runs thus: “Deluded people! that do not consider that the greatest heresy in the world is a wicked life, because it is so directly opposite to the whole design of the Christian faith and religion; and that do not consider, that God will sooner forgive a man a hundred defects of his understanding, than one fault of his will.” N. B. Heresy, justly so called, is not a mere defect of understanding, but a fault of the will: and it is more directly opposite to religion than common offences; as overturning the authority of a law is worse than transgressing it, or as mutiny, sedition, and rebellion are worse than common felonies.]

“Men think they have more reason to be zealous against heresy than against a vice in manners, because it is infectious and dangerous, and the principle of much evil. Indeed, if by heresy we mean that which is against an article of the Creed, and breaks part of the covenant between God and man by the mediation of Jesus Christ, I grant it to be a grievous crime, a calling God’s veracity in question, and a destruction also of a good life; because upon the articles of the Creed obedience is built, and it lives or dies as the effect does by its proper cause: for faith is the moral cause of obedience. But then heresy, that is, such as this, is also a vice, and the person criminal, and so the sin is to be

esteemed in its degrees of malignity. And let men be as zealous against it as they can, and employ the whole arsenal of the spiritual armour against it. Such as this worse than adultery or murder; inasmuch as the soul is more noble than the body, and a false doctrine is of greater dissemination and extent than a single act of violence or impurity. Adultery or murder is a duel, but heresy (truly and indeed such) is an unlawful war, it slays thousands. The losing of faith is digging down a foundation: all the superstructure of hope and patience and charity fall with it. – But then concerning those things which men nowadays call heresy, they cannot be so formidable as they are represented. And if we consider that drunkenness is certainly a damnable sin, and that there are more drunkards than heretics, and that drunkenness is the parent of a thousand vices, it may be better said of this vice than of most of those opinions which we call heresies, it is infectious and dangerous, and the principle of much evil, and therefore as fit an object of our pious zeal to contest against,” etc. [Taylor’s Liberty of Propheying, Dedicat. p. 42, 43.] Thus far Bishop Taylor.

In the sum of the matter, I entirely agree with him. The result, I think, is, that nominal heresy, or an error in slight matters, not affecting the foundation, not hurting the vitals of Christianity, is not so bad as real immorality: and it is equally true, on the other hand, that nominal immorality is not so bad as real error in religion, though in the slighter doctrines. But supposing the error and the maintaining of it to amount to real heresy, it is then a vice, and the greatest of vices: so the whole will turn upon the nature, quality, and tendency of what is charged as an heresy. Invincible ignorance will equally excuse any other vice; and so is wide of the purpose.

P. 139. *All parties are for creeds under one shape or other.* It may be asked perhaps, what creed the Sceptics are for, who profess to doubt of everything? I answer, that their pretended skepticism is mostly affectation, and they generally are as credulous as other men; frequently more so. If they believe less of religion, as some of them perhaps may, yet they are easy of belief as to anything else. They have their systems, their maxims, their probabilities (as they are pleased to call them), which make up as long and large creeds as our certainties do only there is this difference, that they commonly prefer a creed of paradoxes, and sometimes glaring absurdities, before rational faith. And while we believe as much as we can prove, and no more (which is believing like wise men), they believe what they have a mind to, proving nothing, by their own confession; which is resolving all into fond persuasion and credulity.

The most considerable writer I know of that ever appeared in behalf of general skepticism (matters of faith only excepted) is the celebrated Huetius, in a posthumous treatise, [A Philosophical Treatise concerning the Weakness of human

