

whether he has not framed and fitted all men, by the constitution of their nature, in its present state, for a conformity to the laws of piety and virtue. This is certainly the light in which this point ought to be considered; and, therefore, as God is as much the author and source of all our natural faculties and powers, as he must be supposed to be of any supernatural grace, the honour of God can be in no respect lessened by supposing, that man is naturally capable of practising religion and virtue. On the contrary, if this be not admitted, it will be found impossible to maintain the honour of the Divine Being with any degree of consistency.

THE Calvinistical notions of human nature appear to be contrary to the common sense and experience of mankind, and to every rational idea of religion, as well as to the general strain and tenour of the sacred

sacred writings. For amongst all mankind we find, that the performance of a good action is applauded, and the perpetration of a wicked one condemned and censured; which is a demonstration, that men commonly consider one another as free agents. And that inward remorse and disapprobation, which men feel after the commission of any wickedness, unless their consciences have been seared by a long course of iniquity, is another evidence of their possessing a freedom of action; for this can arise only from an internal consciousness, that they were capable of acting better. Were men impelled by any invincible propensity in their natures to the practice of wickedness, it would be as absurd to censure a man for the commission of a crime, as to reproach an idiot for his want of understanding; and to censure men for want of piety, if it consisted in any dispositions of mind out of their

power to attain, would be as unreasonable as to reproach a deaf man for not hearing, or a blind man for not seeing. And these notions of human nature are so far from increasing our ideas of man's guilt, that they do in fact entirely acquit him of any. For if man has it not in his power to be pious and virtuous, and yet suffers for not being so, he is an unhappy creature, but cannot possibly be a guilty one. But the justice of the Divine Being will not admit us to form such a supposition. If man is to be punished for not practising the duties of religion, we must suppose, that he has it in his power to perform them; or his punishment would be both cruel and unjust. The very idea of a state of retribution necessarily implies in it the free agency of man. Is it possible for us to suppose, that the just and righteous judge of the universe, who must infallibly do right, will

punish

punish men for not being what they are by their very nature incapable of being? Is this agreeable to any consistent ideas of the divine justice? And if it be not, can any creeds, can any human systems, be of sufficient authority to force our assent to such a doctrine?

THE whole strain and tenour of the sacred writings appear clearly to imply the ability of man to practise piety and virtue, and to avoid their contraries. How otherwise can we understand those numberless exhortations to virtue and piety, and dehortations from vice, with which the Old and the New Testament are filled? Do not all the threatenings of punishment for disobedience, and promises of reward for obedience, in the law, in the prophets, and in the gospel, necessarily suppose a capability in the objects of them, of avoiding the one, and gaining the other? For with

what propriety can it be imagined, that Moses and the prophets, that Christ and his apostles, exhorted men to the practice of those things which they knew they were incapable of practising ?

THERE are innumerable passages of scripture, both in the Old and in the New Testament, which are utterly incapable of any rational and consistent interpretation, upon any other supposition than that of man being a free agent. In the book of Deuteronomy, chap. xxx. 15—20. we find Moses making this solemn and public declaration to the whole people of the Jews.

“ See, I have set before thee this day life
 “ and good, and death and evil ; in that
 “ I command thee this day to love the
 “ Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, and
 “ to keep his commandments, and his
 “ statutes, and his judgments : — I call
 “ heaven and earth to record this day
 “ against

“ against you, that I have set before you
 “ life and death, blessing and cursing:
 “ therefore chuse life, that both thou and
 “ thy seed may live: that thou mayest love
 “ the Lord, and that thou mayest obey
 “ his voice, and that thou mayest cleave
 “ unto him.” What can we think of such
 a solemn declaration as this to the whole
 people of Israel, if Moses, at the very time
 when he was making it, had known, that,
 by the natural perverseness and depravity of
 their natures, they were really incapable of
 loving and obeying God? Can it be sup-
 posed, that he would have directed them to
 chuse life, as the consequence of their obey-
 ing the commandments of God, and called
 heaven and earth to witness that he had set
 it before them, when he knew that they
 were naturally incapable of chusing it? And
 Moses appears, ver. 11, 12, 13, 14. of the
 same chapter, to have been so far from

imagining them naturally incapable of performing the will of God, that he plainly asserts, that as they knew the will of God, they could have no excuse for not doing it; which manifestly supposes, that it was in their power to do so. “ This commandment
 “ which I command thee this day, it is not
 “ hidden from thee, neither is it far off:
 “ It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest
 “ say, who shall go up for us to heaven,
 “ and bring it unto us, that we may hear
 “ it, and do it? But the word is very
 “ nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in
 “ thy heart, that thou mayest do it.”

