converted, that your sins may be blotted out;" and concludes with telling them, "that God had raised up his Son Jesus, and sent him to bless" them, "in turning away every one of them from their iniquities." And when Paul and Barnabas preached to the Lystrarians, their words are, "We preach unto you, that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless, he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." The natural ability of man to conform to the rules of religion appears here to be clearly implied; and also his

ability of discerning the existence and character of the Deity by the mere light of nature.

In the account which St. Paul gives of himself to Felix the Roman governor, we find the following expressions: "After the way which they (the Jews) call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets. And have hope towards God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust: and herein do I exercise myself, to have alway sa conscience void of offence towards God, and towards men." Nor when Felix sent for Paul, "to hear him concerning the faith in Christ," is he represented as saying any thing about the favourite doctrines of some modern systems.

Acts xxiv. 14—16.
of divinity; but is described as reasoning of "righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come." And in St. Paul's speech for himself, before king Agrippa and Festus, after reciting the manner of his miraculous conversion, he gives this account of the method in which he first preached Christianity. "I was not," says the apostle, "disobedient unto the heavenly vision: but shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance." Indeed, any man who reads the acts of the apostles, with any degree of attention and impartiality, must be perfectly convinced, that the doctrines which they taught, and those which have been since taught by some who have affected to be

Acts xxvi. 19, 20. very
very close imitators of them, were totally different. And the account which is given in the Acts, of the conversion of Cornelius, the Roman centurion, to the Christian faith, is a strong evidence of the regard that is ever paid to sincere piety and virtue by the Almighty; and what little ground there is for the notion, that men cannot recommend themselves by their own actions to the favour of God. It is on the contrary plainly declared in this relation, that the prayers and alms, the piety and benevolence, of a Roman officer, had so recommended him to the divine favour, that an angel was sent to him in order to occasion his conversion to Christianity. For the reason which the angel gave for his extraordinary appearance to him, was, "Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God." This emi-

\[ \text{Acts x. 4.} \]
nent instance of the attention, and regard of
the Divine Being, to real piety and virtue,
wherever found, so struck the apostle Peter,
who had imbibed the narrow notions of his
countrymen, that the favour of God was
confined to their nation, that “he opened
his mouth, and said, Of a truth I per-
ceive, that God is no respecter of persons:
but in every nation, he that feareth him,
and worketh righteousness, is accepted
with him.”

But it is from the epistles of St. Paul,
as has been before observed, that some of
the strongest proofs of the Calvinistical
doctrines, and some others which have been
founded upon them, are supposed to be
drawn. It will not fall within the compass
of this tract, to enter into a particular dis-
cussion of all the passages in St. Paul’s
epistles, which are urged in support of these
opinions; nor to give those more rational
and
and consistent interpretations, which have been given by several excellent commentators of such passages. And, indeed, a proper attention to those parts of scripture, the meaning of which is more obvious and less controverted, and to the general tenour of the sacred writings, would carry more conviction with it, than any examination of particular texts. For when once men have been accustomed to read any particular parts of scripture in a certain sense, and to annex a certain set of ideas to such and such phrases, though perhaps totally foreign from the original meaning of the writer, they naturally consider every attempt to interpret any such passages, in a different sense from that in which they have been accustomed to understand them, as wresting and perverting them. But some general observations upon St. Paul's epistles, and some of the doctrines which are founded upon
upon a misunderstanding of them, may not here be improper.

It should be remembered, in the perusal of these epistles, that they were written to particular churches, and persons, and on particular occasions; and that they had an immediate reference, in many places, to some contentions and disputes which had arisen in the primitive churches, and some of which were peculiar to the first ages of Christianity. For without a proper attention to the particular view and design of the apostle in writing each epistle, it will often be impossible to form any clear notion of his meaning. These circumstances, together with that obscurity which naturally attends epistolary writings of a remote age, must, in the very nature of the thing, render St. Paul's epistles more difficult to be understood than many other parts of the sacred writings.
In the time of the apostles, it appears, that there were many of the Jews who had embraced Christianity, but who were nevertheless very much attached to the ceremonial law of Moses; and who laboured to prove, that it was necessary for the Gentiles, and all the professors of Christianity, to conform to the Mosaic rites. St. Paul, in his epistles, opposes the notions of these Judaizing Christians; he teaches them, that all who believed in Christ, and embraced his religion, would receive the free remission of their past sins, without any conformity to these ceremonial rites. But from these declarations of the apostle, that they were admitted into the Christian church, and had received the remission of their sins, by virtue of their faith in Christ, and without any respect either to their observance, or non-observance, of the law of Moses,

Acts xv. 1—29. xxi. 20—25.

