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TRACTS.

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TRACTS.

PRINTED AND PUBLISHED

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FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE

AND THE PRACTICE OF VIRTUE.

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VOL. IV.

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CONTAINING,  
THE LIVES OF

THE REV. JOHN BIDDLE, M. A.

AND

MR. THOMAS FIRMIN, CITIZEN OF LONDON.

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A  
R E V I E W  
OF THE  
LIFE, CHARACTER AND WRITINGS  
OF THE  
REV. JOHN BIDDLE, M. A.

WHO WAS BANISHED TO THE ISLE OF SCILLY,  
IN THE PROTECTORATE OF OLIVER CROMWELL.

BY JOSHUA TOULMIN, A. M.

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OTHERS HAD TRIAL OF CRUEL MOCKINGS AND SCOURG-  
INGS: YEA, MOREOVER OF BONDS AND IMPRISONMENT:  
OF WHOM THE WORLD WAS NOT WORTHY.

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LONDON:

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## P R E F A C E.

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THE character brought forward in the following memoirs was, more than an hundred years ago, a character of celebrity at home and abroad, The questions concerning the doctrine of the trinity, that have been lately agitated, properly render it an object of curiosity to the present age; for Mr. Biddle was the father of the *english unitarians*.

But his history is a more important object of attention, on account of the severe persecutions he sustained, and the amiable, venerable piety he exemplified. Memoirs of such as have displayed singular virtues, and supported singular sufferings, for what they deemed divine truth, will always be useful; to shew the power of religious principle, and to convince men, that true piety is not peculiar to those who embrace a par-

ticular creed, but the genuine fruit of those principles, which are common to all christians.

From these views is the author induced to lay before the public the life of Mr. BIDDLE, which he presumes cannot fail to prove, to the candid and serious mind, instructive and edifying. To the attention of such, and to the blessing of God, he would humbly commend it.

*Taunton, March 22, 1789.*

A  
R E V I E W  
O F T H E  
L I F E , C H A R A C T E R A N D W R I T I N G S  
O F T H E  
R E V . J O H N B I D D L E , A . M .

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S E C T I O N I .

*The Birth, Education, and First Settlement, of*  
M R . J O H N B I D D L E .

EXCELLENCE and merit of character are independent of the circumstances of rank and place: yet the mind is gratified by the information that can be procured, concerning the family and birth of such as have distinguished themselves by their virtues, or gained, in any walk of life, peculiar reputation.

The good man, whose character and writings will be reviewed in the following pages, derived no

lustre from the honours of his descent, nor can his family be traced back beyond the name and rank of his immediate progenitor. He was the son of Mr. Edward Biddle, a woollen-draper, at Wotton-under-edge, in the county of Gloucester; a person whose circumstances were not affluent, but who supported his family with a virtuous reputation, and a credit rather above his rank. His son, Mr. John Biddle, the subject of these *mémôirs*, was born in that town, in the year 1615.

He received his classical education at the free-school in the same place. He was not ten years of age, when his promising abilities, and the opening blossoms of genius and probity, drew on him the notice of his neighbours, and spread his fame through the country. George lord Berkley, who was a munificent patron of genius and learning, conferred on him, amongst other scholars, an exhibition of ten pounds per annum; but with this mark of distinction, that he bestowed it on young Biddle, at a more early period than he was accustomed to grant this donation.

Our youth, animated by this encouragement, pursued his studies with new vigour. His emulation was kindled; so that, with ease, he not only surpassed his school-fellows of the same rank; “ but

“ but in time, out-ran his instructions, and became tutor to himself.”

In this period of his life he gave several particular specimens of the pregnancy of his parts, and his proficiency in learning. On the death of a school-fellow of high rank, he composed an elaborate oration in latin, which he recited before a full auditory. He also translated into english verse, the eclogues of Virgil, and the two first satires of Juvenal. We are led to entertain an high opinion of the execution of these juvenile performances, from this circumstance, that they were afterwards printed at London in 1634, with the approbation of some learned men, and dedicated to John Smith, Esq. of Nibley, in the county of Gloucester.

But notwithstanding the rapid and singular progress which he made in classical learning, he was, through different causes, detained at school till he was about seventeen years of age. In 1632 he was sent to the university of Oxford, and was admitted a student in Magdalen Hall. Here he prosecuted his studies with great assiduity and increasing fame; and was esteemed as doing honour to that seminary. It seems, that he now discovered not only a brilliancy of parts, but a peculiar liberality and independence of mind; for we are told, “ he did so philosophize, that it might be observed,  
“ served,

“ served, he was determined more by reason, than  
 “ authority : however, in divine things he did not  
 “ dissent much from the common doctrine.” Of  
 this, it seems, that a little piece he wrote against  
 dancing furnished proof.

On the 23d of June, 1638, he took the degree of bachelor of arts ; and with reputation, both for learning and prudence, filled the post of a tutor in the university. On the 20th of May, 1641, the degree of master of arts was conferred upon him with great applause. Before this he had received an invitation to be master of the school in his native town, which he declined. But the reputation which procured this offer, directed the views of the magistrates of Gloucester to him : as his having refused it, left him free to attend to other overtures. In 1641, in consequence of ample recommendations, from the principal persons in the university, he was elected master of the free-school of Crisps, in the city of Gloucester. This choice was accompanied with earnest importunities. He accepted the invitation, and on his going to settle in this post, he was met at his approach to the city, by the magistrates, and was received with honourable expressions of joy and respect.

In this department he answered the expectations which had been formed of him. His skill and  
 faith-



faithfulness were eminent. They, who could commit their sons to his tuition, congratulated themselves on their felicity. Hence, though the fixed salary was not great, the gratuities of parents made the emoluments of it considerable.

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## SECTION II.

### *The Freedom of his Religious Inquiries.*

THE circumstances of Mr. Biddle's situation were truly inviting, and opened to him a pleasing prospect of usefulness and felicity. But his happiness in it was of short continuance. The love of money had not corrupted his mind: nor could the views of interest divert his attention from objects of a different nature. That freedom of inquiry which he had discovered in his philosophical and academical studies, was now directed to the subjects of religion. "Having laid aside the impediments of prejudice, he gave himself liberty," we are told, "to try all things, that he might hold fast that which is good."

To adopt the observations of a great writer, as pertinent here, as they are just in themselves.

"Since

“ Since the understandings of men are similar to one another, (at least so much, as that no person can seriously maintain that *two and two* make *five*,) did they actually read only the same things, and had they no previous knowledge to mislead them, they could not but draw the same general conclusions from the same expressions. But one man having formed an hypothesis from reading the scriptures, another, who follows him, studies that hypothesis, and refines upon it, and another again refines upon him; till in time the scriptures themselves are little read by any of them; and are never looked into but with minds prepossessed with the notions of others concerning them. At the same time several other *original readers* and thinkers, having formed as many other hypotheses, each of them a little different from all the rest, and all of them being improved upon by a succession of partisans, each of whom contributes to widen the difference; at last no religions whatever, the most distinct originally, are more different from one another, than the various forms of *one* and the same religion.

“ To remedy this inconvenience, we must go back to first principles. We must begin again, each of us carefully studying the scriptures for ourselves, without the help of commentators, comparing one part with another. And when our minds shall, by this means, have been exposed to  
the



the same influences, we shall think and feel in the same manner.

“ Were it possible for a number of persons to make but an essay towards complying with this advice, by confining themselves for the compass of a single year, to the daily reading of the scriptures, without any other religious books whatever, I am persuaded, that, notwithstanding their previous differences, they would think much better of one another than they had done before. They would all have more nearly the same general ideas of the contents, and of the chief articles of christian faith and duty. By reading the whole themselves, they could hardly avoid receiving the deepest impressions of the certainty, and importance of the great and *leading principles*; those which they would find most frequently and earnestly inculcated: and their particular opinions having come less frequently in view, would be less obstinately retained. It was in this manner, I can truly say, that I formed the most distinguishing of my opinions in religion\*.”

In this manner it appears that Mr. Biddle formed those sentiments, by which he was afterwards distinguished. He gave the holy scriptures a diligent reading; and made use of no other rule to determine controversies about religion, than the

\* Priestley's *Considerations on differences of opinion in religion*, p. 25, 26.

*Scriptures*; and of no other *authentic interpreter*, if a scruple arose concerning the sense of the scriptures, than *reason*\*.

This method of settling the mind on points of religious inquiry, he strongly recommended to others. “ If thou, christian reader, dost from thy heart aspire to the knowledge of God, and his son Jesus Christ, wherein, as Christ himself testifieth, eternal life doth consist, John xvii. 3. fetch not the beginning thereof either from Socinus (a man otherwise of great understanding in the mystery of the gospel), nor from his adversaries; but being mindful of those words, Luke x. 22. *None knoweth who the son is but the Father; and who the Father is, but the son, and he to whom the son will reveal him*; lay aside, for a while, controversial writings, together with those prejudicate opinions that have been instilled into thine unwary understanding, and closely applying thyself to the search of the new covenant, most ardently implore the grace of Christ, that he would be pleased to manifest himself and the Father to thee; and make no doubt but the true light will at length illuminate the eyes of thy mind, that thou mayest walk in the way that leadeth unto life†.

\* Life, p. 4. and Testimonies, p. 82. 12mo.

† See preface to a Discourse concerning the peace and concord of the church, p. 2, 3, 4.

So faithfully did Mr. Biddle himself pursue this plan of investigating divine truth, that he derived all his learning in matters of religion from the assiduous study of the scriptures, especially the new Testament; with which he was so conversant, that he retained it all in his memory *verbatim*, not only in english but in greek, as far as the fourth chapter of the Revelations. The natural consequence and advantage of this perfect and exact knowledge of the new Testament, it is obvious, must have been a comprehensive view of its contents, a familiar acquaintance with its language and phraseology, so as readily to compare it together as it occurred to his recollection from different places, and a command of the full connexion in which any passage stands.

It also appears, that when he first began to pursue religious inquiries, and to form his sentiments for himself, he did not, as many have, immediately read the first writers of the christian church. For, in a piece he afterwards published, having quoted some passages from Eusebius, he adds, “ How plainly now doth Eusebius, by the passages cited out of him, give attestation to what I hold touching the nature of the holy spirit, so that one would think I learned it from him; whereas I knew not either of his book, or of what was delivered

livered therein, a great while after I had delivered my opinion\*.

The tract where he thus expresses himself, shews indeed, that he afterwards carefully examined the fathers, to ascertain their sentiments concerning the one God : but it likewise proves, that he had a low opinion of their judgment, or of the weight of their testimony, which he used merely as an *argumentum ad hominem*.

It may be alledged, as a clear proof of the independence of Mr. Biddle's mind, and of his freedom from the influence of human authority, that he had read no socinian writer when he settled his judgment concerning the doctrine of the trinity ; though he afterwards looked into the polish writers of that class,

It is remarkable, that also the candid and excellent Dr. Lardner, who, amongst the writers of this century, takes a lead on the unitarian side, declares the same of himself. " I must acknowledge that I have not been greatly conversant with the writers of that denomination, (i. e. the socinians.) I have never read Crellius *de uno Deo Patre* : though I believe it to be a very good book.

\* The Testimonies, p. 7. or the same in Unitarian tracts, v. 1. p. 27.

There is also in our own language a collection of Unitarian tracts, in two or three quartos. But I am not acquainted with it. Nor can I remember that I ever looked into it. I have formed my sentiments upon the scriptures, and by reading such commentators, chiefly, as are in the best repute. I may add, that the reading of the ancient writers of the church has been of use to confirm me, and to assist me in clearing difficulties\*."

Whether these eminent and able persons, Biddle and Lardner, attained to the knowledge of the truth, every one must judge for himself. But this is certain, a method more proper in itself, or more promising of success, could not be adopted, than a diligent application to the only authoritative

\* A Letter on the *Logos*, written in the year 1730, p. 55. Since the above was drawn up, the author has received a letter from a learned and judicious correspondent, a minister of an unitarian society amongst the baptists in Holland, who says the same of himself. "I was in the same case with Dr. Lardner, and could use his words. (See Lindsey's Two dissertations, p. 48.) To this time, I never had read Socinus, or socinian writers, before the works of Lindsey, by which my own sentiments are enlarged. I read, before the year 1775, no commentators, no ancient writers of the church. A year's studying the old and new Testament led me into the way of truth. My honoured master was an Arian, rather Clarkian. More than one of my friends, after my example, found the truth by reading alone the scriptures."



source of true information on the subject of their inquiry.

To return to Mr. Biddle. The temper, with which he prosecuted his inquiries, was suitable to the nature and importance of his researches.

As the lucrative prospects of his situation did not seduce him into an indifference to the knowledge of divine truth; so, we are told, that he was influenced in his pursuit of it, not by a vain curiosity, but by "the love of Christ, who is truth and life." His diligent reading of the scriptures was accompanied with fervent prayers for the divine illumination. The manner and strain of his address, prefixed to his Twelve Arguments, is a specimen and proof of that serious spirit which he possessed; and of the pious convictions under which his researches were conducted.

"Christian reader, I beseech thee," he writes, "as thou tenderest thy salvation, that thou wouldst thoroughly examine the following disputation in the fear of God, considering how much his glory is concerned therein\*."

These arguments were not offered to the public with a decisive tone, and as the result of a fixed determination on the point, which is discussed in

\* Twelve Arguments, the preface; or Unitarian tracts, v. 1. p. 16.

them ; but with the avowed design of calling forth some able and learned persons to investigate the question, and resolve his doubts.