THE free agency of man is evidently implied, in those pathetic exhortations which are made to the Jewish people, in the prophecies of Ezekiel. “ Cast away from you
 “ all your transgressions, whereby ye have
 “ transgressed, and make you a new heart,
 “ and a new spirit; for why will ye die,
 “ O house

“ O house of Israel? for I have no pleasure
 “ in the death of him that dieth, saith the
 “ Lord God: wherefore turn ye your-
 “ selves, and live ye ⁵⁴.” They are here
 manifestly supposed capable of casting from
 them all their transgressions, and of turn-
 ing to God. The Almighty declares, “ I
 “ have no pleasure in the death of him
 “ that dieth.” God had not been wanting
 on his side: he had given them faculties
 and powers sufficient for the purposes of re-
 ligion, but they had neglected so to em-
 ploy them. To the same purpose it is said
 by St. Paul, that “ God would have all
 “ men to be saved ⁵⁵.” How is it possible
 to explain this, with any degree of con-
 sistency, unless we consider men as free
 creatures. If the salvation of all men de-
 pended on the will of God, independently
 of their own actions; and it was the will

⁵⁴ Ezekiel xviii. 31.

⁵⁵ 1 Timothy ii. 4.

of God that all men should be saved; what was it that could possibly prevent it? God certainly might have elected, or given a sufficient degree of grace, to one man as well as to another. But if we consider men as free agents, capable of acting well or of acting ill, even independently of their Maker, whilst they continue in possession of that freedom of choice, and of those faculties, which he has originally given them; the difficulty then vanishes. It is agreeable to the will of the good and merciful Father of our spirits, that all men should conform themselves to the laws of piety and virtue, and thereby qualify themselves for the enjoyment of eternal happiness: but, as he has made them free creatures, this depends upon their own choice; and it is thence it arises, that though it be the will of God that all men should be saved, yet there are many who
 notwith-

notwithstanding will not be saved. God has done his part; but they, being free to accept the terms of salvation or to refuse them, have not co-operated with the benevolent intentions of the Deity.

ANY instances, which may be produced of the Almighty having influenced the actions of some particular individuals, on extraordinary and particular occasions, are no just argument against the general doctrine of the free agency of man. We know that in the natural world, as well as in the moral, there are instances of the divine interposition on particular occasions; although, in the ordinary course of divine providence, things are suffered to go on according to the fixed and established laws of nature. Neither does our admitting the free agency of man, and his natural capability of religion and virtue, exclude the doctrine of divine assistance. For though men naturally possess

possess such an ability, yet the Divine Being may certainly communicate any irradiations, or internal assistances, which his infinite wisdom for any wise reasons may at any time see fit and proper; and which may not in the least interfere with their natural freedom of action. It appears however very certain, that we have now no reason to expect assistances of that sort, in the same degree in which they were communicated in the time of the apostles, and in the first age of Christianity. The interposition of the Deity was at that time more apparent, and it certainly was more needful in the first establishment of the gospel, than it can be in these ages. And undue pretences to divine illumination have been such a source of the most extravagant enthusiasm, that they should by intelligent Christians be very carefully avoided.

UPON

UPON the whole, it is very evident, that it is the universal sense of all mankind, in judging of their own actions, and those of other men, that they are free creatures. The very existence of human laws and government supposes it. Without supposing them masters of their own actions, they cannot be considered as accountable for them. To reward or punish any beings, either in the present or the future world, for actions which they did not voluntarily perform, and which they could not have avoided, would be both unjust and absurd. The consequence is clear and evident: either men have it in their power to obey the dictates of reason and religion, or they have not: if they have, they are properly moral and accountable creatures, and proper objects of reward and punishment; if they have not, they cannot be accountable for their actions, nor can they, with the least justice.

justice or propriety, be either punished or rewarded. And the whole tenour of revelation manifestly supposes men to be free agents. On any other supposition, the whole scheme of religion appears full of confusion and disorder, an inexplicable mystery: but if we admit that men are free creatures, and consequently accountable for their actions, these difficulties vanish, and the whole system of religion appears rational, intelligible, harmonious, and consistent. We then naturally consider the present state as a state of trial; to the very idea of which temptations are essential; and future rewards and punishments then appear natural and necessary.