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the ceremonial part of which was entirely abolished by the Christian dispensation; it has been inferred, that it was criminal for men to suppose that their own actions would contribute to, or be the occasion of, their final justification; or that a conformity to the laws of religion and virtue, the practice even of real works of righteousness, would be a means of their obtaining eternal happiness: though it is the clear and express language of St. Paul himself, as well as of the other sacred writers, that eternal life would be the reward of those, and of those only, who "by patient continuance in well-doing" fought "for glory, and honour, and immortality."

All the different texts in the epistles of St. Paul, which speak of faith as the cause of man's salvation, may be very rationally and consistently explained, and agreeably to the general tenor of the scriptures, without hav-
ing recourse to those unreasonable interpretations which are frequently put upon them. And it may be proper to observe, that there was, in the very nature of the thing, a particular reason why faith should have been inculcated with peculiar force in the first ages of Christianity. It was certainly essentially necessary, that at that time faith should be established as a first principle. Those to whom the gospel was first preached, must have been previously convinced of the divine mission and authority of Christ, before they could be expected to obey his laws. But in later ages; and to those who already acknowledged the mission and authority of Christ, the practice of the duties of Christianity seems the principal thing to be inculcated. Though it must be acknowledged, that exhortations to faith may notwithstanding be very pertinent and advantageous to professed Christians; for it can
can scarcely be imagined, that so many professors of Christianity would be inattentive to the practice of its duties, if they were really and heartily convinced of the truth and importance of religion.

But there is another reason assigned in the New Testament, on which account men were required to believe, viz. that they might receive remission of sins. Men in their present state are surrounded with innumerable temptations, which render it morally impossible that they should be entirely free from sin; and the greatest part of mankind do, and in all ages of the world did, sin very frequently. "All have sinned," says St. Paul, "and come short of the glory of God." As all men, therefore, must have been conscious of having offended their Creator, in a greater or a less degree, and been therefore sensible, that they stood

37 Romans iii. 23.
in need of mercy and forgiveness; but could not have any certain assurance of their being in a state of favour and acceptance with him; the Almighty thought proper to send Jesus Christ into the world, to die upon the cross, that all those who believed in him might receive remission of sins, and might consider his death as a proof of it. The death of Christ may therefore be considered as a memorial, and an evidence, to all mankind, of the placability of God. "We were reconciled to God by the death of his Son." It was by faith in the death of Christ, that God thought proper, for infinitely wise reasons, to dispense his mercy to mankind. But it is not therefore to be supposed, that the death of Christ was a motive to induce God to the exercise of mercy. The all-gracious Parent of mankind, essentially good and merciful

 Romans v. 10. 
in his own nature, needs no inducements to be merciful to his creatures. On the contrary, it is the language of scripture, that "God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that who-soever believeth in him should not perish." But it is certain, that it could not have been the doctrine of St. Paul, that faith in Christ would of itself entitle men to eternal salvation, without the practice of holiness; because it is the plain and express language of St. Paul, and indeed of all the scriptures, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." And it appears likewise equally clear, from St. Paul's own epistles, that faith in Christ would not necessarily produce that holiness, which was indispensably necessary to the completion of their salvation; and that the

29 John iii. 16.
justification which he speaks of their receiving, by virtue of their faith in Christ, was not a final justification; nor did it, in itself, give them a right to eternal life. This will appear very plainly if we consider, that those very persons whom he addresses as called, enlightened, justified, reconciled to God, and saved by faith in Christ, he frequently exhorts to a conformity to the commandments of Christ, and the laws of righteousness, assuring them, that without this they would have no inheritance in the kingdom of God. "Be ye therefore," says the apostle, "followers of God as dear children:—for this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ, and of God: let no man deceive you with vain words; for because of these things cometh the wrath
"wrath of God upon the children of disobedience." Be not deceived: God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the spirit, shall of the spirit reap life everlasting." From all which it is evident, that when the apostle speaks of their being saved by faith in Christ, his meaning is not, that it entitled them to eternal happiness; but that they were thereby saved from the guilt of their past sins, and received into the favour of God, notwithstanding their former alienation from him; that, on their faith in Christ, they received from the free grace, or mercy of God, the remission of their past sins, without their previously doing any thing to obtain such remission; and that, if they af-