“The author,” he says, “hath a long time waited upon learned men, for a satisfactory answer to these arguments ; but hath received none. His hopes are, that the publishing of them will be a means to produce it ; that he may receive satisfaction, and others may be held no longer in suspense, who are in travail with an earnest expectation as well as he\*.”

Upon Mr. Biddle's examination of the holy scriptures, it appeared to him, that the common doctrine concerning the trinity was not well founded in revelation, much less in reason. Being as communicative of his sentiments, when occasion offered, as he was free in his inquiries, he spake of his doubts without reserve, and opened his reasons for calling the truth of that doctrine into question. This discovery of his thoughts soon alarmed the fears, and inflamed the spirits, of some zealots. The charge of heresy was raised against him, and he was summoned before the magistrates ; to whom he exhibited, on the point about which he was accused, the following confession of faith, viz.

\* Twelve Arguments, the preface, p. 4, 5.

1. I believe that there is but one infinite and almighty essence, called GOD.

2. I believe, that, as there is but one infinite and almighty essence, so there is but one person in that essence.

3. I believe that our saviour Jesus Christ is truly God, by being truly, really and properly united to the only person of the infinite and almighty essence.

This confession was made May 2, 1644. It failed of giving satisfaction to the magistrates, who urged him to be more explicit concerning the plurality of persons in the divine essence. Accordingly, about four days after, knowing that the word *person*, when ascribed to the divine Being, was used in various senses, both by the ancient fathers and modern writers, he confessed, that there were three in that one divine essence, commonly termed persons.

“ By this it appears,” observes the author of his life, “ that how distinct soever might be his conceptions concerning the trinity, yet he was not determinate enough in his expressing of that matter, as he became not long after.” Mr. Biddle’s second confession was indeed clearly contradictory to the first which he exhibited. But candour will make every allowance for a man, probably intimidated by the prospect of a prison; whose mind

was



was not fully made up on a question involved in the intricacies of scholastic controversy, and whose holy fortitude was as yet in the first feeble stage of its exercise.

### SECTION III.

His Tract entitled *Twelve Arguments*.

In whatever darkness or ambiguity the language of Mr. Biddle was involved, when he was summoned a second time, to make a confession of his faith; it reflects honour on his sincerity and fortitude, that, afterwards, he expressed himself with greater clearness and precision. Instead of desisting from inquiries which had already threatened, nay, endangered, his security and peace, he resumed them with new vigour, and with a serious spirit of piety and earnest prayer to almighty God for his assistance, he pursued his examination of the scriptures, on the point in dispute, with greater attention and care.

“A love of sacred truth is hardly consistent with an absolute indifference about its reception in the world.” The mind of Mr. Biddle, it appears,

pears, was as active to impart, as it was solicitous to gain the knowledge of divine things. His resolution to aver and communicate his conceptions kept pace with the convictions which he obtained on the points he investigated. For as he proceeded in his researches, he conferred with his friends on the subject and result of his inquiries, and freely opened his mind on the questions concerning one God and three persons.

Amongst other communications that he made to his acquaintance, was a paper, entitled, "*Twelve Arguments*, drawn out of the scripture, wherein the commonly received opinion touching the deity of the holy spirit is clearly and fully refuted." These arguments were drawn up in the form of so many syllogisms, and each was illustrated and supported by distinct explanations and reasonings.

To many, who with the author do not embrace the common doctrine of the trinity, his arguments, under those logical propositions, will appear to rest more on the sound of words, than to be derived from a liberal interpretation of scripture, and an enlarged acquaintance with its idioms and language.

They all proceed on this principle, and are meant to establish it, viz. that the holy spirit is a person or intelligent being: The same opinion of the distinct personality of the holy spirit has  
been

been advanced and defended by considerable writers \*, who have denied his deity. But the most full and candid view of the language of scripture, on this head, has been given us by the excellent Dr. Lardner †.

The point elucidated and argued in this tract is, “ that by the words, the *spirit*, the *spirit of God*, and the *spirit of the lord*, which occur in the old Testament, is meant, not a being or an intelligent agent ; but a power, a gift, a favour, a blessing : and that by the phrases, the *spirit*, the *holy spirit*, the *holy ghost*, the *spirit of God*, the *spirit of truth*, the *comforter*, in the new Testament, is also meant a gift, or the plentiful effusion of miraculous and spiritual gifts.” Were it not to incur the censure of dogmatizing, and using too decisive a tone, one would be tempted to pronounce this piece of Dr. Lardner’s satisfactory and unanswerable.

\* See Dr. Scott’s Demonstration of the scripture doctrine of the trinity, and an Appeal to the common sense of all christian people.

† A letter concerning the Logos, written in the year 1730, the first postscript. The point has been very lately discussed, and closely argued in an ingenious little tract, entitled, “ The Impersonality of the holy spirit. Printed for John Masson, 1287.”

One remark of this great author deserves particular attention, and carries great force with it. It is this, "That there is not in the acts of the apostles, or in any other book of the new Testament, any account of the appearance and manifestation of a great agent or person, after our saviour's ascension; therefore no such thing was promised or intended by our saviour, or expected by the apostles, who could not but know his meaning."

This fact seems to have escaped the attention of those, who have argued for the personality of the holy spirit: nor have they made due allowance for the style of the holy scriptures, in which it is not uncommon to personify many things, to which we do not ascribe intelligence. In this view the expressions concerning charity, sin, and death, are as explicit and strong, as any that are applied to the holy spirit.

As to our lord's language in particular, it is on this point a very pertinent and sensible observation of a great writer: "That it is less extraordinary that the figure called *personification*, should be made use of by him here, as the peculiar presence of the spirit of God, which was to be evidenced by the power of working miracles, was to succeed in the place of a real person, viz. him-  
self,

self, and to be to them what he himself had been; viz. their advocate, comforter, and guide\*.

It was, it should seem, a long time, before the idea of the personality of the holy spirit became a fixed opinion, and an article of faith. For, as it is modestly expressed by Dr. Lardner, on a review of the christian writers of the first three centuries; “It is probable, that the doctrine of the trinity, which is now commonly received, and which is so much disliked by many, was not formed all at once, but was the work of several ages†.

To return to Mr. Biddle’s tract. To it are subjoined expositions of some particular texts, the elucidation of which is connected with the questions discussed in the *twelve arguments*, it may be useful and acceptable, if we select one or two of these expositions.

For instance, 1 John v. 7. *And these three are one.* Mr. Biddle waves speaking of the suspectedness of the text, but observes: “That it would have been hard, if not impossible, (had not men been precorrupted) that it should ever come into any one’s head to imagine, that this phrase, *are one*, did signify, *have one essence*:

\* Dr. Priestley’s History of the corruptions of christianity, vol. i. part 2. § 7. p. 88.

† The same, p. 90, and Lardner’s Letter on the Logos, p. 107.



Since such an exposition is not only contrary to common sense, but also to other places of scripture, wherein this kind of speaking perpetually signifieth an union in consent and agreement, or the like, but never an union in essence. To omit other sacred writers, this very apostle in his gospel, ch. xvii. verses 11, 21, 22, 23, useth this same expression six times, intimating no other but an union of agreement : yea, in verse 8. of this very chapter in his epistle, he useth it in the same sense. For though the expression varieth somewhat in the ordinary greek Testament, in that the preposition *eis* is prefixed, (although the complutensian bible readeth it, *eis to en hen*, in both verses) yet is the sense the same ; this latter being spoken after the hebrew idiom, the former according to the ordinary phrase : for confirmation whereof see Matt. xix. ver. 5 and 6. together in the original. Wherefore this expression ought to be rendered alike in both verses ; as the former interpreters did it, though the latter interpreters in v. 8. have rendered it *agree in one*, putting the gloss instead of the translation\*.

On Isaiah vi. 9, 10. Mr. Biddle observes that it is argued that the holy spirit is the Lord ; because

\* Twelve arguments, in 12mo, 1647. p. 19, 20. or Unitarian tracts, v. 1. p. 9.

On comparing this text with Acts xxviii. 25, 26, 27. that which in Isaiah is attributed to the Lord, is in the Acts ascribed to the holy spirit. which kind of arguing, though it be very frequent with them, is yet very frivolous : for at this rate, he adds, I may also conclude, that because what is attributed to the Lord, Exod. xxxii. 11. is in the 7th verse of the same chapter ascribed to Moses : therefore Moses is the Lord. And because what is attributed to the Lord in Isaiah lxxv. 1. is in the xth of Romans, verse 20. ascribed to Isaiah, therefore Isaiah is the Lord. And because what is attributed to God, 2 Tim. i. 8, 9. is by Paul attributed to himself, 1 Cor. ix. 22. and to Timothy, 1 Tim. iv. 16. therefore Paul, yea, Timothy, is God \*.

These remarks are capable of an extensive application in the dispute concerning the essence of Christ, and his equality with the Father. The last observation in particular, affects almost the whole series of arguments in vindication of that opinion.

The tract, of which we are now speaking, though originally drawn up for the perusal of his friends, and for private use, was followed with the

\* As before, page 26, 27. or Unitarian tracts, v. i. p. 12.

most serious consequences to the author, and with a great revolution in his condition.

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## SECTION IV.

### *Proceedings against Mr. Biddle.*

THERE is no act of iniquity to which false zeal hath not prompted men. It hath not only drawn the sword and kindled the fire, to restrain and punish what has been deemed heretical pravity, but, when open and obvious proofs of it have not lain against a person, by interrogatories and tortures, it hath extorted confessions on which to ground a conviction. It hath construed suspicions into proofs. It hath invited or disposed men to violate the confidence of friendship, and given a sanction to perfidy. Of this the history of Mr. Biddle furnishes a melancholy proof.

The *twelve arguments* noticed in the last section, were communicated among others, to one, who, while Mr. Biddle most probably thought him a sincere inquirer after truth, shewed himself unworthy of any confidence. For, instead of weighing the force of the reasoning, or endeavour-

ing



ing, in the intercourses of private friendship, to convince Mr. Biddle of its fallacy, he was ungenerous enough to betray him to the magistrates of Gloucester, and to the committee of the parliament, that then resided there.

The consequence of this information being lodged against him was, that he was committed to the common goal, December 2, 1645. This commitment was cruel and peculiarly afflictive to him: for he was, at the time, ill of a dangerous fever. The design of his imprisonment was to secure his person, till the parliament should take cognizance of the affair. The severity of this proceeding, happily, was soon mitigated by the interposition of a compassionate friend, a person of eminence in Gloucester, who procured his enlargement, by giving bail for his appearance, when the parliament should see fit to call him to their bar.

About June, 1646, archbishop Usher, passing through Gloucester, in his way to London, had a conference with Mr. Biddle, respecting his sentiments concerning the trinity, and endeavoured to convince him that he was in an error, but without effect.

Six months after he was set at liberty, Mr. Biddle was summoned to appear at Westminster, and the parliament immediately chose a commit-

tee, to whom the cognizance of his cause was referred. Upon his examination he freely and candidly confessed, " That he did deny the commonly received opinion concerning the deity of the holy ghost, as he was accused; but that he was ready to hear what could be opposed to him, and if he could not make out his opinion to be true, honestly to acknowledge his error."

He was urged to declare his sentiments, concerning the deity of Christ, but he prudently waved the question, as not being to the point on which he was accused, and as it was a subject which he had not sufficiently studied, publicly to engage himself on it.

Though he endeavoured to have his affair brought to a conclusion on the single question, which alone was properly before his judges, no decision was passed, but he was wearied out by tedious and expensive delays. This induced him, at the distance of sixteen months from his first commitment, to address one of the committee, sir Henry Vane, in a letter dated April 1, 1647, in which he solicits and beseeches that gentleman, if he had any bowels towards the distressed, either to procure his discharge, or at least to make a report to the house, touching his denial of the supposed deity of the holy spirit.

In this letter he plainly and fully expressed his  
ideas

ideas concerning the nature and offices of the holy spirit. "As for my opinion touching the holy spirit, it is that I believe the holy spirit to be the chief of all ministering spirits, peculiarly sent out from heaven, to minister on their behalf that shall inherit salvation; and I do place him, both according to the scriptures and the primitive christians, and by name Justin Martyr, in his apology, in the third rank after God and Christ, giving him a pre-eminence over all the rest of the heavenly host. So that as there is one principal spirit amongst the evil angels, known in scripture by the name of *satan*, or the *adversary* \*, or the *unclean* † *spirit*, or the *evil spirit of God* ‡, or the *spirit of God* ‡, or the *spirit* ‡ by way of eminence; even so there is one *principal spirit* (I borrow this appellation from the septuagint, who render the last clause of the 12th verse of psalm li. in this manner, πνευματι ηγεμονικω στεριξον με, *spiritu principali fulci me*; stablish me with thy principal spirit) there is I say one principal spirit, amongst the good angels, called by the name of the *advocate* or the *holy spirit*, or the *spirit* §, by way of eminence.

\* 1 Pet. 5. 8.

† Zech. 13. 2.

‡ In support of the application of these terms to *satan*, Mr. B. refers to 1 Sam. xvi. 15, 16, and last verse; and 1 Kings, xxii. 21. See the original.

§ John xvi. 7. Ephes. iv. 30. Nch. ix. 20. 1 Cor. vii. 40. Acts x. 19.

This opinion of mine is attested by the whole tenor of the scripture, which perpetually speaketh of him as differing from God, and inferior to him \*."