Understanding. Printed in English, London, 1725.] written, I suppose, for an exercise of wit, to divert himself and friends; unless he had some further latent view to serve the Romish cause. I may remark that one article of his skeptical creed is, that the certainty of faith is superior to that of sense: a second is, that it is superior even to that of the first principles and axioms of Geometry. [Huet. Philosoph. Treatise, etc. p. 15.] One cannot desire any two plainer instances of the credulity of a sceptic. I mention not, how often he forgets the part he was to act, talking in the style of a dogmatist: Sure it is, or It is certain. [Page 28, 30, 34, 68, 75, 98, 150.] Sometimes; he is fully persuaded, [P. 7.] or fully, convinced, [P. 33.] or certainly knows [P. 14.]: at other times, he speaks of evident proof, [P. 40.] and irrefragable argument, [P. 52.] and demonstration, [P. 99. comp. 100, 104.] just as any dogmatist would do. So hard a thing is it for the finest wit even to personate a skeptic with any tolerable grace, or without perpetual inconsistency: for which reason I before hinted that I look upon skepticism, so called, to be little else but affectation. Or if there really be any such kind of men who believe that they believe, nothing, that very instance is an undeniable argument of their more than common credulity. Indeed, for a man to fall to arguing and proving that there is no such thing as proof or argument, is much the same as if one should make an eloquent harangue, lamenting that mortal men have not the faculty of speech, loudly complaining that all mankind are mutes.

P. 141. *Our way supposes that men ought to examine (if capable, and as far as capable) in order to know that the doctrine proposed is true.* If it should be asked; What need of examination after so many wise and good men, and all morally certain; I would ask again, what need is there of studying the demonstrations of Euclid, which all the world agree in, its containing certain truth? A man might safely enough take them for granted, and by so doing might as soon become a sound Geometrician, as by the like method, in the other case, he might commence a pound Divine, or a confirmed Christian. At best, it would be resting faith upon mere human authority, which would be resting it on a wrong bottom; and, besides, would be neglecting the due improvement of the heart and cultivation of the mind.

But may there not be danger in examining, danger of being led to dissent from what is right, and to embrace none error? Undoubtedly there may. And what convenience is there without some inconveniency? Such danger must be risked, rather than found our faith upon a wrong principle, to render it worthless or contemptible: and it is better to hazard the chance of falling into some error in faith, than to be certain of committing a greater error in conduct. However, if men come with humility, modesty, and circumspection to the examination, and have patience to stay till they are clear, before they formally dissent, or before

they declare it openly; there will be no great danger in examining everything with the utmost severity.

P. 142. *The phrase of having dominion over one's faith is of obscure meaning*, etc. I did not then call to mind how well the meaning of that phrase had been lately cleared up by a very learned hand. [Bishop Haze, *Scripture Vindicated*, p. 60–63.]

P. 183. *The darkness cometh not upon it*. I referred to a very judicious critic, Lambert Bos, for the justifying my rendering of this text. I find since that the learned Wolfius disapproves of what Bos had offered [Rom. 9:30. *Wolfi Curae Philolog. et Crit. in loc. vol. i. p. 784.*]: but I abide by Bos notwithstanding, who plainly has reason on his side. He did not insist merely upon the force of the word καταλαβειν, but upon the phrase, upon the verb as joined with σκοτος, or σκοτια. The examples which he gives from sacred and profane writers, of the use of the phrase, are all clear and full to his purpose. And if there be need of additional examples from ecclesiastical writers, there are several; as Origen, [Origen. *Comment. in Johan. edit. Heat. p. 73, 74.*] Cyril of Alexandria, [Cyril. *Alta. Comment. in Johann. p. 23.*] and Theophylact. [Theophylact. *in loc. p. 561.*] Clemens of Alexandria, in his comment, (if it be his,) seems to take in both the senses of that verb into his construction of the text. [Clemens Alex. *Excerpt. Theodoti, p. 969. edit. Ox.*] As to the allusion to the Gnostic principles (I use the word Gnostic in the larger sense) which I suppose in the words of St. John, neither Bos nor Wolfius take notice, nor seem to have been aware of it. But if the observation be just, as it appears very probable, (and I shall say more of it presently,) that also is a confirmation of such sense of the phrase as Bos pleads for; and the two considerations taken together answer very aptly to each other, which is an argument that both are right.