30 Ephesians v. 1—6. 31 Galatians vi. 7—8.
terwards continued in a sincere endeavour to conform themselves to the laws of Christ, notwithstanding those imperfections which are always attendant on human obedience, they would finally be approved by him, and made partakers of that happiness which he has promised to all his true disciples. That St. Paul did not consider a real faith in Christ as necessarily in itself giving a right to eternal life, is very evident from his epistles; and it is observable, that speaking even of himself, (and of the reality and sincerity of his own faith he certainly could have no doubt) he says, "I keep under "my body, and bring it into subjection," left that by any means, when I have "preached to others, I myself should be a "cast-away;" in which the apostle manifestly speaks of his own salvation as conditional, and as depending on the dif-

"1 Corinthians ix. 27.

charge
charge of his duty, and his adherence to the laws of virtue. "This single passage (says a noble and ingenious writer) is a full answer out of the mouth of St. Paul himself, to all the mistakes that have been made of his meaning, in some obscure expressions concerning grace, election, and justification." It may also be observed, that Christ himself speaks of persons who had such a degree of faith in him, as to enable them to prophesy, and work miracles in his name, and who, he declares, would nevertheless be in the number of those who would finally be rejected by him. "Not every one that faith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord,


"Lord,
"Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? and then will I profess unto them, I never knew ye: depart from me ye that work iniquity." We have also a text in the epistle to the Hebrews, which clearly supposes and expresses the possibility of men being finally condemned, notwithstanding their having a real faith, and being enlightened by the gospel, and even made partakers of the holy spirit. "It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the holy ghost, and have tasted of the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come; if they shall fall away, to renew them again to repentance." And St. Paul, in the epistle

Matthew vii. 21—23.  
Heb. vi. 4—6.
to the Colossians, says, "You that were " sometime alienated, and enemies in your " mind by wicked works, yet now hath " he reconciled, in the body of his flesh " through death, to preserve you holy and " unblameable, and unreproveable in his " sight: if ye continue in the faith grounded " and settled, and be not moved away " from the hope of the gospel." Plainly teaching them, that their reconciliation to God by faith in Christ, would not issue in their final salvation, unless they continued steadfast in their obedience to the laws of Christ; and that, notwithstanding their present reconciliation to God, by faith in Christ, their final salvation was conditional. It is not, however, to be supposed, that the professors of Christianity were to be entirely free from sin, in order to ensure their final salvation. Man is sur-

36 Colossians i. 21—23.
rounded with such innumerable temptations, that some degree of moral imperfection is always attendant on humanity. And whilst we sincerely endeavour to do the will of God, our involuntary and unallowed imperfections will be forgiven by our merciful Creator. "If any man sin, "we have an advocate with the Father, "Jesus Christ the righteous." But we must endeavour, sincerely and uniformly, to obey the will of God; that must be the prevailing turn and bias of our minds; and without such a sincere conformity to the laws of our Creator, we have not the least reason to expect his final approbation, or to be made partakers of that felicity which he has promised to bestow upon the righteous.

The phrase, being saved by faith, may be very rationally explained, even

"I John ii. 1.

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when it refers to man's final salvation; though the phrase is certainly frequently used in a different sense. For those who by a firm belief in the doctrines which Christ taught, of a future state of retribution, &c. are induced to refrain from, and to avoid, the practice of vice, and to conform to, and regulate their lives by the laws of piety and virtue, may, with the strictest propriety of speech, be said to be saved by faith. Because though they are not saved on account of their faith; yet as their faith is the motive that induces them to regulate their lives by the rules of religion, they may very properly be said to be saved by faith.

It must be acknowledged, that those who adhere to the Calvinistical doctrines of justification, election, &c. do nevertheless admit the necessity of holiness, as supposing that faith will necessarily produce it.
it. But it appears even from the New Testament, that men may really have faith who do not act in conformity to it; and, perhaps, observation on many characters in real life would afford sufficient evidence of the possibility of it. And though these notions may be, and certainly frequently are, entertained by persons who are sincerely virtuous; yet to teach men, that they are incapable by their own natural powers, of so far conforming to the laws of righteousness as to attain the favour of God, must naturally slacken their endeavours after it. And to teach them, that their own actions can in no degree recommend them to the divine favour, and that they are not to expect any reward hereafter, on account of any thing which they themselves can do, is certainly depriving men of the strongest motives to a life of piety and virtue; and appears to be, in a very great degree, subverting
verting the grand design of the Christian revelation.