Then, after an enumeration of many texts, which in his apprehension, decidedly supported his sentiments, he adds some pertinent reflections on the importance of the question, and the nature of the proceedings against him.

" Behold now," says he, " the cause for which I have lien under persecution, raised against me by my adversaries, who being unable to justify by argument their practice of giving glory to the holy spirit, as God, in the end of their prayers, since there is neither precept nor example for it in all the scripture, and being taxed by me for giving the glory of God to another, and worshipping what he hath not commanded, nor ever came into his heart, have in a cruel and unchristian manner resorted to the arm of flesh, and instigated the magistrate against me, hoping by his sword (not that of the spirit) to uphold their will-worship; but in vain, since every plant that the heavenly Father hath not set shall be rooted up. And that the practice of worshipping the

\* Twelve arguments. Letter to a member of parliament, *Pr Unitarian tracts*, vol. 1. p. 12,



holy spirit of God, as God, is such a plant as God never set in his word, would soon appear to the honourable house, could they be so far prevailed with, as, having laid aside all prejudices, seriously to weigh the many and solid proofs that I produce for my opinion out of the scripture, together with the slight, or rather no proofs of the adverse party for their opinion; which they themselves know not what to make of, but that they endeavour to delude both themselves and others with personalities, modes, substances, and such like brain-sick notions, that have neither sap nor sense in them, and were first hatched by the subtilty of Satan in the heads of platonists, to pervert the worship of the true God.

“ Neither could this controversy be set on foot in a fitter juncture of time than this, wherein the parliament and the kingdom have solemnly engaged themselves to reform religion both in discipline and doctrine. For, amongst all the corruptions in doctrine, which certainly are many, there is none that more deserveth to be amended than this, that so palpably thwarteth the whole tenour of the scripture, and trencheth to the very object of our worship, and therefore ought not to be lightly passed over by a man that professeth himself a christian, much more a reformer. God is jealous of his honour, and will not give it to another;

we therefore, as beloved children, should imitate our heavenly Father therein, and not upon any pretence whatsoever depart from his exprefs command, and give the worship of the Supreme Lord of heaven and earth to him whom the scripture no where affirmeth to be God.

“ For my own particular, after a long impartial inquiry of the truth, in this controversy, and after much and earnest calling upon God, to give unto me the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him; I find myself obliged, both by the principles of reason and scripture, to embrace the opinion I now hold forth, and as much as in me lyeth, to endeavour that the honour of almighty God be not transferred to another, not only to the offence of God himself, but also of his holy spirit, who cannot but be grieved to have that ignorantly ascribed to himself, which is proper to God that sends him, and which he no where challengeth to himself in scripture.

“ What shall befall me in the pursuance of this work, I refer to the disposal of almighty God, whose glory is dearer to me, not only than my liberty, but than my life. It will be your part, honoured sir, into whose hands God hath put such an opportunity, to examine the business impartially, and to be an helper to the truth, considering that this controversy is of the greatest importance

portance in the world, and that the divine truth suffers herself not to be despised scot-free.

“ Neither let the meanness of my outward presence deter you from stirring, since it is the part of a wise man, as in all things, so especially in matters of religion, not to regard so much who it is that speaketh, as what it is that is spoken; remembering how our saviour in the gospel saith, that God is wont to hide his secrets from the wise and prudent, and to reveal them unto children. In which number I willingly reckon myself, being conscious of my own personal weakness, but well assured of the evidence and strength of the scripture to bear me out in this cause\*.”

The effect of this pious and humble remonstrance was, that sir Henry Vane, to whom it was addressed, shewed himself a friend to Mr. Biddle, and reported his case to the house. The result was not favourable to Mr. Biddle's comfort and liberty, for he was committed to the custody of one of the officers of the house of commons, and he was continued under this restraint for the five following years. In the mean time the matter was referred to the consideration of the assembly of divines, then sitting at Westminster, before

\* Twelve arguments. The Letter written to a certain knight, p. 6, 7, 8. or Unitarian tracts, v. 1. p. 14, 15, 16.



some of whom he often appeared, and gave them, in writing, his twelve arguments against the deity of the holy spirit.

The answer to his arguments, which he received at any of these interviews, was not satisfactory or convincing to his mind. This induced him to print them in the year 1647, in hopes that the publication of them would not only give the world a fair state of his case, but excite attention to the question. It was accompanied with an address to the impartial reader, signed J. H. in which the writer expressed his own and the author's earnest hope, that the publication of these arguments would engage some one to attempt a solid reply to them; such a reply, as would not merely tax his arguments with being weak and invalid, but, by clear and strong reasonings, would refute them, and carry conviction to inquisitive and doubting minds: A reply, that did not substitute railing for argument, and supply the deficiency of its proofs by the bitterness of its invectives. "At these rates," he observed, "the weakest man might easily subvert the strongest controversy."

This preface also bespoke and intreated the reader's very serious attention to the arguments laid before him; "as to a matter which affected the divine glory, and his own salvation:" the author

thor requested him “ at any hand to forbear condemning his opinion as erroneous, till he was able to bring pertinent and solid answers to all his arguments.”

To suppress the piece, and to prohibit the progress of inquiry, it was justly observed, could “ no ways unscruple doubting spirits :” amongst whom for the present the writer numbered himself, expecting an answer to these ensuing arguments, adding, in the language of a pious and ingenuous mind ; and that “ God will be with him that undertaketh it, and write in a spirit of meekness, and of wisdom, in the revelation and knowledge of truth, shall be the matter of his prayers, who desires the truth may be cleared up, and shine like the noon-day, and all error confounded, and vanish before truth, like a mist before the sun.” J. H.\*

The publication of this tract raised a great alarm, and it was called in and burnt by the common hangman. But this illiberal mode of suppressing the work, and stifling inquiry, had only a short and temporary effect. This piece, with two other tracts, was reprinted by the author in 1653, and it was published a third time, amongst the Unitarian tracts, in 4to, in the year 1691. To which the life of the author was prefixed.

\* Twelve arguments, in 12mo. 1647.

## SECTION V.

Mr. Biddle publishes his *Confession of Faith*, and  
*Testimonies of the Fathers*.

MR. BIDDLE appears to have possessed a firmness of mind, which not only supported him under the dark clouds that gathered round him, but enabled him to pursue his inquiries, and to publish, with steadiness and freedom, his sentiments concerning the points for which he suffered. For, being yet in prison, he printed, in 1648, a *Confession of faith concerning the holy trinity*, according to the scripture, with the *Testimonies of several of the fathers on this head*.

In the conclusion of the preface to the *Confession of faith*, he frankly expresses himself on the design of this publication, and the importance of its object. “ I have,” says he, “ here presented you with a *Confession of faith* touching the holy trinity, exactly drawn out of the scriptures, with the texts alledged at large, that so you may the better judge how suitable the same is to the word of God.

“ Neither have I other aim in the publication thereof than to restore that pure and genuine knowledge of God delivered in the scripture, and  
 which

which hath for many hundred years been hidden from the eyes of men, by the corrupt glosses and traditions of Antichrist, who hath instead thereof obtruded upon them I know not what absurd and uncouth notions, bearing them in hand that ignorance is the mother of devotion, and that they then think and speak best of God, when their conceits and words are most irrational and senseless. By which means, having renounced those quiddities and strange terms, that have vitiated the simplicity of the scripture, and having laid asleep the contentations arising from them, we shall at length unanimously with one mouth glorify the God and Father of our lord Jesus Christ\*.”

The preface, which closes with the preceding paragraphs, is occupied with a full representation of the evils, of which Mr. Biddle conceived the doctrine of the trinity had been productive, having, as he expresseth it, “not only made way for the idolatrous pollutions of the Roman Antichrist, but, lying at the bottom, corrupteth almost our whole religion.”

To illustrate and confirm this assertion, he observes, that the common opinion touching three

\* See the Confession of faith, 12mo. 1648, or Unitarian tracts, 4to. v. 1. tract ii. 1691.

persons in God, subverteth the unity of God, so frequently inculcated in the scripture; and that it hindereth men from praying according to the precept of the gospel, which instructs us to ask of God the holy spirit, and to pray to him through his son Jesus Christ, which implieth that God is the Father only.

He also considers the tenet of three persons in God as incompatible with the love and honour which we owe to the most high God; this is the *highest* love and honour that it is in our power to exercise, and of which *one person only* can be the object, who can be the *Father only*; for the son and spirit, as the names import, deriving from him, can be only secondary objects of honour and love; in subordination to the Father, and with reference to the powers and characters received from him.

He represents it as another consequence of the common opinion, that it thwarteth the idea, which men naturally entertain of God, as the Being who is the first cause of all things, existing of himself only, and all others from him. It looks, therefore, like an attempt to deprive men of their understanding, and in a point of the greatest importance, to ascribe supreme deity to two other persons besides the Father, i. e. to ascribe the character of the first cause, of self-existence,



existence, to beings who are caused; or, according to the orthodox style, to the son, who is begotten of the Father, and to the holy spirit, which proceedeth from both.

Another consequence of this doctrine, he also remarks, is, that it is a stumbling-block to the ancient people of God, the jews, and is a bar to their reception of christianity, “For they, having formerly smarted for their idolatry, are now grown exceeding cautious of a tenet looking that way.” He concludes with remonstrating on the effect which the doctrine of the trinity has, in impeding the accomplishment of the prophecy long since delivered by Zechariah, ch. xiv. 9. “In that day the Lord shall be one, and his name ONE.” Whereas, the partisans of this doctrine contend, that the Lord is three, calling him *Deum trinum*; and that his name is not *One*, but three; even the Father, the son, and the holy ghost.

Having thus freely arraigned the common doctrine of the trinity, the author, in the following treatise, states and endeavours to establish his own ideas on the subject. This he does under the form of six articles or propositions, each of which is separately illustrated by a full discussion of the principles it exhibits, and by a copious display of reasonings and divine authorities in proof of its truth.



A selection of the three first articles may be entertaining and instructive, as well as furnish a specimen of this performance.

I. " I believe that there is one most high God, creator of heaven and earth, and first cause of all things pertaining to our salvation, and consequently the ultimate object of our faith and worship; and that this God is none but the Father of our lord Jesus Christ, the first person of the holy trinity.

II. " I believe that there is one chief son of the most high God, or spiritual, heavenly, and perpetual lord and king, set over the church by God, and second cause of all things pertaining to our salvation, and consequently the intermediate object of our faith and worship; and that this son of the most high God is none but Jesus Christ, the second person of the holy trinity\*.

III. " I believe that Jesus Christ, to the intent he might be our brother, and have a fellow-feeling of our infirmities, and so become the more ready to help us (the consideration whereof is the greatest encouragement to piety that can be imagined), hath no other than a human nature, and therefore in this very nature is not only a person (since none but an human person can be our brother), but also our lord, yea, our God."

\* See p. 42. on the use of this word " trinity."

Were we to lay before the reader the illustrations and proofs brought forward, under every article, we must re-publish the tract at full length; yet it may be acceptable to point out some remarks which are recommended to our attention by their novelty, or importance, or force.

Under the first article he considers the text, Gen. i. 26. *Let us make man*, as addressed to the holy spirit, whom he conceives to be represented in verse 2. Pf. civ. 30. and Job xxvi. 13. as the instrument of God in the creation; upon which he starts this question: "Had the son of God, Christ Jesus, been also employed in creating Adam, would he not likewise have been mentioned in the history of the creation? Was it not as material, and altogether of as great consequence, for Moses and the jews to have known, that the son of God, Christ Jesus, was employed by God, in creating Adam, as the holy spirit."

He grants that the holy scripture attributeth creation to Christ; but then he remarks, that by the nature of the thing itself, by the circumstances of the places, and by express words, it appears that not the first but second creation, or the reduction of things into a new state or order, is meant.

He argues that Christ expressly precludes our conceiving of him as the creator of Adam, when

he ascribes it to another being, Matt. 19. 14. in that description, *HE that made them*. He considers this notion as totally incompatible with the language of Peter and Paul concerning Christ: the former speaking of him as *fore-ordained*, or *fore-known* before the foundation of the world; which can be said only of things that are to come, and are not already in being. The latter, Rom. v. 14. describing *Adam as the type of him that was to come*, or as the greek, *was to be*, μελλοντος. Could Adam be a type of a being already existing? or was the creator of Adam yet to be; as yet to exist? or can it be said of any one, that *he is to be*, when he is already in being.

Under the second article, he argues that Phil. 2. 5. cannot be understood to speak of what is called the incarnation; because the apostle exhorting the Philippians to humility, from the example of Christ, must be supposed to draw his argument from some instance that was conspicuous, and had been visible to sight and contemplation, which the incarnation could not be. He further urges; that, in this passage, the apostle speaks of our lord only as a man.

On 1 Cor. viii. 6. *By whom are all things*, he remarks, by *all things* are not here meant all things simply, but all things pertaining to our salvation, as is evident from this, that the apostle

speaketh

speaketh of christians, and putteth an article before the word *all* in the greek; which implieth restriction \*.

In discussing the third article concerning the strict humanity of Christ, having quoted 2 Tim. ii. 5. John iii. 13. vi. 62. viii. 40. iii. 14. 15. Matt. ix. 6, 7, 8. Matt. xvi. 27, 28. Dan. vii. 13, 14. he observeth, "that the most excellent things, which are in the scripture, attributed to Christ, are attributed to him not only under the notion, but also under the very name of a *man*."