P. 183. The ancient Magian notion of a good God and an evil God, the first called light, and the other darkness, etc. A brief account of that ancient notion may be seen in Dean Prideaux, [Prideaux's *Connection*, vol. i. p. 179. 8vo. edit.] and a large history both of its rise and progress among the Pagans, in Wolfius. [Wolfi *Manichaeismus ante Manichaeum, sect. ii. p. 48–174.*] And how the same notion was revived, or augmented with new fooleries, among the heretics of the apostolical times, may be understood from a noted fragment of Basilides, preserved by Archelaus, of the third century, in his account of his Disputation with Manes. [Archet. et Manet. *Disput. p. 194. Fabric. Conf. Wolf. Manich. p. 177. Grab. Spicileg. vol. ii. p. 30.*] Now, considering that Cerinthus was among those who had adopted the old notion of a good God and an evil God (as Epiphanius has informed us [Epiphanius. *Haeres. xxviii. 2. p. 111.*]), and so of course must have fallen in with the old Magian principles; Basilides may reasonably be allowed of as a good

interpreter of Cerinthus in those articles: and since St. John very manifestly struck at several other tenets of Cerinthus, in his divine proeme, it is more than probable that what he says in verse the fifth about light and darkness alludes to the Gnostic notion then prevailing, and is a confutation of it.* They pretended that the evil God Darkness pursued the Light, and came up to it: he asserts, that the Darkness came not upon it, never laid hold of it, never approached to obstruct or obscure it, but was irradiated and illuminated by it. It may further be considered, that Basilides probably flourished in the first century, and might be contemporary with St. John, as both Jerome [Hieronym. contr. Lucifer. p. 304. Opp. tom. iv. Bened. ed.] and Epiphanius [Epiphan. Haeres. xxxi. 2.] seem to assert: and though learned men have disputed it, yet [Massuet. Dissertat. Praev. in Irenaeum, p. 60.] Massuet appears to have well cleared up the point against the most material objections. Now, if Basilides himself was so early, it is so much the more likely that St. John, writing at that time, might have an eye to the pernicious doctrine then propagated by him, and by the whole set of Gnostics. By Gnostics I understand all that sort of men who derived their principles from Simon Magus, and lived in the apostolic age; though I am aware that in a stricter and more special sense, [See Wolfius, Manicheismus, etc. p.206. Buddaus, Eccles. Apostol. p. 344, 345, 571, etc.] the Gnostics may be said to have risen up in the second century.

*[Accordingly, Archelaus (in his dispute with Manes) confutes that hypothesis from this very text; which is a great confirmation, not only of the construction of the phrase before given, but likewise of such application of the text as I have been pleading for. "How could it be that the evil God, being that he is all darkness, should come upon the light, and compass it, when the Evangelist declares, that the light shined through the darkness, and the darkness compassed it not."]

P. 213. *Irenaeus born in or near the Apostles' times, and was advanced in years when he wrote.* I here follow Dodwell in a matter which requires not, and indeed admits not, of a scrupulous or critical exactness. However, since Dodwell has been blamed by more than one, for his chronology in that article, I may just mention how the different accounts stand in relation to the year when Irenaeus was born. According to Dodwell, A.D. 97. Grebe chooses the year 108. Tillemont, the year 120. Others, 135. Massuet sets it the latest of all, A.D. 140. According to which different computations, Irenaeus must be supposed either older or younger when he wrote, if he wrote in 176, or thereabouts, as most agree that he did: though some differ also as to that, setting the date of his writings ten or fifteen years lower.