It appears then, that there is no foundation in reason for the Calvinistical doctrines; and it has been shewn, that there is as little real foundation for them in revelation; that they are not the doctrines of
scripture,

scripture, but the inventions of men; and that the great design of the Christian revelation is to promote the practice of righteousness. But how inconsistent with this are the methods that are sometimes taken to depreciate moral virtue? That which the scriptures invariably represent as one of the most essential parts of religion, without which they could never expect to be approved or accepted by God, is by many Christian teachers numbered, as Swift expresses it, among the **BEGGARLY ELEMENTS**.

THE points in controversy between the Calvinists and the Arminians, have been what I have chiefly had in view in this tract; but there is another doctrine, which is admitted by persons who are not Calvinists, as well as by those who are so, which it may not be improper here to take some notice of, though it is not consistent with
the

the limits, which I have prescribed to myself in this publication, to enter at large into the discussion of it. I mean the doctrine of the Trinity. It is said, that “there
 “ are three persons in the Godhead, the
 “ Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost ;
 “ and that these THREE are ONE GOD, the
 “ same in substance, equal in power and
 “ glory.” And it is asserted, in one of the established creeds, that “ Whosoever
 “ will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic faith:
 “ Which faith, except every one do keep whole and undefiled, WITHOUT DOUBT
 “ HE SHALL PERISH EVERLASTINGLY.
 “ And the Catholic faith is this: That we
 “ worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity. Neither confounding
 “ the persons, nor dividing the substance.
 “ For there is one person of the Father,
 “ another of the Son, and another of the
 “ Holy

“ Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the
 “ Father, of the Son, and of the Holy
 “ Ghost, is all one : the Glory equal, the
 “ Majesty co-eternal.” But this incom-
 prehensible doctrine I cannot find in the
 New Testament ; nor do I apprehend,
 that it can be proved by any of the texts
 urged in its support. The proper unity
 of the Deity appears clearly to be taught
 in scripture, in a great variety of passages.
 Christ invariably spoke of whatever power
 he possessed as derived from his heavenly
 Father ; and in one of his last addresses to
 the Almighty, our Lord said, “ This
 “ is life eternal, that they might know
 “ thee, THE ONLY TRUE GOD, and Jesus
 “ Christ whom thou hast sent ⁵⁶ ;” a mode
 of speaking very inconsistent with the
 doctrine of the Trinity, and not to be
 reconciled by our being told, that Christ

⁵⁶ John xvii. 3.

“ being the Eternal Son of God, became
 “ Man, and so was, and continueth to be,
 “ God and Man, in two distinct Natures,
 “ and one Person.” The whole of this
 is very repugnant to reason, and extremely
 inconsistent with the general representa-
 tions of the Deity both in the Old and in
 the New Testament. And in the latter
 St. Paul, when speaking of the final
 consummation of all things, and of Christ,
 says, “ Then cometh the end, when he
 “ shall have delivered up the kingdom
 “ to God, even the Father; when he
 “ shall have put down all rule, and all
 “ authority and power. For he must
 “ reign, till he hath put all enemies
 “ under his feet.”—“ But when he saith,
 “ all things are put under him, it is
 “ manifest, that he is excepted which did
 “ put all things under him. And when
 “ all things shall be subdued unto him,
 “ then

“ then shall the Son also himself be subject
 “ unto him that put all things under him,
 “ that God may be all in all ⁵⁷.”

THE absurd and inconsistent representations, which have frequently been given of the Christian system, by its mistaken friends, appear to have done it more real disservice, than all the writings of the Deists. The opposition of the Deists has in some respects been very serviceable to Christianity: it has occasioned the evidences of its divine origin to be more diligently inquired into, and more clearly pointed out. And it has shewn, that the gospel is superior to all the attacks of its keenest adversaries. But the absurd notions, which have been propagated of the Christian religion, by many of its professors, have prevented it from having its proper effect upon many of those who did profess a belief in

⁵⁷ 1 Cor. xv. 24, 25, 27, 28.

it ; and have been a great means of adding strength to the attacks of its adversaries. For, indeed, many of the arguments of the deistical writers are levelled, not so much against Christianity itself, as against some mistaken representations of it : but which they, as it best answered their purpose, thought proper to regard as the real doctrines of Christianity.