But amongst all the absurd doctrines, which have been pretended to be founded on St. Paul's epistles, there does not appear to have been any so totally repugnant to every idea of the moral character of God, and against which every sentiment of humanity so strongly revolts, as that of predestination. St. Paul has shewn, that God has elected or chosen some particular nations, and collective bodies of men, to enjoy some eminent religious advantages; as the Jews the Mosaic dispensation, and the Gentiles the Christian; which they were favoured with not on account of their respective merits, but entirely because it was the will and pleasure of the Divine Being that it should be so: and which peculiar advantages he certainly might confer, con-

38 Vid. Romans chap. viii. ix. x. xi.
fistently with the most perfect justice, on whatsoever nations, or bodies of people, his infinite wisdom should see fit. But from a total misunderstanding of the nature of the election, of which the apostle was speaking, he has been thought to mean, that God had arbitrarily elected a certain number of individuals to future happiness, to whom the means of salvation were given; whilst the rest were reprobated, and consigned over to eternal misery. And all that is alleged, in vindication of the moral character of the Deity, which so much suffers in this shocking representation of the divine conduct, is, that mankind incurred this sentence in consequence of Adam's transgression; by which he, and all his posterity, became objects of the divine wrath, and were subjected to everlasting misery: though the scriptures nowhere represent any thing but death being entailed on mankind in
consequence of the fall. Thus the whole human race are said to have been justly made subject to eternal misery, for an action committed many ages before the greater part of them existed; though it is the uniform doctrine of the scriptures, that men are punished only for their own works. It is said to have been the doctrine of some of the predestinarian writers, that "God of his own pleasure, antecedent to all sin in the creature, original or actual, did agree to glorify his sovereignty and justice, in the eternal rejection and damnation of the greatest part of mankind, as the end; and in their unavoidable sin and impenitency, as the means."

Reason, revelation, and universal nature, proclaim this truth, that God is good to all, and that his tender mercies are over all his works: but in what possible manner can we reconcile this with
with these doctrines? with the supposition, that he has devoted, by an irreversible decree, millions of his creatures to endless misery, without even having given them a possibility of avoiding it? It is indeed amazing, that such a doctrine, so totally repugnant to every idea, not only of goodness and of mercy, but even of equity and of justice, should ever have been considered as a part of that divine religion, which the Father of mercies, the God of love, has instituted as his last and most merciful dispensation to the sons of men.

Notwithstanding the absurd and erroneous interpretations, which have been given of some parts of St. Paul's writings, they are in themselves perfectly rational and consistent; and entirely agreeable to the doctrine of Christ and the other apostles. It is only when some particular detached passages of his epistles, are interpreted with-
without a proper regard to the peculiar circumstances which attended his writing them, and to the whole scope of his reasoning, that he appears to differ from them. This apostle, in all his epistles, inculcates the uniform practice of virtue with great force and energy. And the account, which he gives of the future judgment, perfectly agrees with that given in the gospels. "The judgment of God is according to truth:—who will render to every man according to his deeds: to them who by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, eternal life: but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath; tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil;—but glory, honour, and peace, to every man that
"that worketh good: for there is no respect of persons with God.""

The epistles of the other apostles are attended with less difficulty. That of St. James is almost entirely composed of instructions, for the regulation of the Christian conversation of those to whom his epistle is written. This apostle inculcates very forcibly the necessity of practical religion; and cautions them against imagining, that faith alone was sufficient for their final salvation. "Be ye," says he, "doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves:—What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and hath not works, can faith save him?—By works a man is justified, and not by faith only." And the same apostle represents the practice of benevolence, and personal holiness,

Romans ii. 2—11. *James i. 22. and ii. 14—24. as
as the sum of religion. "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father, is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."

The two general epistles of St. Peter are likewise composed of persuasives to personal virtue, urged chiefly from the consideration of the future judgment; together with some exhortations to steadfastness under those trials, to which the first Christians were more peculiarly exposed. And, agreeably to the representations which have been before given of the design of the gospel, this apostle declares the intention of it to be, to call them to glory and virtue: and that by the gospel-dispensation are given to us exceeding great and precious promises; that by these we might be made partakers of the divine nature, hav-

"James i. 27.