P. 312. *In strictness they were not interpretations of Scripture, but rather pious meditations upon Scripture: am sensible that some of them were intended as strict interpretations: but in the general, etc.*

To confirm and illustrate what I have here said, it may be observed that St. Austin took into the allegorical way of interpreting, when he was yet but a new convert, because he thought it much, easier than the literal way, which he was not then so well prepared for. He had not at that time (so he tells us himself [Augustin. de Gen. ad. Liter. lib. viii. c. 2. p. 227. tom. in. Bened. Note, that St. Austin in the year 389, then a new convert, ventured no farther than the allegorical exposition of Genesis but in the year 401 he undertook the literal explication also, in twelve books, [de Genesi ad Literam,] which he finished about 415.]) sufficient leisure or abilities to undertake so hard a province as the unfolding the literal sense, and therefore contented himself with giving only the mystical or allegorical. Could a sensible man so speak, and at the same time imagine that the mystical construction he pretended to give was the true mind of the Holy Ghost? Or could he conceive that he had any certain foundation for the mystical sense (so considered) before he had found out the literal one to ground it upon? No, surely. But thinking himself at liberty to raise any true and instructive moral from the text, he gave it as a good lesson to ruminate upon, rather than as a strict interpretation of the words before him. He, and other allegorizers like him, might apprehend that dry history, or a mere narrative of facts, would be unentertaining or unedifying to common readers or hearers, and therefore they had a mind to furnish them with proper meditations, moral and religious, to graft upon such parts of sacred Writ; that so whenever they should hear or read any Scripture history, such reflections also might occur to their minds, for improving the same to spiritual uses. [Buddaei Imagog. vol. ii. p. 1786.] And whether such spiritual uses were really intended in such place by the sacred penman or no; yet if the words might be but aptly accommodated thereto, and were but pertinently and soberly applied, and the analogy of faith preserved, a good end was answered thereby, and true doctrine at least kept, if not true interpretation. [Augustin. de Gen. ad Literam, lib. i. cap. 41. p. 132.]

Nevertheless it must be owned that the allegorizing Fathers did sometimes intend such comments as strict and proper interpretations; particularly, where they thought that the obvious literal meaning carried some absurdity in it, or else was too low and trivial to be the whole design of the sacred writer, or Spirit of God. They had St. Paul's example to go upon: "Doth God," says he, "take care for oxen?" [1 Cor. 9:9.] Intimating that such literal interpretation, singly considered, was too low and jejune a sense to fix upon the law in Deuteronomy, [Deut. 25:4.] and that therefore there was a necessity of supposing some higher meaning, and good reason for looking out for one. The like might be the case with other passages of the Old Testament, and very probably is: and so the Fathers endeavoured, wherever they apprehended any necessity of rising above

the letter, to search out the mystical intendment; and in their searches of that kind they sometimes indulged their fancies too far, giving their own conjectures (but modestly, and within the analogy of faith) for the sense of Scripture. And what commentator is there that may not sometimes, or often, mistake in interpreting the obscure places of sacred Writ? A good sense, that is to say, a sense consistent with sound doctrine, every wise man will be sure to make choice of: but as to the true sense of the place, in such instances, it is what the wisest cannot often be sure of, or take upon them to warrant.

I shall only add, that in order to form a more distinct idea of the ancient ways of interpreting, it may be proper to bear in mind that threefold method of commenting which St. Jerome lays down [Hieronym. ad Hedib. tom. iv. p. 186. edit. Bened.]; namely, the historical, tropological, and theorkal: or, in more familiar terms, the literal, moral, and sublime. The first of the three looked only to the grammatical meaning of the words, for the information of the hearers: the other two aimed at improving their morals and elevating their affections: which ends might be, in a good measure, answered by apposite meditations upon the text, though they should not happen to be true interpretations. And it was that consideration chiefly, as I conceive, which made the Fathers take the more freedom in moralizing and spiritualizing (if I may so speak) the letter of sacred Writ. See the last passage which I quoted from St. Austin, intimating as much.

P. 334. *Men of as great sense, learning, and piety, to all outward appearance, as any in their times, have sometimes fallen into heresy.* I might mention Tertullian, Apollinaris, and several more. [Vid. Vincent. Lirinens. cap. xv. xvi. xxiii. xxiv.] But it has been suggested by some persons, that according to the Scripture account of heresy, none were chargeable with it, but men who knowingly espoused false doctrine, who were directly self-condemned as teaching what they knew to be wrong, men of vile and dishonest principles, and of a flagitious character; in short, monsters of lewdness or impiety. And all this is grounded upon the scattered descriptions given of several kinds of heretics, in several parts of the New Testament. I have not here room to consider this whole matter at large; nor is it necessary I should, since I have obviated the main of it in the preceding sheets: but to prevent any person's being imposed upon by such suggestions, I may here throw in a few brief, and, I hope, pertinent considerations.