THE religion of Jesus, when it is impartially examined, and distinguished from those absurd additions with which men have frequently obscured and disfigured it, must excite the approbation and the reverence of every man. Were it always represented in its genuine, in its native beauty, religion could never be made the subject of raillery and ridicule. The Christian revelation exhibits the Deity in the most endearing and engaging characters ; as the God of love, and the Father
and

and Friend of the whole human race. It teaches a piety and devotion, not confined either to time or place, nor composed of superstitious and external rites and ceremonies; but pure, spiritual, and rational. It enforces the utmost purity of heart, and the greatest simplicity, integrity, and rectitude of manners. And it inculcates a benevolence not confined either to sects, or parties, or countries; but of the most diffusive and disinterested kind. In short, it is the design of Christianity to promote whatsoever is really noble, excellent, amiable, and praise-worthy; whatsoever can refine, perfect, ennoble, and dignify humanity.

THE professors of Christianity should be extremely careful not to corrupt the simplicity of the gospel by human additions. It should ever be remembered, that all those who contribute any thing towards

rendering its excellency and its reasonableness less apparent, do, in fact, however different may be their intentions, strengthen the cause of Deism, and sharpen the arrows of Infidelity.



A N
O R A T I O N,

DELIVERED AT

THE INTERMENT

OF

THE REVEREND

CALEB FLEMING, D. D.

IN

THE DISSENTERS BURYING-GROUND,
BUNHILL FIELDS.

JULY 29, 1779.

[FIRST PUBLISHED IN THE YEAR 1779.]



FUNERAL ORATION.



HE most casual survey of those numerous mansions of the dead, which this place exhibits to our view, must have a natural tendency to inspire some degree of seriousness and recollection even into the most thoughtless and inattentive. The tombs around us proclaim, in the most emphatic terms, that **IT IS GIVEN UNTO ALL MEN ONCE TO DIE.** Nor can any be wholly insensible, that as these graves are filled with the remains of our fellow-creatures, some of
them

them perhaps once our friends, it cannot be long before we also must descend into the same dreary habitations. The various scenes of life are, indeed, perpetually pointing out to us, that our residence here is only temporary. "As for man, his days
 "are as grass, as a flower of the field so
 "he flourisheth; the wind passeth over
 "it, and it is gone, and the place thereof
 "shall know it no more." Whatever may be the possessions, whatever the attainments of human beings, they must all in a few years quit this scene of action, and launch into the regions of futurity. This is the inevitable lot of all, of the poor and of the rich, of the weak and of the powerful, of the ignorant and of the learned. No age, no sex, no rank or dignity, is exempted from the general decree. Whoever thou art, whatever thy situation, thy character, or thy circumstances,

stances,

stances, DUST THOU ART, AND UNTO
DUST THOU SHALT RETURN.

We are now assembled, to commit to the silent grave the body of our late reverend, and departed friend and brother, Dr. CALEB FLEMING, who sustained, for many years, with much reputation, the character of a Protestant Dissenting Minister in this metropolis. He has finished his labours, and is gone to make up his account with his great Master, with his and our common Lord. Indefatigable in the pursuit of truth, and zealous in the promotion of what he apprehended to be so, he spent the greater part of a long life in the duties of the ministerial office. A very large portion of his time, for a considerable series of years, was entirely appropriated to the study of divinity, and to those parts of knowledge which are immediately connected with
it ;

it; other studies engaged comparatively little of his attention; theology was at once his business and his pleasure. Ordinary amusements, and modes of relaxation, were little adapted to his taste. For though he had naturally great cheerfulness of temper, yet the gravity of the Divine eminently predominated in his character. Of the rights of conscience he was a warm and resolute assertor; and ever opposed, with a manly indignation, all invasions of the right of private judgment. He was a Protestant, and a Protestant Dissenter, from inquiry, and upon principle. He engaged in the pursuit of truth with perseverance, and with ardour; and those who differed from him in opinion could not question his sincerity, if they were under the influence of candour, or of equity. He had refused liberal offers to enter into the establishment, and
such.

such as, in the circumstances he then was, he must have accepted, had he been influenced by lucrative views. But his integrity was unquestionable; and he delivered his opinions in the pulpit, with so much seriousness and energy, and such a degree of openness and frankness, as naturally impressed his auditors with a strong conviction of his sincerity. He paid no regard to established systems, and considered the interposition of human power and authority, in matters of religion, as the principal source of the corruptions in Christianity. This sentiment, which is certainly well grounded, he was extremely solicitous to inculcate, both in his preaching, and in his writings. His seriousness and piety, the uprightness of his character and conduct, the abilities which he displayed as a preacher, and his many private and social virtues, procured him

him many respectable friends, and entitled him to general esteem. Towards the close of his life, he was rendered incapable of the public exercise of his ministry, by bodily weakness and disease. But even then a remarkable cheerfulness and vivacity were often observable in him, till the powers of nature became nearly exhausted, and his enfeebled frame announced his approaching dissolution. As a man, he was an object of much regard and esteem; and as a divine, and a diligent inquirer after religious truth, let his numerous publications speak for him'.