In the title of the tract, which we are reviewing, stands the word *trinity*, and it frequently occurs in the following pages, as a term adopted by the author to convey a scriptural truth. This, considering the main drift and tendency of the treatise, may surprize the reader. It may, certainly, be concluded from hence, that he had no objection to the use of the word; whether it was done with a design more easily to insinuate his ideas of the scripture doctrine on this point, viz. that it consisteth of *one God, one lord, and one spirit*; or whether it proceedeth from the mere force of early habit, which often last of all permits us to give up words, though we may long before have discarded the ideas generally affixed to them.

And thus he aid to (bring) his power to  
 \* διὰ τῆς πάλαι.

But



But it is not duly considered that the use of words, to which custom has long affixed a peculiar sense, will continue to awaken in the mind those ideas which they have generally been employed to express; and that the force of the old meaning will prevail over any gloss or interpretation, with which we may accompany them. Would we get rid of error, we must lay aside the *terms* under which it has been clothed, as well as explode the ideas themselves. At least this should be done with respect to such terms as, like the word "trinity," have no sanction from the language of scripture, but are surely human inventions.

Mr. Biddle's confession of faith was soon succeeded by another tract, entitled, *THE TESTIMONIES of Iræneus, Justin Martyr, Novatianus, Theophilus* (who lived the two first centuries after Christ was born, or thereabouts) as also *Arnobius, Lactantius, Eusebius, Hilary, and Brightman*; concerning that one God and the persons of HOLY TRINITY. Together with observations on the same, printed at London.

It may appear inconsistent with the avowed principles of Mr. Biddle, who professed to derive his sentiments solely from the scriptures, that he should make an appeal to human testimonies. The reason and propriety of his adopting this mode

mode of arguing are stated by himself at the close of this piece.

“ Those human testimonies above-written have I alledged, not that I much regard them as to myself (who make use of no other *rule* to determine controversies about religion, than the *scripture*; and of no other authentic *interpreter*, if a scruple arise concerning the sense of scripture, than *reason*) but for the sake of the adversaries, who continually crake *the fathers, the fathers*. And though such of them as dissent from the church of Rome, lay aside this plea, when they have to do with papists about sundry points of controversy; yet do they take it up again, in a manner waving the scripture, when they argue with me.

“ For it is apparent that the fathers of the two first centuries, or thereabouts, when the judgments of christians were yet free, and not enslaved with the determinations of councils, asserted the Father only to be that one God, and so were in the main right as to the faith concerning the HOLY TRINITY, however they went awry in imagining two natures in Christ, which came to pass, (as we before hinted) partly because they were great admirers of Plato, and accordingly (as Justus Lipsius somewhere saith) did in *outward profession so put on Christ*, as that in heart they did *not put off Plato*, wittily applying his high notions



tions, touching the creation of the world, to what was simply and plainly spoken of the man Christ Jesus, in relation to the gospel by the apostle John ; partly that they might thereby avoid the scandal of worshipping a *crucified man*, a thing then very odious amongst the jews and pagans, and now amongst deluded christians \*.”

Amongst other passages cited by Mr. Biddle from the ancient christian writers; is that from Justin Martyr, lately quoted by Dr. Priestley, whose inferences from it have been controverted by his opponents. It may therefore be acceptable to the reader, if we lay before him Mr. Biddle's translation of the passage, and remarks on it.

“ *Nevertheless, O TRYPHON, said I, this remaineth safe, that such a one is the Christ of God, although I cannot demonstrate that he was, before, the son of the maker of all things, being a god, and was born a man by the virgin, it being every way demonstrated that he is the Christ of God, whosever otherwise he shall be found to be. But if I shall not demonstrate that he did pre-exist, and according to the counsel of the Father endured to be born a man of like affections with us, being endued with flesh, it is just and fit to say that I am mis-*

\* The Testimonies, &c. printed in 12mo. p. 83, 84. or Unitarian tracts, 4to. v. 1. tract 4. p. 30.

taken in this only, and not to deny that he is the Christ, if he appear to be a man born of men, and to become the Christ by election.

“ For there are some dear friends, said I, of our kind, who confess him to be the Christ, yet hold him to be a man born of men. To whom I assent not; no, though very many of the same opinion with me should speak it, since we are commanded by Christ himself not to hearken to the doctrines of men, but to such things as have been promulgated by the prophets of happy memory, and taught by himself.

“ And TRYPHON replied, They that say he was a man, and according to election anointed and made Christ, methinks speak more probably, than you who say such things as you relate. For all we expect that the Christ shall be a man of men.”

On this passage Mr. Biddle offers some strictures. “ Observe here,” christian reader, “ that Justin Martyr did not think it inconsistent that Jesus should be the Christ, although he had no other than the human nature. Secondly, that divers christians, whom Justin himself owned for such, for he saith that they were of the same kind, and opinion with him, did then *de facto* affirm that Jesus, whom they counted the Christ, had none but a human nature. Both which were in the succeeding age by Athanasius, and since by other

other such furious zealots, stiffly denied, and he pronounced utterly incapable of eternal life, who should not believe, not only that Christ had another nature, but (what neither Justin Martyr, nor any other of the christians, who lived in the two first centuries, and whose works are extant, ever did affirm) that that other nature was the very nature of the most high God. Thirdly, that the jews (who would be happy, were their opinion, concerning the kingdom of Christ, as true as that they hold concerning his nature) did not believe that the Christ who was to come, should be other than a man\*."

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## SECTION VI.

*A cruel ordinance obtained against Mr. Biddle.*

IT is not supposable that these pieces of Mr. Biddle could be published without drawing a great odium on their author, or that this attack on prevailing and established opinions, could be made without raising indignation against him. At that

\* Testimonies, p. 24, &c. ed. in 12mo. or, Unitarian tracts, v. i. tract iv. page 9, 10, 18.

time the supreme power was solely in the hands of the parliament, the episcopalian hierarchy had been overturned, and in the room of it had succeeded a presbyterian and ecclesiastical government, the high court of which sat at Westminster, and consisted of an assembly of divines. These took the alarm at the appearance of Mr. Biddle's writings; and, instead of applying themselves to the refutation of his sentiments by a candid and solid answer to his arguments, they applied to the civil power, and supplied the defect of their own exertions by recourse to its commanding terrors. They preferred the carnal to the spiritual weapon, and found a more expeditious and popular remedy against the rise of heresy, in the use of the sword, than in that of the pen.

They accordingly solicited the interference of the parliament, and prevailed with it to pass an ordinance for the punishing of blasphemies and heresies; from which Mr. Biddle's life was in great danger; for though it took a wide compass, and was formed to reach a variety of opinions, yet it was evidently pointed, in particular, against the notions which he had advanced.

This ordinance was directly pointed against such as, in any mode, should not only deny the being, omnipresence, fore-knowledge, almighty power, holiness and eternity of God; but who

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should

should, by preaching, printing, or writing, controvert the deity of the son, or of the holy spirit, or the equality of Christ with the Father, or the distinction of two natures, the godhead and humanity, or the sinless perfection of his humanity, and the meritorioufness of his death in behalf of believers ; or that any of the books, commonly deemed canonical, were not the word of God. It pronounced those, who offended in any of these instances, guilty of felony, and doomed them, if convicted on confession, or on the oaths of two witnesses, before two justices, to imprisonment, without bail or mainprize, until the next gaol-delivery, when the witnesses were bound to give evidence, and the party were to be indicted for feloniously publishing and maintaining such error. It then enacted, that in case the indictment should be found, and the party on his trial should not abjure the same error, and maintenance and defence of the same, he should suffer *the pains* of DEATH, as in case of felony, without benefit of clergy.

It appointed the same process, and decreed the same sentence against those who had been formerly indicted on the same grounds, and after having abjured their error, should again publish and maintain the same.

If the sanction by which this ordinance enforced



forced other determinations, wore a milder aspect, what was wanting in the severity of its sentence, was counterbalanced by the rigour with which it extended and multiplied its decisions. To maintain and publish that all men should be saved; that man hath by nature free will to turn to God; that the soul dieth or sleepeth after the body is dead; that revelations or workings of the spirit are a rule of faith; that man is bound to believe no more than by his reason he can comprehend; that the two sacraments of baptism and the lord's supper, are not ordinances commanded by the word of God; that baptising infants is unlawful, or such baptism is void, and that such persons ought to be baptised again, and in pursuance thereof shall baptise any person formerly baptised; that the observation of the lord's day, as it is enjoined by the laws and ordinances of this realm, is not according to, or is contrary to, the word of God; or that it is not lawful to join in public prayer or family prayer, or to teach children to pray; or that the churches of England are no more churches, nor their ministers and ordinances true ministers and ordinances; or that the church government by presbytery is unlawful, or antichristian; or that magistracy, or the power of the civil magistrate by law established in England, is unlawful, or that all use of arms, though for the public defence, (and



though the cause be never so just) is unlawful. To advance or maintain any of these opinions incurred, by this ordinance, imprisonment till the party should find two sufficient sureties, before two justices of the peace, one of them to be of the quorum, that he would not publish or maintain the same error or errors any more\*.

The enumeration of the opinions condemned by this ordinance (some of which are omitted in this review) is so minute, and full and pointed, as plainly to speak this language: "Our principles form an unerring standard, and not any deviation from it, in one instance, is or shall be admitted." No decree of any councils, no bull of any pope could be more dogmatical, or authoritative; few, if any, have been more sanguinary.

Besides the severity of the penalties, which it denounced, the mode of process which it appointed was arbitrary and repugnant to the constitution of this country in particular, as well as opposite to

\* See Crosby's History of the english baptists, vol. 1. p. 199. 205. or British biography, vol. 6. p. 82. 84. This ordinance is also preserved in "A Collection of acts and ordinances of general use, made in the parliament begun and held at Westminster, the 3d of November, 1648, and since unto the adjournment of the parliament begun and holden the 17th of September, 1656, being a continuation of that work from the end of Poulton's collection." By Henry Scobell, esq. clerk of the parliament. Folio 1658.

the general principles of equity and justice : for it allowed neither the privilege of a jury, nor the liberty of an appeal. Such is the operation of religious bigotry.

The truth, indeed is, that bigotry, though never amiable nor reasonable, is comparatively an harmless thing, when it exists only in individuals who are not armed with the power of the sword, nor can act with an united and combined influence and authority. The alliance of the church with the state, gives the sting to this intolerant and baneful temper ; and it matters little, whether the leaders in the church support the rank of bishops, or move only in the humble post of presbyters.

Both episcopacy and presbyterianism “ adopt one grand error, productive of two great evils, which generate ten thousand more, all nefarious. The great and fountain error is the considering of *conscience*, as a subject of human government. This notion produces two great evils. 1. LEGISLATION ; now all human legislation is oppressive to conscience, and it is immaterial where this power is lodged. It is TYRANNY any where. 2. Enforcing laws made by Jesus, by penal sanctions. In popery and episcopacy both the legislative and executive power are lodged in the same person. Presbyterianism is exactly like them, and only swears the civil magistrate to do the worst part

of the work. From these two evils, making laws for conscience and then executing them, or executing laws made by Jesus Christ, by coercive measures, proceed confusion and every evil work \*."

The conduct of the presbyterians, during the short period, when they were in alliance with the supreme powers of this country, verifies the truth of these remarks. In reference to *their* measures, Milton had every reason to say with satirical poignancy, "New presbyter is but old priest wrote large."

For the ordinance, now before us, was only one, out of several public acts, that breathed the same intolerant, dogmatical spirit; and had the same baneful aspect on the inquiries of the candid, and on the rights of conscience.

The fact is, that the question concerning the rights of conscience, had not been brought into a discussion; or, at least, the inquiry was only in its infancy. The object of contest, between the episcopalians and presbyterians, had been, not to establish and enlarge the general liberty, but to gain power to themselves, and to give security to their own professions and opinions, under an idea

\* Robinson's Plan of lectures on the principles of nonconformity. 5th ed. 1781. p. 39, 40.

that

that their own creed, their own mode of worship alone, was scriptural; and, when established, was to be maintained and protected by all the efforts of authority.

In the course of the contest, the presbyterians, for a few years, gained the superiority. All those measures were then right, which before they felt to be unjust and oppressive; because now they were used in the cause of God and truth. Power blinded and corrupted *them*, as it had done before the episcopalians. "An ecclesiastical hierarchy," in every nation, in every age, under all civil revolutions, has been inimical to truth, and a bar to reformation.

In Scotland the presbyterian hierarchy is meliorated by its neighbourhood to this country, and its union with the episcopalian hierarchy under the same king. But in Geneva, and in Holland, where it reigns, exempt from the influence and controul of a different and powerful body of men, it is by no means favourable to liberty and free inquiry. The severity of the placarts, in the latter of these countries, has been a bar to the translation of the *Memoirs of the life and writings* of Faustus Socinus into Dutch. No bookseller there having the courage to appear as the publisher of it. At Dort, the translation of Dr. Priestley's *History of the corruptions of christianity* has been strictly prohibited.



prohibited. And it may, on good information, be asserted, that the sermons of the established clergy of Holland have, in general, little of any moral instruction; but the strain of them is dogmatical and intolerant.

It is an honour to the english protestant dissenters of this day, and a ground of devout thankfulness, that presbyterianism hath no existence amongst them. They who, very improperly, are called presbyterians, as consistent protestants, and as genuine advocates for liberty, have no rivals, and but few equals\*.