"ing
ing escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." And, in order to point out to them in what the excellency of the knowledge of Christ consisted, after having exhorted them to faith, virtue, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity; he adds, "for if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren, nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." The following verse is also remarkable, and seems to corroborate the interpretation that has been before given, with respect to some passages in St. Paul's epistles, viz. that the justification by faith, of which that apostle speaks, was not an absolute and final justification, but only a remission of the sins of their past lives, previous to their conversion to Christianity. "He," says the apostle, "that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off,

2 Peter i. 8.
"off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins." And the following expressions of the apostle clearly intimate, that their faith in Christ would not of itself ensure their final salvation; and that it must be their own personal adherence to piety and virtue, which must finally complete it. "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

The practice of righteousness is insisted on, as the essence of religion, with great force by the apostle John. "Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he (God) is righteous.—If we say

2 Peter i. 10, 11.

that
that we have fellowship with him, and
walk in darkness, we lie, and do not
the truth: but if we walk in the light,
as he is in the light, we have fellowship
one with another, and the blood of Jesus
Christ his son cleanseth us from all sin:
—Herein do we know that we know
him, if we keep his commandments.
He that faith, I know him, and keepeth
not his commandments, is a liar, and
the truth is not in him. But who so
keepeth his word, in him verily is the
love of God perfected; hereby know we
that we are in him.—If ye know that he
is righteous, ye know that every one that
doeth righteousness, is born of him. In
this the children of God are manifest,
and the children of the devil: who so-
ever doeth not righteousness, is not of
God: neither he that loveth not his
brother." St. John never intimates, that
the best actions of men were in the sight of God of no account, and as "filthy rags;" but, on the contrary, affirms, that their keeping his commandments is a motive to the Deity to confer blessings on them; and that conscious integrity is a reasonable cause to excite confidence in us towards God. "Beloved, if our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight." The practice of benevolence, and the exercise of the social affections, are repeatedly and very strongly inculcated by him, as essential to the Christian character; and as the only proper criterion of our love to God. "Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God,"
God, for God is love.—Who so hath this world's good, and saeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed, and in truth.

In the book of Revelations, we find the necessity of keeping the commandments of God, in order to attain eternal life, clearly pointed out. "Behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.—Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.—Blessed

1 John ii, iii, iv.  
Revelations xxii. 12—14.
are the dead which die in the Lord, 
from henceforth: yea, faith the Spirit, 
that they may rest from their labours; 
and their works do follow them.⁴⁵"

And the following is the representation 
which is given, in this book, of the future 
judgment: "I saw the dead, small and 
great, stand before God; and the books 
were opened: and another book was 
opened, which is the book of life: and 
the dead were judged out of those things 
which were written in the books, ac-
cording to their works. And the sea 
gave up the dead which were in it; and 
death and hell delivered up the dead 
which were in them: and they were 
judged every man according to their 
works.⁴⁷"

Thus it appears to be the design of the 
New Testament, throughout every part of 
⁴⁵ Revelation xiv. 12, 13. ⁴⁷ Revelation xx. 12, 13.
it, to excite men to the uniform practice of piety and virtue. It appears, that "the grace of God," which "hath appeared unto all men" in the gospel dispensation, was intended to teach them, that "denying ungodliness, and worldly lusts, they should live soberly, righteously, and piously in the present world." In which it perfectly coincides with those innumerable exhortations to the practice of righteousness, which occur in the Old Testament. And to this the doctrine of a future state of retribution is strongly pressed and inculcated as the principal motive. Other motives are occasionally spoken of, but this appears to be the great leading principle of the Christian revelation. The notions entertained by the heathens of a future state appear to have been attended with much doubt and uncertainty: some of them ap-

43 Titus ii. 11, 12.

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pear to have considered it only as a poetic fiction; and some of their best writers, in speaking of it, do it in a manner that shews they rather wished for it, than really expected or believed it: and even the Jews themselves appear to have been much in the dark concerning it. It is only by the gospel, that life and immortality have been clearly brought to light⁴⁹; and the doctrine of a future state of retribution plainly revealed. And it certainly is a motive, that, of all others, may rationally be supposed to act the most forcibly upon mankind. For surrounded as man is, in his present state, with innumerable temptations, tending to withdraw him from an adherence to his duty, perhaps there is no other that can, through the general tenour of life, be supposed to actuate him with sufficient force. 