1. All heresies mentioned in Scripture were not of equal malignity. It is not right to apply to all what was true of some only; or to draw together all the ill features of several sects, or men, into one picture of deformity, and to make it serve for the picture of every individual.

2. The Apostles do not charge all the false teachers with flagitious, or

openly scandalous lives, and lewd doctrines, but the Nicolaitans chiefly, if not solely.

3. Some others are charged with secularity and selfish views, but not all. The Apostles, having the gift of discerning spirits, and writing by the Spirit of God, might justly so charge them: otherwise many of them might have passed, and would have passed, as persons of a fair character, full of godly zeal, [Gal. 4:17.] and ministers of righteousness. [2 Cor. 11:13–15.] It was to prevent their passing for such, that the Apostles took the advantage they extraordinarily had, to expose the secret views of the men, lest they should deceive whole churches by a fair outward deportment.

4. As to those whom the Apostles so charged with sinister views, or corrupt motives, it cannot be proved that they taught what they knew to be false, or believed to be wrong: but their inclinations governed their faith, and they easily believed what their passions, pride, vanity, or popularity suggested to them; which is a very common case. [“Men are apt to believe what they desire: and the weakest reasons which persuade them appear like demonstrations.” See Le Clerc’s whole chapter on this head, in his *Parrhasiæna*, chap. vii. p. 226. Compare *Causes of Incredulity*, part i. c. 1, 2, 3.] So that it does not appear that those false Apostles were formally self-condemned, or any otherwise than as all false teachers and evil doers are self-condemned, when they might know and do better; though many of them enjoy great self-satisfaction.

5. Whatever the motives of such men were, the Apostles did not anathematize them for their corrupt motives, but for their corrupt doctrines; which would have deserved the same anathema, though taught with the best intention, and most upright views, either by the Apostles themselves, or by an angel from heaven. [Gal. 1:8.] St. John, in particular, does not say, whosoever upon ill motives abideth not in Christ’s doctrine, or bringing not this doctrine, “receive him not”; but simply, “whosoever transgresseth,” and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, or bringeth “not this doctrine” [2 John 9, 10.]: there lay all the stress.

6. Ill motives would corrupt even the best works: so the throwing all the malignity of heresy upon the ill motives, is making no fault of the heresy at all, nor specifying any difference, in moral account, between preaching the truth of the Gospel, and subverting it: for to do either upon wicked motives is undoubtedly a wicked thing.

7. The design of the Apostles in exposing the corrupt views of heretics, was not to justify their anathema, or censure (which was just without, because of the corrupt doctrine), but to prevent the deception of the simple, who were in danger of being beguiled by flattering professions of love and tenderness

towards men, and of zeal and conscience towards God: as is plain in the case of the Judaizing heretics, who were believing Pharisees, and who plausibly pleaded the kw of God. [Acts 15:5.] To obviate such plausible and ensnaring pretenses, it was very proper to acquaint the unwary, that those false teachers were really men of selfish views and secular aims, [Rom. 16:17–18.] and were not to be implicitly trusted upon ever so many smooth speeches, or artful professions, whether of friendliness or godliness.

8. Lastly, let it be noted, that open declared libertines are not the most dangerous of heretics; neither are the wildest heresies, though worst in quality, the most destructive in their consequences. Some things are too gross to deceive many, and too shocking to prevail much, or long. There is vastly greater danger of the Christian world's running into an half religion, than there is of their taking up with none, or with one that is plainly scandalous: and infinitely more, in all likelihood, will at length perish for not being good enough, than for being monsters of lewdness or impiety.