But it is time to drop this subject, and to return to Mr. Biddle, to whom, it was expected that the ordinance, which has led us into these reflexions, would have proved fatal. Had it been more confined in its direction, it could scarcely have failed of being destructive to him. But its force was directed to so many objects, and so various, that it would have involved, in the execution of its sentence, many whom not only policy taught, but necessity constrained, them to spare. For, in the army, from which quarter the authority of parliament met with considerable opposi-

\* See to this effect the animated and eloquent discourses delivered before the friends of the New Academy at Manchester, in 1786, particularly Mr. Harrison's sermon, p. 25, &c.

tion, numbers, both of soldiers and officers, were liable to the severities of this act. On this account, and because there was a dissension in the parliament itself, it lay unregarded for several years.

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## SECTION VII.

Mr. Biddle's *Sufferings from 1648 to 1651. His subsequent enlargement and improvement of it.*

THOUGH the circumstances noticed in the close of the last section enervated, to a great degree, the force of that shocking ordinance, which was aimed at Mr. Biddle's life, yet he suffered for several years, the miseries of a severe imprisonment. It derived, however, some mitigation, and indeed, enlargement through the death of Charles I.

In the subsequent confusion of the times, arising from the opposition that the commonwealth met with from the royalists, the scots and the irish, and from the conduct of the presbyterians towards the new government, the attention of the parliament and of the presbyterians was naturally drawn off from religious disputes to the establishment of their power and influence in the political scale.

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The parliament also interfered with explicit and direct exertions in favour of toleration.

For Cromwell, before he embarked for Ireland, which he was appointed to reduce, sent letters to the parliament, urging the repeal of all the penal laws relating to religion. His application was supported by a petition from general Fairfax, and his council of officers, praying that all penal statutes formerly made, whereby many conscientious people were molested, might be removed. This petition was favourably received, and, after some time, passed into a law.

Though it does not appear that Mr. Biddle, in consequence of this, was dismissed from prison by a legal and official discharge, yet, for the present, these measures were favourable to him. His keeper allowed him more liberty, and permitted him, upon security being given, even to go into Staffordshire. Here the obloquy and confinement, which he had suffered, were, in some degree, soothed and counterbalanced, by the patronage and kindness of a justice of the peace, who received him into his house, courteously entertained him, made him his chaplain, and appointed him to be a preacher of a church in that county, and at his death left him a legacy; which was a very seasonable supply to him, as he had already spent nearly all his substance in about four years charge-  
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able restraint\*. One regrets, that the memoirs of Mr. Biddle have not perpetuated the name of the gentleman who acted this excellent part. He evidenced a laudable superiority to vulgar prejudices, in not being ashamed of this persecuted man; and he manifested a christian benevolence and fortitude, in affording to him his patronage, and in ministring to his wants. It is a pleasing thought, that though the names of those who perform such good deeds, should be lost to the world, they are on everlasting record in the books of heaven.

Mr. Biddle was not long permitted to enjoy the ease and comfort of his friendly asylum, for sir John Bradshaw, president of the council of state, being informed of his retreat, issued out orders for his being recalled, and more strictly confined. In this long confinement, which lasted to February, 1651, what proved most grievous to him, was that by reason of his lying under the imputation of blasphemy and heresy, the minds of people were either so alienated from him, or so intimidated with an apprehension of incurring the same odium, should they shew him any kind and respectful attention, that he was cut off from all the intercourses of life, and could hardly have

\* British Biography, v. 6. p. 85.

any one to converse with. In particular, no divine, except Mr. Peter Gunning, afterwards bishop of Ely, during his seven years confinement, ever paid him a visit, not even to attempt to convince him of his errors. A good man, suffering for conscience and his love of truth, must be very sensibly affected with a treatment, which expresses not only neglect, but contempt and hatred.

A worthy successor to Mr. Biddle, in the like sufferings, and for the same cause, the excellent Mr. Emlyn, felt the full force of this trial. "During this more than two whole years imprisonment," says he, "my former acquaintance (how intimate soever before) were altogether estranged from me, and all offices of civility in a manner ceased; especially among them of superior rank, though a few of the plainer tradesmen of my own people were more compassionate and kind. O! my God, what a change hast thou made in my outward condition! I had a tolerable esteem, and a multitude of friends, but am now become their scorn and bye-word, and my acquaintance and friends stand afar off\*."

Thus bigotry cancels the bonds of life, and heretical pravity is looked on as more criminal

\* Emlyn's Works, vol. 1. p. 36. 4th ed. 1746. Memoirs of his life, p. 32.

than the most heinous acts of immorality. A robber and a murderer is treated according to the rights of humanity, and is indulged with the visit of sympathy and friendship, which is denied to the man who deviates from the prevailing faith, though his character in every other respect is blameless and excellent; denied by those, who profess a religion which inculcates *visiting the prisoner*, as an expression of respect, of attachment, and gratitude, to its great author. But so it pleaseth providence, that the cup of which the sufferer for righteousness sake partaketh, should be mingled with every bitter ingredient, to try his faith, to exalt his virtue, and to shew the power of truth, surmounting, in the end, every evil and difficulty.

In the experience of Mr. Biddle, poverty was added to imprisonment and the neglect of mankind. Notwithstanding the recruit which his fortune had received from the legacy just mentioned, his substance, in the course of seven years confinement, was all spent, and he was reduced to such indigence, that, unable to pay for the ordinary repast of the table, he was glad, says his biographer, “of the cheaper support of drinking, a draught of milk from the cow, morning and evening.”

When he was reduced to this situation, and had been so long precluded from all the means of

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support,

support, which the benevolence of others, or his own industry, might supply, divine providence did not leave him to perish through want, but opened for him an unexpected resource. Mr. Roger Daniel, a printer, of London, formed at that time the design of publishing a new and most accurate edition of the greek version of the old Testament, called the Septuagint. At the recommendation of a learned man, he employed Mr. Biddle to correct the impression, knowing full well, says Mr. Wood, that Biddle was an exact grecian, and had time enough to follow it. This was an employment not only seasonable, but most acceptable to Mr. Biddle, “ whose delight,” observes the writer of his life, “ was in the law of God. This, and another employment of a more private nature, did, for some time, furnish him with a comfortable subsistence\*.”

In the year 1651, such public measures were taken, as, by their operation, were favourable to our virtuous sufferer; for the parliament published an act of indemnity for all crimes; with a few exceptions, which did not reach the case of those who were confined for advancing and disseminating what were deemed heretical opinions. This act restored, among others, Mr. Biddle to full liberty.

\* Wood's *Athenæ Oxonienses*. Art. Biddle.



In consequence of the pieces he had published, and of the severe proceedings against him, it appears, that an attention to the general question was awakened; and some had been made converts to his principles, particularly in London. The liberty which he now obtained, was improved by his meeting, on every Lord's day, with those friends he had gained in the city, for the purpose of expounding the scriptures, and discoursing thereon.

The principle, on which Mr. Biddle and his adherents first formed themselves into a distinct and separate society was, that the *unity of God is an unity of person as well as nature*; that the holy spirit is indeed a person, but not God. The object of their religious association was to exert their endeavours, that the honour of almighty God should not be transferred to another. For, as Mr. Biddle urges, in a piece before quoted, "God is jealous of his honour, and will not give it to another; we, therefore, as beloved children, should imitate our heavenly Father herein, and not, upon any pretence whatsoever, depart from his express command, and give the worship of the supreme Lord of heaven and earth to him whom the scripture nowhere affirmeth to be God."

Mr. Biddle's society, emancipated from the restraints of an establishment, and assembling toge-



ther, not only for the purpose of divine worship, but for freely investigating theological questions, adopted some other discriminating notions. Such as these; “ that the fathers under the old covenant had only temporal promises; that saving faith consisted in universal obedience performed to the commands of God and Christ; that Christ rose again only by the power of his Father, not his own; that *justifying faith* is not the pure gift of God, but may be acquired by men’s natural abilities; that faith cannot believe any thing contrary to, or above reason; that there is no *original sin*; that Christ hath not the same body now in glory, in which he suffered and rose again; that the saints shall not have the same body in heaven which they had on earth; that Christ was not *lord* or *king* before his resurrection, or *priest* before his ascension; that the saints shall not, before the day of judgment, enjoy the bliss of heaven; that God doth not certainly know future contingencies; that there is not any authority of fathers or general councils in determining matters of faith; that Christ before his death had not any dominion over the angels; and that Christ, by dying, made no satisfaction for us\*.”

\* See the Preface to Sir Peter Pett’s Happy future state of England; as quoted by Mosheim’s translator. Mosheim’s Ecclesiastical history, vol. v. p. 56. note (rr) of the 2d edition in octavo, 1767.

The members of this society were called from Mr. Biddle, their head and pastor, "bidellians;" and from their agreement in opinion, concerning the unity of God, and the humanity of Christ, with the followers of Socinus, they were denominated "socinians." "They followed indeed, at first, Mr. Biddle (as he espoused the tenets of Socinus) but so, that as soon as there appeared better light, (to use a scripture phrase) *they rejoiced in it.*" The name which most properly characterised their leading sentiment and detachment from an implicit adherence to any teacher, was that of "unitarians."

This was the rise of the *english unitarians*, to whose honour it was said, that "besides an acuteness and dexterity of thought, they were excellently learned, especially in sacred criticism." But "that which most commended them, was the freedom and sincerity, which they all along practised, in judging of the controverted articles of religion."

It is justice to the worthy persons themselves, and useful to posterity and the cause of truth, to perpetuate, if possible, the names of those who have been its patrons and advocates, or sufferers for it; and who, by their exertions, though not by their pen, have contributed to the spread of religious knowledge and free inquiry. We regret

it, that of those who were Mr. Biddle's friends, and members of the church which he raised, only two names have been preserved to us, those of Mr. Nathaniel Stuckey and Mr. Thomas Firmin.

The first was a young gentleman, eminent for his distinguished parts and early piety. He was born in 1649. At the age of fifteen he published a latin translation of Mr. Biddle's scripture catechism, for the use of foreigners; and in the next year 1665, he printed a latin version of Mr. Biddle's *Brief catechism for children*; to which he annexed an oration of his own, in the same language, on the sufferings and death of Christ\*. This young man died at the age of seventeen†.

\* To this edition of Mr. Biddle's catechetical pieces was also subjoined, a letter addressed to him by Jeremiah Felbinger, a zealous unitarian, who was born in Silesia, but having been obliged often to change his residence on account of his sentiments, died in Amsterdam, where he supported himself by the care of a school, and correcting the press. The purport of the letter just mentioned, was to express his joy in the acquisition of such a man to the party of the antitrinitarians; and to convey his earnest wishes, supported by various arguments, that he would go on to exert himself in the same cause, and would disseminate the sentiments he adopted, not only in England, but in the new world. Vide Fr. Sam. Back *Historia antitrinitariorum*, vol. 1. 8vo. 1776. Art. Felbingerius.

† Sandii *Bibliotheca antitrinitariorum*. Art. Bidellius & Felbingerius.

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But the greatest honour and support were derived to Mr. Biddle and his cause from the friendship and exertions of Mr. Thomas Firmin, the friend and intimate of the doctors Outram, Whichcote and Worthington, and of the bishops Wilkins, Tillotson and Fowler; a man of eminent piety and superior virtue; who, for active and generous benevolence, has had few equals in any age. Bishop Burnet says of him, that “he was in great esteem for promoting many charitable designs, for looking after the poor of the city, and setting them to work: for raising great sums for schools and hospitals, and indeed for charities of all sorts, private and public. He had such credit with the richest citizens, that he had the command of great wealth as often as there was occasion for it\*.” His time was devoted to benevolent exertions; his fortune was laid out in liberal munificent deeds. The hospitals of St. Thomas and of Christ particularly felt the influence, and continue to enjoy the good effects, of his generosity and activity. In the cloister of the latter, a marble records and perpetuates the praises of his wonderful zeal and charity†.

\* Bishop Burnett’s History of his own times, v. 3. octavo, p. 292.

† For a full account of his most useful and generous deeds, see his life written by “one of his most intimate acquaintance,” and more lately by Mr. Cornish,

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Mr. Firmin, besides being the personal friend of Mr. Biddle, continued, after his decease, and until after the revolution, with much vigour and assiduity, to promote the reception of his opinions. He encouraged many publications in defence of the unity of God, which he dispersed over the nation, distributing them freely to all who would accept of them. He had a particular concern in the publication of several volumes of unitarian tracts in quarto, which issued forth from the press about the time of the revolution.

Mr. Firmin was a very young man when Mr. Biddle's society was first formed; and it does not appear that it subsisted after the death of its founder, who did not attempt to bring his friends into such close bonds of union, as would preserve them a distinct community after his removal. The force of the testimony, which was borne to the doctrine of the divine unity by the writings of the unitarians, could not but be greatly diminished by the dissolution of Mr. Biddle's society. It is to be lamented, that Mr. Firmin, in particular, did not exert himself to keep together this body of unitarians, or that, if, as one would hope, he did take some steps with this design, they were not successful.



## SECTION VIII.

*Mr. Biddle's Dispute with Dr. Gunning, and  
Publication of his Catechism.*

WHILE Mr. Biddle and his friends enjoyed the liberty of holding religious assemblies, Dr. Gunning, afterwards regius professor of divinity at Cambridge, and bishop of Ely, who had visited Mr. Biddle in prison, and was eminent as a learned man, and as a ready acute disputant, came on a lord's day, in the year 1654, to their meeting, accompanied with some learned friends. His conduct soon explained his intentions and views, that they were, not to be an hearer of Mr. Biddle, and a witness of the order of his worship, but publicly and before his own adherents, to confound and confute him. For he commenced a disputation with him, on the first time, concerning the deity of the holy spirit; and then, on the next lord's day, concerning the supreme deity of Christ. The disputation was carried on in the syllogistic mode, and they took their turns of responding and opposing.