But the true design of funeral addresses of this kind, is, not chiefly to do honour to the dead, but to benefit the living; to

▪ Dr. Fleming's different publications amounted to upwards of fifty. His largest piece is entitled, "A Survey of the Search after Souls," printed in 1758, in 8vo.

awaken

awaken a sense of that common mortality, to which we are all subject; and which, nevertheless, human beings are too apt to forget. The shortness of human life, though it is one of those obvious truths of which none can be ignorant, is yet too seldom practically remembered. The generality live as if this were to be the whole of their existence: they are anxious to procure the advantages, the conveniencies, and the enjoyments of the present life; but they make little provision for futurity.

FAR different should be the conduct of Christians; and far different will be their conduct, if the principles of the religion they profess have their proper effect. They should live by faith: an habitual persuasion of the reality and importance of the great truths of the Gospel should influence their whole conduct. If senti-
ments

ments like these have made a deep and just impression on our hearts, terrestrial objects will appear comparatively of little importance. What was it that led the earlier professors of Christianity to undergo every suffering, every pressure of distress, every calamity that human power could bring upon them, with patience, with serenity, with the most heroic fortitude? It was that faith in the great truths of religion, in the infinitely momentous doctrines of the Gospel, which made them consider all temporary sufferings as trivial, compared with the future and immortal blessedness which Christ had set before them. They had "respect unto the recompence of reward." They were animated by the prospects, which the author and finisher of our faith had set before them. We profess the same religion, and should be influenced by the same principles;

ples; and if this be in reality the case, it will be productive in us of a similar conduct. We shall then think nothing of so much importance to us, as to obtain the favour and approbation of our great Judge. We shall then look not chiefly
 “ at those things which are seen, and
 “ which are temporal; but at the things
 “ which are not seen, and which are
 “ eternal.”

ONE of the most mournful scenes in human life, is that of taking our last farewell of those whom we have long loved and esteemed, and who are about to descend into the grave. But this separation would be rendered much more painful, were it not for the prospects which religion sets before us. This is our great consolation, when we are deprived of our virtuous and pious friends by death, that on their departure from

this world, the righteous are removed to
 “ mount Zion, to the city of the living
 “ God, to the heavenly Jerusalem; to an
 “ innumerable company of angels, to the
 “ general assembly and church of the first-
 “ born, to God the Judge of all, to the
 “ spirits of just men made perfect, and
 “ to Jesus, the mediator of the New
 “ Covenant.” Sentiments and views like
 these will naturally alleviate the distressful
 reflexions, which may arise in the breasts of
 the surviving relatives of our late honoured
 and departed friend, in consequence of the
 loss which by his death they have sustained.

DEATH puts an end to all our temporal
 cares, to all our temporal pursuits, to all
 our temporal enjoyments: but it puts not
 an end to our being. We quit this scene;
 but we are removed to another infinitely
 more important. What will be our situ-
 ation there, is an inquiry of all others
 the

the most interesting. Can there be one around me indifferent, what will be his future allotment, what the sentence which he shall receive at the bar of the Almighty? It is impossible. Nothing but gross and shameful inattention to the great truths of religion, can conceal from us their importance.

WHEN we leave these mansions of the dead, let not those salutary impressions be wholly lost, which may on this occasion have been excited. As we know, that we are mortal; as we know, that a few years will put a period to our temporal existence; let us improve the time, with which we may yet be favoured by the all-gracious Author of our being; let us cultivate all the virtues which should adorn the Christian character, and by which our divine Master himself was so illustriously distinguished. At the last day, when the trumpet

trumpet of the archangel shall sound, when all who are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God, it will then be of infinite importance to us, what part, what character we shall have sustained, what shall have been the general tenour of our conduct, in the present world. It will then be of infinite importance to us, whether we shall be numbered among the righteous or the wicked; among those who have served God, or those who have served him not. Let us then fix our views upon the end of life; and be induced, by the certainty of its approach, sincerely and diligently to keep the commandments of God. Then may we rejoice in hope, that **THIS CORRUPTIBLE BODY SHALL PUT ON INCORRUPTION, and that THIS MORTAL SHALL PUT ON IMMORTALITY.** Amen.

THE END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