When a man is abstracted from the temp-

⁴⁹ 2 Timothy i. 10.
tations of the world, and in his closet, the motives to virtue, which may be drawn from the nature and fitness of things, and the beauty and amiableness of virtue, may operate with considerable strength upon the mind; but, even upon the best minds, it may reasonably be supposed, that, in an hour of severe temptation, the firm belief of a future state must have a much greater effect. And these more refined motives to virtue would perhaps be found to operate but faintly at any time upon the bulk of mankind; for whom it was undoubtedly necessary, that a divine revelation should be adapted. And it is acknowledged, even by Lord Shaftesbury, that "this may be said as to the support which this belief of a future reward and punishment may prove to virtue; that as it is capable of raising men to virtue, who were at first in a manner strangers to it; so where

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men are already in a virtuous course, it may prove that which alone can save them from falling off, from the virtue they possess, into a licentious and vicious practice."

Neither does the notion of men being excited to virtue, from the consideration of a future state of retribution, necessarily suppose them actuated merely by hope or fear, and the less ingenuous affections of the human mind. For, as the same noble writer observes, "if by the thoughts of future reward, or what regards another state, be understood the love and desire of virtuous enjoyment, or of the very practice and exercise of virtue in another life; the expectation or hope of this, must not only be a great encouragement to virtue; but it appears plainly, that the very following of virtue, in hope to attain that"

Inquiry concerning Virtue, B. i. Sect. 3.

"supreme
"supreme happiness which consists in the
"perfection of it, is of itself a degree of
"virtue, and a proof of the sincere love
"we have for it."

As the ideas of human nature, which
are suggested by the Calvinistical opinions,
appear dishonourable both to man, and to
his great Creator; and as the doctrine of
man's free agency appears to be a matter
of very considerable importance, and with-
out admitting which it seems impossible to
form any consistent ideas of religion, I shall
make a few remarks upon those subjects.

There have been many, who seem to
have thought, that they could in no way
better evidence their own piety, than by
degrading and vilifying human nature. It
is not easy to conceive, that it could ever
have been the dictate of reason, that there
was any piety in any thing of this kind; or

"Ibid.

C c 4 that
that it was honouring God to speak dis-
honourably of his creatures. For reason
would rather have dictated, that it was
doing more honour to the Almighty Author
of nature, to form more favourable ideas of
that, which, in its present state, whatever
its imperfections may be, is indisputably the
noblest part of the visible creation.

It is very evident, that the bulk of
mankind are not virtuous; but it does by
no means thence follow, that they are de-
praved and impotent creatures, naturally
prone to wickedness, and incapable of what
is good and virtuous. Even amongst the
most dissolute part of the human race,
amongst those who indulge themselves in
the practice of vice with the least scruple,
there are discoverable, by a candid observer,
many evidences of latent virtue; and ac-
tions really virtuous are frequently per-
formed by those, whose general character
will
will not bear a strict scrutiny. And, indeed, the actual existence of vice amongst mankind, is no proof of their being under any invincible propensity to it. For, if we suppose men free creatures, capable either of acting well or of acting ill; and as being in a state of probation, in which they have many temptations to act contrary to the dictates of reason and of conscience; it will account for the existence of moral evil in the world, without the necessity of supposing, that they are by any inherent corruption of their nature biased towards wickedness.

There are many particulars observable in human nature, which are very unfavourable to the notion of man being naturally a wicked creature. It may be observed, that innocence is generally considered as one of the characteristics of childhood and youth; and that openness of heart, candour, benevo-
benevolence, and the social affections, appear to operate more, and the contrary dispositions less, in early life than at a later period; which seems to militate strongly against the notion of man being naturally prone to wickedness. And, perhaps, whenever dispositions of a different kind appear to prevail in childhood and youth, the whole of it may be attributed to ill example, or to the want of a virtuous education. Children, naturally imitative, are fond of doing those things which they see done by others; their actions are therefore very much regulated by the conduct and behaviour of those about them. And we may rationally account for such perverseness and frowardness of behaviour, as may be sometimes discoverable in children, without having recourse to the supposition of their being naturally biased towards vice. For, as they have in them the seeds of those appetites
appetites and passions, which, however innocent in themselves, are vicious when not restrained within their proper bounds; it is easy to conceive, that if they have ill examples set before them, and are suffered, while their judgment is weak and unformed, to let these natural appetites and passions take a wrong direction, those very children may be froward and vicious, who, with judicious culture, might have been tractable and virtuous.