Mr. Biddle was evidently taken at a great disadvantage, as he was suddenly surpris'd into a debate, without any preparation for it. But this circum-



circumstance contributed to display both his furniture and abilities, and to shew how much he had studied the questions, and was master of the argument. For his biographer informs us, that Mr. Biddle acquitted himself with so much learning, judgment, and knowledge in the sense of the holy scriptures, that instead of losing, he gained much credit both to himself and his cause, as even some of the gentlemen of Dr. Gunning's party had the ingenuity to acknowledge\*."

But the doctor, unwilling to sit down as foiled, or presuming on his own superiority in another question, surprised Mr. Biddle a third time, and finding him in the discussion of the argument against the satisfaction of punitive justice by the death of Christ, he defended that sentiment with great vigour. But on this, as on the former occasions, he met with a skilful and dexterous opponent; which he had the generosity afterwards to confess.

This method of attack, by intruding unawares, upon a religious society, and interrupting their worship, or by discussing controverted points in a public disputation, hath, very properly, been laid aside, and given way, in our more liberal age, to the use of the pen. There was a rudeness and a

\* Unitarian tracts. Biddle's life, p 6, 7.

violence in it, from which modern politeness is justly averse; and it favoured more of the spirit of contention, and an eagerness for victory, than of the love of truth. Yet public disputation was a mode of opposing supposed error, generally practised through Europe, from the time of the reformation till the close of the last century. Whatever advantage might arise from such public discussion of theological questions, by awakening the attention of men, and exciting them to think and inquire on subjects, to which perhaps they would not, otherwise, have turned their thoughts: yet they were productive of much evil, by inflaming the spirits of men. They thus tended to beget in some a dislike, and in others a contempt of religious debate; while the prevailing party took occasion to triumph with all the insolence of power.

But to return—this year of Mr. Biddle's life was distinguished more by the publication of two *catechetical* pieces, than by his public disputations with Dr. Gunning. They were entitled, “A  
 “ Two-fold catechism; the one simply called *A*  
 “ *Scripture catechism*; the other *A Brief scrip-*  
 “ *ture catechism* for children; wherein the chiefest  
 “ points of the christian religion, being question-  
 “ wise proposed, resolve themselves by pertinent  
 “ answers taken word for word out of the scrip-  
 “ ture, without either consequences or comments.

“ Composed

“ Composed for their sakes that would fain be  
 “ *mere christians*, and not of this or that sect, in-  
 “ asmuch as all the sects of christians, by what  
 “ names soever distinguished, have more or less  
 “ departed from the simplicity and truth of the  
 “ scripture.” The discriminating title of the  
 other runs, *A Brief scripture catechism for chil-*  
*drēn*; wherein, notwithstanding the brevity there-  
 of, all things necessary unto life and godliness are  
 contained. By John Biddle, master of arts, of  
 the university of Oxford.

In the preface to the first of these, Mr. Biddle  
 complains, that all catechisms were generally so fil-  
 led with the suppositions and traditions of men;  
 that “ the least part of them was derived from the  
 word of God.” For, says he, “ when councils,  
 convocations, and assemblies of divines, juggling  
 the sacred writers out of their place in the church,  
 had once framed articles and confessions of faith  
 according to their own fancies and interests, and  
 the civil magistrate had by his authority ratified the  
 same, all catechisms were afterwards fitted to those  
 articles and confessions, and the scripture either  
 wholly omitted, or brought in, only for a shew, not  
 one quotation amongst many being a whit to the  
 purpose, as will appear to any man of judgment;  
 who taking into his hands the said catechisms,  
 shall examine the texts alledged in them; for if he  
 do

do this diligently and impartially, he will find the scripture and those catechisms to be “at so wide a distance from one another, that he will begin to question, whether the catechists gave any heed at all to what they wrote, and did not only themselves refuse to make use of their reason, but presume that their readers also would do the same.”

To prevent the evils of this method, Mr. Biddle professes, that, according to the understanding he had obtained by continual meditation on the word of God, he had compiled his scripture catechism; in which he himself asserted nothing, but only introduced the scripture faithfully uttering its own assertions, which all christians confess to be of undoubted truth.

Mr. Biddle, aware that his catechism would exhibit sentiments contrary to the current opinion of the age, cautions his reader against taking offence at them. “Take heed that thou fall not foul upon them, for thou canst not do so, without falling upon the holy scripture itself, inasmuch as all the answers throughout the whole catechism are faithfully transcribed out of it, and rightly applied to the questions, as thou thyself mayest perceive, if thou shalt make a diligent inspection into the several texts, with all their circumstances.”

He was apprehensive that objection would

he made to the design for which some texts were cited, viz. that they ought to be understood figuratively ; he protests therefore against putting figurative interpretations on the scripture, without express warrant of the scripture itself, as a method of interpretation subject to no certain rule, and which might be applied to the support of any absurdity. “ Certainly, might we of our own heads, argues he, figuratively interpret the scripture ; when the letter is neither repugnant to our senses, nor to the scope of respective texts, nor to a greater number of plain texts to the contrary, (for in such cases we must of necessity admit figures in the sacred volume, as well as we do in profane ones, otherwise both they and it will clash either with themselves, or with our senses, which the scripture itself intimates to be of infallible certainty, see 1 John 1, 2, 3.) might we, I say, at our pleasure, impose our figures and allegories on the plain words of God, the scripture would in very deed be, what some blasphemously assert it, a *nose of wax*.

His reflexions on the confusion of language introduced into the christian religion, by the invention of intricate and unscriptural terms and phrases, which are not understood, either by the people, or by those that invented them, deserve attention. “ Wherefore, says he, there is no possibility to reduce the christian religion to its primitive

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tive integrity, (a thing he observes, never sincerely attempted, even in the reformed churches, since men have, by severe penalties, been hindered from proceeding further than did Luther or Calvin) but by cashiering those many intricate terms, and devised forms of speaking, imposed on our religion, and by wholly betaking ourselves to the plainness of the scripture. For I have long since observed, (and find my observation to be true and certain) that when, to express matters of religion, men make use of words and phrases unheard of in the scripture, they slily under them couch false doctrines, and obtrude them on us; for without question the doctrines of the scripture can be so aptly explained in no language, as that of scripture itself."

After a full enumeration of various terms, introduced into theology, Mr. Biddle remarks: "After Constantine the Great, together with the council of Nice, had once deviated from the language of the scripture in the business touching the son of God, calling him co-essential with the Father; this opened a gap for others afterwards, under a pretence of guarding the truth from heretics, to devise new terms at pleasure, which did by degrees so vitiate the chastity and simplicity of our faith delivered in the scripture, that there hardly remained so much as one point thereof sound and entire. So that as it was wont to be disputed in



the schools, whether the old ship of Theseus (which had in a manner been wholly altered at sundry times, by the accession of new pieces of timber upon the decay of the old) were the same ship it had been at first, and not rather another by degrees substituted in the stead thereof. In like manner, there was so much of the primitive truth worn away by the corruption, that did by little and little overspread the generality of christians, and so many errors instead thereof tacked to our religion at several times, that one might justly question, whether it were the same religion with that which Christ and his apostles taught, and not another since devised by men, and put in the room thereof.

“ But thanks be to God, through our lord Jesus Christ, who, amidst the universal corruption of our religion, hath preserved his written word entire, (for had men corrupted it, they would have made it speak more favourably in behalf of their lusts and worldly interests, than it doth) which word, if we with diligence and sincerity pry into, resolving to embrace the doctrine that is there plainly delivered, though all the world should set itself against us for so doing, we shall easily discern the truth, and so be able to reduce our religion to its first principles.

“ For thus much I perceive by my own experience,

rience, who being otherwise of no great abilities, yet setting myself with the aforesaid resolution, for sundry years together, upon an impartial search of the scripture, have not only detected many errors, but presented the readers with a body of religion, exactly transcribed out of the word of God; which body, whosoever shall well ruminare and digest in his mind, may, by the same method wherein I have gone before him, make a further inquiry into the oracles of God, and draw forth whatsoever yet lies hid, and being brought to light, will tend to the accomplishment of godliness amongst us, for at this only all the scripture aimeth: I say the scripture, which all men, who have thoroughly studied the same, must of necessity be enamoured with, as breathing out the mere wisdom of God, and being the exactest rule of a holy life (which all religions whatsoever confess to be the way unto happiness) that can be imagined, and whose divinity will never, even to the world's end, be questioned by any but such as are unwilling to deny their worldly lusts, and obey the pure and perfect precepts. Which obedience, whosoever shall perform, he shall not only in the life to come, but even in this life, be equal to the angels."

Mr. Biddle's *scripture catechism*, which is introduced by these reflexions, is divided into twenty-

four chapters ; comprising a system of speculative and practical theology. The subjects are, of the holy scripture, or word of God ; of God ; of the creation ; of Christ Jesus ; of the holy ghost ; of salvation by Christ ; of Christ's mediation ; of Christ's prophetic office ; of remission of sins by Christ ; of Christ's kingly office ; of Christ's priestly office ; of Christ's death ; of the universality of God's love ; of Christ's resurrection ; of justification and faith ; of keeping the commandments, and having an eye to the reward ; of perfection in virtue and godliness to be attained, and of departing from righteousness and faith ; of the duty of subjects and magistrates ; wives and husbands, children and parents, servants and masters ; of the behaviour of men and women in general, and in special, of aged men, aged women, young women and young men ; of prayer ; of the church ; of the government and discipline of the church ; of baptism ; of the lord's supper ; of the resurrection of the dead, and the last judgement ; and what shall be the final condition of the righteous and the wicked thereupon.

This piece, though drawn up purely in the words of scripture, was formed with a pointed reference to the opinions, which he conceived had no foundation in the scriptures ; and many of his quotations were so constructed as to introduce the

texts

texts which appeared, explicitly and plainly, to stand in contrast with those sentiments. For instance,

In the chapter on GOD, there is this general question concerning the love of the divine Being: Could we love him with *all the heart*, if he were *three*? Or is his *Oneness* the cause hinted by Moses, why we should love him thus? How sound the words according to the truth of the hebrew text? See Ainsworth's translation.

Answer.—“Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is ONE.” Deut. vi. 4.

In the chapter on the kingly office of Christ, there is another example of this pointed reference, viz. “Ought men to honour the son as they honour the Father, because he hath the *same essence* with the Father, or because he hath the same judiciary power?” What is the decision of the son himself concerning this point? Answer. “The Father judgeth no man, but hath *committed all judgment* unto the son; that *all men should honour the son, even as they honour the Father.*” John v. 22, 23. 2. Did the Father give judiciary power to the son, because he had in him the *divine nature personally united to the human*; or because he was the *son of man*? What is the decision of the son concerning this point also? Answer. “He hath given him au-  
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thority to execute judgement, because *he is the son of man.*"

On the head of justification we meet also with some questions, close and pointed, after the same manner. E. g. 2. In the justification of a believer, is the righteousness of Christ imputed to him, or his own faith for righteousness? Ans. "To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, *his faith is counted for righteousness.*" 2. Doth not God justify men, because of the full price that *Christ* paid to him in their stead, so that he abated nothing of his right, in that one drop of *Christ's* blood is sufficient to satisfy for a thousand worlds? If not, how are they saved? Ans. "Being justified **FREELY** by his grace, through the redemption, that is in *Christ Jesus*; in whom we have redemption through his blood, the *forgiveness of sin*, according to the *riches of his grace*, Rom. iii. 24. Eph. i. 7.

Should it be thought that this mode of introducing and refuting the sentiments of others, has too much the air of controversy, perfectly to suit the design of a catechism professedly scriptural; it must be allowed to be a pertinent and forcible way of bringing into view texts that seemed to be overlooked; and of shewing that the language of the other party was totally unscriptural, and their  
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conclusions from some particular passages absolutely repugnant to the plain declarations of other texts.

The catechism which we have reviewed, was too prolix for the attention and memory of children; of this Mr. Biddle appears to have been fully sensible; for, as it has been noticed, he connected with it another catechetical composition, called, "A brief catechism for children:" "whether," he says in the preface, "in years or understanding; that they might receive true and solid information concerning the chief articles of the christian faith."

"Yea," he adds, "perhaps it may (as well as the larger catechism going before) give further light and instruction even to them, who seem to have attained a full stature in the knowledge of the gospel. For, though all the things, whether of belief or practice, that are either necessary or very profitable to the attainment of eternal life, be plainly delivered in the scripture, yet, considering in what principles christians are generally educated, it would perhaps have been impossible for them, having the eyes of their understanding so veiled with prejudicate opinions, to see what is clearly held forth in the scripture, and accordingly with ease fetched out from hence by me, who have long since discarded prejudices, and am;  
(through

(through the special favour of Jesus Christ towards me) addicted to none of those many factions in religion, whereinto the christian world hath, to its infinite hurt, been divided, but rejoice to be a *mere christian*, admitting (as I have elsewhere declared) no other rule of faith than the holy scripture, (which all christians, though otherwise at infinite variance amongst themselves in their opinions about religion, unanimously acknowledge to be the word of God,) nor any other interpreter, if a doubt arise about the meaning of the scripture, than reason; which all sober men confess to be the only principle that God hath implanted in us to judge between right and wrong, good and bad, and whereby we excel all other living creatures whatsoever."