It

It is too apparent, that the important business of education, particularly with respect to piety and morals, is in general very much neglected. Instead of instilling deeply into the minds of youth, their dependance on, and obligations to the Deity, and thoroughly grounding them in the sentiments and the principles of virtue, which are the most important points of a right education, their parents and preceptors are generally content with giving them a very slight and superficial view of these most important subjects; whilst a much greater attention and regard is paid merely to forming their
It has often been observed, that the first advances to vice are made with reluctance; and that it is never practised without compunction, till men have hardened themselves by long habit to the practice of it: which seems to be an evidence, that wickedness is so far from being natural to man, that the practice of it is a rebellion against the first dictates of his nature. It is likewise certain, that it is natural to men to applaud and admire virtue in others, as well as to approve it in themselves. Sentiments of compassion, of benevolence, and of social affection, are certainly natural to the human mind. And it may be affirmed farther, that sentiments of piety, the love their exterior behaviour. As the happiness and stability of any nation depends so much on the virtue of its individuals; and as that very much depends on the method of education that prevails; this is a point that deserves the attention of all the friends to religion, virtue, and their country.
and reverence of the Deity, are natural to human nature, when amiable and just ideas of him have been instilled and are imbibed. Instances of disinterested generosity and goodness excite gratitude and affection to the benefactor, by whom such services are bestowed, and such goodness displayed. These are the natural feelings and sentiments of humanity. And such sentiments naturally arise with respect to the Deity, when he is exhibited to the mind in a proper light.

The doctrine of man having lost his natural ability to practice virtue, and aptitude to religion, by the fall, appears to have no real foundation in the scriptures. They only represent man as subject to temporal death by the fall, and not as thereby becoming incapable of religion, and prone only to the practice of vice and impiety. And Christ himself does not seem by any means
means to have countenanced these unfavourable ideas of human nature. For we are told, that when his disciples inquired of him, who was the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, he called a little child to him, and set him in the midst of them, and said unto them, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." And when his disciples rebuked those who brought young children to him, he was much displeased; and said, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of heaven." Now can it be supposed, that Christ would have told his disciples, that in order to enter the kingdom of heaven they must become as little children, and that of such that kingdom consisted, if he had known them

Matthew xviii. 1-4.
to be naturally polluted, and necessarily prone to wickedness? Must we not rather infer from these texts, that Christ considered young children as innocent, harmless, and teachable; and, therefore, proper emblems of that mild, peaceable, innocent, and humble disposition, which became the disciples of the blessed Jesus?

There is no just reason for imagining, that those appetites and passions, which are found in human nature, and which, when not properly restrained and regulated, are the cause of sin, are any consequence of the corruption of human nature. They do on the contrary appear, when under proper restraints, to be very useful to mankind. And, indeed, exclusively of this, something of this kind appears to be necessary to any creature while in a state of probation: for, without something within themselves, which might in some degree prompt
or excite them to a compliance with external temptations, they could not be considered as in a state of trial.

The favourers of the Calvinistical opinions appear to have thought, that representing man as a weak, and naturally wicked creature, tended to promote humility, and to advance and raise our ideas of the grace and goodness of God in the gospel dispensation. Every attempt, therefore, to give more favourable representations of man's natural dispositions and ability, they consider as having a tendency to derogate from the grace of God, and to diminish the glory of the gospel. And, perhaps, could they be convinced, that the contrary opinions had not this tendency, they might be induced to examine them with more candour, and to inquire with less prejudice and prepossession, how far their own opinions are really founded on the scriptures.
It seems to have been thought, that to assert that man possesses, by the constitution of his nature, at least in his present state, an aptitude and ability to act virtuously, is raising him at the expense of his Maker, and making him independent on his Creator. But this is totally mistaking the point. The warmest advocates for human nature, cannot be supposed to form any ideas of man possessing any abilities or powers independent of his Maker, which he did not originally derive from him; and for the continuance of which, as well as for his existence itself, he does not absolutely depend upon his pleasure. The question therefore is not, whether man can act virtuously independently of the Almighty; (for in a certain sense we can do nothing without him; i.e. without his permission, and without his having originally given us suitable faculties and powers); but