"The lord Jesus grant, that this and the foregoing larger catechism may, by the readers, be perused as profitably, as I have willingly to that end communicated the same unto them."

The *Brief catechism* is divided into ten chapters; treating, in succession, of the scripture, or word of God; of God; of Jesus Christ; of the holy spirit and of the trinity; of the death, resurrection, ascension, and exaltation of Christ; of mortification and holiness; of the commandments, and so of love to God and men; of faith; of the church;

church ; of the resurrection of the dead ; and of the last judgment.

These catechisms alarmed the advocates for the orthodox faith ; and the authority of the scripture language and declarations, under which the writers took shelter, was insufficient to protect him from a prosecution, and his book from an ignominious censure.

The parliament condemned, in particular, these propositions : (1.) “ That God is confined to a certain place. (2.) That he has a bodily shape. (3.) That he has passions. (4.) That he is neither omnipotent nor unchangeable. (5.) That we are not to believe three persons in the Godhead. (6.) That Jesus Christ has not the nature of God, but only a divine lordship. (7.) That he was not a priest while upon earth, nor did reconcile men to God. And (8.) That there is no deity in the holy ghost\*.

Considering the very limited state of free inquiry, at that time, it is rather surprising that a ninth proposition, or ground of charge, against Mr. Biddle had not been added ; viz. the future annihilation of the wicked, or that they would not, as the godly and faithful, “ live for ever,” but be “ destroyed, corrupted, burnt up, devoured, slain, pass

\* Neal's History of the puritans, v. iv. p. 135. 8vo.

away, and perish." For he produced many texts to exhibit this view of future punishments.

The propositions, which they did deduce from these catechetical pieces, were deemed sufficient grounds for proceeding, with severity, against Mr. Biddle. A learned modern writer, who does not adopt the author's peculiar sentiments, has observed of "the scripture catechism," that it discovers an enlargement of mind, a liberality of sentiment, and a sincerity, in freely publishing what he apprehended to be truth, which do honour to his memory\*." But the age in which it was published, as we have seen, was by no means disposed to treat those compositions or writers, that discarded or opposed the prevailing faith, with candour or equity. Of which Mr. Biddle, on this occasion, had new experience.

He was brought to the bar of the house of commons, which the protector Cromwell had convened; and was examined whether he was the author of that *two-fold scripture catechism*, wherein all the questions are answered in the words of scripture at large. Mr. Biddle, to these interrogatories, wisely made a reply, which at once conveyed an appeal to the principles of equity, and expressed his just expectations from the genius of

\* Harwood, on the socinian scheme, p. 21.

the english constitution. For he answered by asking, " Whether it seemed reasonable that one brought before a judgment-seat, as a criminal, should accuse himself?" The reason, which this answer carried in it, was not admitted as a bar to the proceedings against him; but on the 3d of December he was committed close prisoner to the gate-house, and forbidden the use of pen, ink, and paper, and denied the access of any visitant.

In this case, nothing less than a capital judgment was to be expected; a bill was accordingly brought in for punishing him. In this situation Mr. Biddle preserved a composed and cheerful mind, and maintained his hope of an happy event from the providence of God, in whose cause he suffered. His hope did not fail him; for the protector, induced by reasons drawn from his own interest, dissolved the parliament; and the prisoner, after ten months imprisonment, obtained his liberty, May 28, by due course of law\*.

The resentment of government pursued the book as well as the author; for an order was issued out, that the catechism should be burnt by the hands of the common hangman; which was accordingly done on the 14th of December. This

\* Unitarian tracts, vol. i. 4to. The life of Biddle, p. 7. and British biography, vol. vi. 8vo. p. 86.



mode of casting an odium upon particular writings, hath been practised by all governments, and in all ages\*. The disgrace ultimately falls on those who adopt this measure: for it indicates the weakness of their cause, or the indolence of its partisans. They either have not the ability, or will not be at the pains, to discuss and refute the opinions they would suppress. It is a method of dismissing, as much within the power of the ignorant, as the learned; and of the fool, as of the wise man. And, after all, though a book may be burned, an impression cannot be annihilated in one fire. Copies will be secretly preserved and read; and will, in a future unprejudiced age, bring forward the question, if it hath been judiciously stated, and closely argued, to disgrace the memory of those who would have stifled inquiry.

It is however but justice to the times of which we write, to say, that while the ruling powers prosecuted and imprisoned Mr. Biddle, and burnt his catechisms, some pursued a more fair and rational mode of exposing the supposed weakness of his arguments, and investigating the truth of his opinions. Mr. Nicholas Estwick, of Wakton, in Northamptonshire, and some time fellow of

\* Cicero de naturâ deorum, curâ Davissii, l. i. c. 23. Minutius Felix, curâ Davissii, cap. 8. Taciti Annales, l. iv. cap. 35.

Christ's college, in Cambridge, published a professed Examination and confutation of Mr. Biddle's confession of faith concerning the holy trinity. And, to the honour of the leading men in the state, it should be mentioned, that they availed themselves of the learning and abilities of the celebrated Dr. Owen to discuss, from the press, the positions of Mr. Biddle's catechisms. For at the command of the right honourable the council of state, he drew up and published his *VINDICIÆ EVANGELICÆ*; or the mystery of the gospel vindicated, and socinianism examined, in the consideration and confutation of a catechism, called a *scripture catechism*, written by J. Biddle, A. M. Mr. Neal has called this work a learned and elaborate treatise. The celebrity of Mr. Biddle's writings was not confined to England, they were attended to abroad, and several foreigners published refutations of his sentiments\*.

Another effect of Mr. Biddle's catechetical publication was, that to guard the minds of people, especially of the rising generation, from what were deemed heretical sentiments, the provincial assembly at London published *An exhortation to catechising*, with directions for the more regular con-

\* Bock *Historia antitrinitariorum*, tom. i. par. 1. p. 54.

ducting of it. These instructions were sent to the several classes of London, and, after their example, the associated ministers in the several counties of England published the like exhortation to their brethren\*.

This measure originated from zeal for a particular system, and certainly tended to fix in young minds strong prejudices in its favour; yet it was worthy of true piety and zeal, and may be supposed to have greatly contributed to prevent a pernicious and total ignorance of all religious principles.

## SECTION IX.

*A new prosecution commenced against Mr. Biddle.*

It may be thought, that after having experienced such evils and sufferings for the open avowal and defence of his religious opinions, Mr. Biddle should have withdrawn from public notice, and have silently enjoyed his own view of things in private. The love of ease and safety would certainly have dictated this conduct, and worldly prudence would

\* Neal's History of the puritans, vol. iv. p. 185 and 136. 8vo.

have approved it. But Mr. Biddle seems to have entertained other sentiments, and to have thought that personal comfort and safety ought to be sacrificed to truth, and our duty to God. Socrates, the grecian sage, thought so before him\*. When he was pleading before his judges: "Perhaps," says he, "some one will ask, Why can you not, Socrates, withdraw, and, banishing yourself from us, spend your life in silent and retired leisure? It would be a most difficult matter to convince you that I cannot do this. Should I urge, that this would be to disobey God, and that therefore I cannot be silent, you would discredit me, as a dissembler. Were I to alledge, that to hold daily conversations on virtue and other topics, which you have heard that I canvas and investigate with others, is the greatest human felicity; for a life spent without inquiry is not

\* Ἰσως οὖν αὖ τις εἰποι, Σιγῶν τε καὶ ψυχικῆς ἀγῶν, ὡς Σωκράτης, οὐχ οἷός τ' ἔσθ' ἡμῖν ἐξέλθων ζῆν; Τοῦτοι δὲ ἐστὶ παλίων χαλεπώτατον πείσθαι τίνας ὑμῶν. εἰσὶ γὰρ λέγων, οἷ τῷ βέλῳ ἀπειθεῖν τούτ' ἐστὶ, καὶ διὰ τοῦτ' ἀδύνατον ψυχικῶν ἀγῶν, οὐ πείσεσθε μοι, ὡς εἰρωνεύομεν; εἰ δ' αὖτις λέγων, οἷ καὶ τυγχάνει μέγιστον ἀγαθὸν ἀνθρώπῳ τοῦτο, ἐκάστης ἡμέρας περὶ ἀρετῆς τοὺς λόγους πείσθαι, καὶ τῶν ἄλλων, περὶ ὧν ὑμεῖς ἐμοὶ ἠκούετε διαλεγόμενου, καὶ ἐμαυτὸν καὶ ἄλλους ἐξετάζοντος (οὗδε ἀνεξετάτος βίος, οὐ βιωτὸς ἀνθρώπου) τιμῶν, ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν οὐκ ἔστι μοι λεγόντι. Ταῦτα δὲ ἔχει μὲν οὐκ ἔστι, ὡς ἐγὼ φημι, καὶ ἄνδρες, πείθειν δὲ οὐκ ἔστι. Platonis Dialog. V, cum Forster, p. 111, 112, & Opera Platonis, quoted by Dr. Doddridge. Family Expositor, vol. iii. on Acts iv. 19. note (n).

“ a life for man : you would be as far from believing me. But things are as I represent them, though it is not easy to persuade you of it. If ye would dismiss me and spare my life, on condition that I should leave off to teach my fellow-citizens, I would rather die a thousand times than accept the proposal.”

Mr. Biddle's conduct had a superior sanction in that of the apostles ; who, when commanded by the jewish sanhedrim, not to speak at all, nor teach in the name of Jesus, answered, “ Whether it be right in the sight of God, to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.” Acts iv. 19. A christian has more powerful reasons for a strict, open, and firm attachment to truth, than has an heathen philosopher ; for he has the word of God to direct his inquiries, and authorise his conduct, and he has the hope of immortality to support and animate his steady zeal.

Mr. Biddle, influenced by these considerations, so far from withdrawing from the scene of exertion and suffering, betook himself to his former exercises for propagating, what appeared to his mind, divine truth, as closely connected with the honour of almighty God. Scarcely, therefore, had a year expired, after he was released from the prosecution on account of his *Scripture catechism*, than a new danger, not less formidable, overtook him.

Notwith-



Notwithstanding the odium, under which his sentiments laid, and the offence they gave to the governing power, they began to be embraced by a considerable part of a baptist congregation under the pastoral care of Mr. Griffin; who took alarm at this infection, and, to stop its spread, challenged Mr. Biddle to a public disputation in his meeting-house at St. Paul's. Mr. Neal has, to whatever cause it was owing, given a representation of this matter not quite so honourable to Mr. Biddle, as the truth of the fact requires; for he says, that Mr. Biddle, being of a restless spirit, challenged Mr. Griffin; thus not only mistating the proceedings, as originating from Mr. Biddle, but uncandidly ascribing them to a wrong cause. It appears from Mr. Biddle's biographer, that he not only was not first in this business, but waved the challenge, and declined the disputation for some time. At length he met Mr. Griffin, amidst a numerous auditory, among whom were many of his bitter and fiery adversaries, especially some booksellers, notoriously known for their false zeal and former opposition to Christian liberty, under the name of *beacon friers* \*.

\* Neal's History of the puritans, vol. iv. p. 137. 8vo. Their names were Thomas Underhill, Luke Fawn, and Nathaniel Webb. See Crosby's History of the english baptists, vol. i. p. 209.

To introduce the debate, Mr. Griffin asked, " If any man there did deny, that *Christ* was God most high?" The event gave too much reason to apprehend, that the matter was thus opened, insidiously to draw from Mr. Biddle's own mouth, grounds of accusation. Mr. Biddle, with sincerity and firmness, replied, " I do deny it." Mr. Griffin, on this, it should seem, entered into a proof of the affirmative; but, in the judgment of judicious hearers, was not able to support his cause against Mr. Biddle; and the disputation was adjourned to another day, when Mr. Biddle, it was agreed, should take his turn of establishing the negative side of the question between them.

Before that day came, other measures of confutation, besides fair discussion and argument, were adopted. The adversaries of Mr. Biddle laid hold of the open and generous profession he had made of his sentiments: information was lodged against him. He was apprehended and committed to the compter, July 3, 1655; from thence he was removed to Newgate, and was at the next sessions called to trial for his life, on the ordinance against blasphemy and heresy, which we have before mentioned. The iniquity of this proceeding was aggravated by its being founded on an act, which had never properly received the force of a law, and had, for several years, lain obsolete.

But

But the inveterate zeal of persecutors admits no measures of kindness or equity. The manner of conducting this prosecution against Mr. Biddle, as well as the grounds on which it was commenced, afforded a proof of this. For when he prayed, that counsel might be allowed him to plead the illegality of the indictment, it was denied him by the judges, and the sentence of a mute threatened. Upon this he gave into court his exceptions engrossed on parchment, and, with much struggling, had counsel allowed him; but the trial was deferred to the next day.

In this emergency, the principles and policy of Oliver Cromwell operated in favour of Mr. Biddle. The protector was an enemy to persecution; and among the capital articles, on which his government was formed, were these liberal ones, viz. "That such as profess faith in God, by Jesus Christ, (though differing in judgment from the doctrine, worship, or discipline publicly held forth) shall not be restrained from, but shall be protected in the profession of the faith, and exercise of their religion; and that all laws, statutes, and ordinances, &c. to the contrary of the aforesaid liberty, shall be esteemed null and void. It was also his art, by dexterous management, to keep the opposite parties, then in the nation, in a kind of equipoise, which he found necessary for his  
own

own security. He saw it was not for the interest of his government to have Mr. Biddle either condemned or absolved. He therefore took him out of the hands of the law, and detained him in prison. His release would have offended the presbyterians and all the enemies to religious liberty, of whom there appeared a great number at his trial. On the contrary, the proceedings against Mr. Biddle were opposed by the friends of liberty; they were censured and reprobated by different publications from the press. And while petitions were, by one party presented against him, the other did not lie dormant, but solicited his discharge, and urged their suit by pointed remonstrances against that ordinance, as threatening all their liberties, and infringing the fundamental articles of the protector's government. Many congregations of baptists appeared on this occasion, as friends to Mr. Biddle, and advocates for the rights of conscience. At length Cromwell, wearied with petitions, for and against, to terminate the affair, and, in some degree meet the wishes of each party, banished Mr. Biddle to the isle of Scilly, whither he was sent October 5, 1655.\*

\* Short account of the life of John Biddle, p. 7, 8. and Crosby's history of the english baptists, vol. 1. p. 206. 215.

Disagreeable and afflictive, as must be this state of exile, it was rather a shelter from the vindictive spirit of his enemies, and was a means of preventing another parliament, under the protector, from decreeing any thing more rigid against him, as he was absent and out of their way. The inconveniences and wants of his situation were also relieved by the kindness of the protector himself; who, after some time, allowed him in his exile an hundred crowns per annum for his subsistence; which, as an act of pure generosity, shewn to a persecuted man, whose tenets could not be agreeable to Cromwell, reflects honour on his name.

The evils of Mr. Biddle's banishment were, in other respects, alleviated; especially by the state of his mind, and the employment of his thoughts. "Here, his biographer informs us, he enjoyed much divine comfort from the heavenly contemplations, for which his retirement gave him opportunity. Here he had sweet communion with the Father, and his son Jesus Christ, and attained, in many particulars, a clearer understanding of the divine oracles. Here, whilst he was more abundantly confirmed in the doctrines of his confession of faith, &c. yet he seems, notwithstanding, to have become more doubtful about some other points which he formerly held; as appears from his *Essay to explaining the revelation*, which he wrote



wrote after his return thence; which shews that he still maintained a free and unprejudiced mind\*.

Though Mr. Biddle's banishment lasted three years, his friends were not regardless of his interest and liberty; but were active in their endeavours to procure his release. He himself wrote letters, both to the protector and to Mr. Calamy, an eminent presbyterian minister, to reason them into compassion, but without immediate success. It may, perhaps, be offered in extenuation of Mr. Calamy's apparent neglect of Mr. Biddle's applications, that in Oliver's time he kept himself as private as he could. At length, the solicitations of friends, favoured by the operation of other occurrences, prevailed, and the protector permitted a writ of habeas corpus to be granted out of the upper-bench court, whereby Mr. Biddle was brought back, and by that court set at liberty, as finding no legal cause of detaining him.

A short account, &c. p. 8. PALMER'S Nonconformist's memorial, vol. 1. p. 74.

## SECTION X.

*His renewal of his public Ministrations—his last imprisonment—and Death.*

THE reflexions, with which we opened the preceding chapter, are equally pertinent to the conduct of Mr. Biddle, which we are to review in this. He still preserved the firmness of his mind. He still felt the ardor of zeal. Notwithstanding the dangers, sufferings, and persecutions, which he had sustained, he was not terrified from what he counted his duty to Christ, in propagating the true knowledge of the only true God, and of Jesus Christ, whom he had sent. Upon his return to London, he resumed his religious exercises among his friends, and acted as pastor to a congregation in the city, formed on the principles of the independents\*.

The national affairs soon took a turn unfavourable to Mr. Biddle's prosecution of his delightful work. For, about five months after, the protector died, and Richard succeeding, called a parliament, which, it was supposed, would be

\* British biography, 8vo, vol. vi. p. 87.

particularly inimical to him. At the importunity of a noble friend, he reluctantly retired into the country, during their session. On the dissolution of that parliament, he returned to his former station.

This period of tranquility, and of his ministerial services, was but of short duration. The enjoyment of religious liberty was, in those times, fluctuating and precarious, dependent upon the state of political affairs, and changing with the national revolutions. Of this Mr. Biddle had repeated experience. And though the reign of his enemies, the presbyterians, was now drawing to its close, its termination afforded him no security; but, by the change of government, he was involved in new difficulties and dangers; and became a sufferer in common with those, from whose hands he had a little before suffered. With the settlement of CHARLES II. on the throne of his ancestors, the ancient government in the church and state was restored. The presbyterians soon felt the iron hand of power, and all dissenters from the episcopal worship were treated on the same intolerant principles. Their liberty was taken away, and their meetings were punished as seditious.

Mr. Biddle endeavoured to avoid the threatening storm, by restraining himself from public to more private assemblies. But his prudence and  
caution

caution were ineffectual. The retired and peaceable associations of himself and his adherents could not elude the jealous eye of magistracy by their secrecy, nor disarm its rage by their harmlessness. For, on the first of June, 1662, he was haled from his lodgings, where he and some few of his friends were met for divine worship, and carried before sir Richard Brown, a justice of peace, who committed them all to prison, without admitting them to bail. Mr. Biddle was doomed to the dungeon, where he lay for five hours. The recorder, actuated by more reverence for the law, released them on giving security for answering, at the next sessions, to the charge brought against them. They accordingly performed this. But the court not being able to find any statute whereon to form a criminal indictment, they were referred to the following sessions, and then were proceeded against, under pretence of an offence at common law; a mode of conviction which leaves much to the breast of the judge. The decision, in this case, was, that every one of the hearers should be fined in the penalty of twenty pounds, and Mr. Biddle himself in one hundred; and they were ordered to lie in prison till these mulcts were paid.

The sheriff was disposed to have remitted the greatest part of Mr. Biddle's penalty, and to have accepted even ten pounds, which he would have

paid. Sir Richard Brown rigorously insisted upon the payment of the full sum, and even, in that case, threatened him with a seven years imprisonment, which occasioned his continuing in prison.

But in less than five weeks, through the noisomeness of the place, and the want of air, which was peculiarly disagreeable and pernicious to him, whose only recreation and exercise had been, for many years, to walk daily in the fresh air, he contracted a disease which was attended with immediate danger to his life. So unrelenting, so unpitying is bigotry, sir R. Brown could not be moved, in this extremity, to grant the sick prisoner the comfort of a removal, in order to recovery. The sheriff, whose name was Meynel, acted on the principles of humanity, and granted it. But, on the second day after, between five and six o'clock in the morning, the 22d of September, 1662, he died, in the 47th year of his age.

He had formerly assured his friends, that he had brought himself, by frequent meditations on the resurrection and future happiness, to look on death with contempt. The manner with which he met his dissolution, evinced to them the truth of these declarations. For when, by the disease more violently affecting his head, he perceived a great alteration, he signified it to his friends, and  
absolutely



absolutely declined any further discourse ; but composed himself, as it were to sleep, for eight hours before he expired, being very sparing of words, and even of groans, that might argue any impatience. When a pious person, who attended him, broke forth into this valedictory wish, *God grant that we may see one another in the kingdom of heaven* ; his speech failing him, he shewed how pleasing that wish was to him, by lifting up his quivering hand. He had, before this illness, frequently dropped expressions, that indicated an expectation of his approaching end ; often saying, that if he should be once more cast into prison, he should never be restored to liberty ; and moreover, *That the work was done*, meaning, that the truth which he apprehended God had raised him up to profess, was sufficiently brought to light, and that there only wanted ingenuousness in men, for the embracing and acknowledging it.\*

\* Short account of his life, p. 94

## SECTION XI.

*His Works, not noticed before.*

IT has been our design, in the preceding sections, to bring into view only those works of Mr. Biddle, which raised the public attention, or drew on himself severe prosecutions. But, besides these, there were other publications of his, which were specimens of his learning and genius, or expressive of his zeal to promote religious inquiry and truth. His juvenile performances have been before mentioned.

During his banishment to the isle of Scilly, as we have said, he drew up an essay to the explaining of the revelations; in which he treated of the beast in the apocalypse, antichrist, the personal reign of Christ on the earth, &c.\* His present biographer not having been able to procure a sight of this piece, can say nothing more concerning it.

\* Short account of his life, p. 4. and British biography, 8vo. vol. vi. p. 79: note (l) and p. 87.

In the year 1653, Mr. Biddle published several small pieces, which were translations of tracts written by some of the polish unitarians. Among these was one entitled *Brevis discussio*; or a *Brief inquiry touching a better way than is commonly made use of to refute PAPISTS, and reduce PROTESTANTS to a certainty and unity in RELIGION.* The author of this tract was Joachim Stegman, a german, who, on account of his attachment to the socinian sentiments, was dismissed from the pastoral office in two churches of the reformed; on which he went into Poland, and was first chosen principal of the university at Racow, and was then sent, by the synod of Racow, to succeed Valentinus Radecius, as pastor of the unitarian church at Claudiopolis, or, as it is called in German, Clausenbourg, in Saxony, where he died in 1633.\*

This work was printed in 1633: a translation of it is preserved in the Phœnix. It incurred censure, as containing sundry socinian and pelagian tenets, and was ascribed to Mr. John Hales, of Eton.

“ The scope of it is to shew, that the protestants, by adhering to the peculiar system of Lu- ]

\* Bock Historia antitrinitariorum, tom. i. p. ii. p. 949, 950, et Sandii Bibliotheca antitrin, p. 132.

ther, Brentius, Calvin, Beza, &c. &c. had, in many instances, offered weak and improper arguments against popery, which had laid them under needless difficulties. His advice is, therefore, to discard all human authority, and to stick to the scripture only, as explained and understood by right reason, without having any regard to tradition, or the authority of fathers, councils, &c.

“ Mr. Bayle, we are told, says, this book did more hurt than good, not because it was not well written, but because it tended to disparage the reputation of the first reformers, broke in upon their several systems, and, what was worse than all the rest, was manifestly the work of somebody tainted with the heresies of Socinus and Arminius.” \*

We suppose that Mr. Bayle speaks here not his own opinion, but the sentiments of those who prefer the party they have once espoused to good sense and truth. The piece opens with this principle; “ He that will refute an error, must neither be entangled in the same, nor reject the true [ grounds of refutations.” In the succeeding chapters it treats of fathers and doctors; of the holy spirit; of the true opinion touching the judge;

\* An historical view of the controversy concerning an intermediate state. 2d ed. p. 64.

of traditions ; of philosophical principles ; of the true opinion touching the rule ; whether the dead do properly live ; whether Christ in heaven hath yet flesh and blood ; whether it be possible to obey the precepts of Christ ; and whether it be necessary to obey the precepts of Christ.

The eighth chapter of this work may be deemed curious, not only for the example it gives of the support which popery derives from some doctrines embraced by protestants ; but for the full and yet concise view which it exhibits of the arguments against an established doctrine, on which few, even in the present day, venture to think with freedom. “ Luther and Calvin,” he observes, “ teach such things as are injuriously defended, not only against the papists, but also against the very life of the christian religion, true piety. Of the former sort, is that opinion wherein they hold that the dead live. It will seem absurd, and indeed the thing itself is very absurd ; yet they believe it.

“ For they suppose that the souls of men, in that very moment wherein they are parted from their bodies by death, are carried either to heaven, and do there feel heavenly joy, and possess all kinds of happiness which God hath promised to his people ; or to hell, and are there tormented, and excruciated with unquenchable fire. And  
this,



this, as was said before, they attribute to the mere souls separated from the bodies, even before the resurrection of the men themselves, that is to say, while they are yet dead. But these things cannot happen to any thing which is not alive, for that which doth not live, doth not feel; and consequently neither enjoyeth pleasure, nor endureth pain. Wherefore they believe, in effect, that the dead live; namely, in the same manner that they affirm Peter, Paul, and other dead men, to live in heaven.

“Now this is the foundation, not only of purgatory, but also of that horrible idolatry practised amongst the papists, whilst they invoke the saints that are dead. Take this away, and there will be no place left for the others. To what purpose is the fire of purgatory, if souls separated from the body feel nothing? to what purpose are prayers to the virgin Mary, to Peter, and to Paul, and other dead men, if they can neither hear prayers, nor intercede for you? On the contrary, if you admit this, you cannot easily overthrow the invocation of saints. Now, though the thing be such of itself, as deserves to seem absurd to every one, yet will we see, whether the contrary thereof be not set down in the scripture.

“Nor need we go far for an example, since we have a pregnant one in the argument of Christ, wherein

wherein he proveth the future resurrection of the dead from thence; that God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but is not the God of the dead, but of the living; whence he concludeth that they live to God, that is, shall be recalled to life by God, that he may manifest himself to be their God, or benefactor. This argument would be fallacious, if before the resurrection they felt heavenly joy. For then God would be their God or benefactor, namely, according to their souls, although their body should never rise again.

“ In like manner, the reasoning of the apostle would be fallacious, 1 Cor. xv. 30, 31, 32. wherein he proveth the resurrection by that argument; because, otherwise, those that believe in Christ would in vain seek hazards every hour; in vain suffer so many calamities for Christ, which he teacheth by his own example. Again, because otherwise it would be better to sing the song of the epicureans, “ Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we shall die.” In short, of all men, christians would be the most miserable. Certainly this would be false, if the godly, presently after death, did in their souls enjoy celestial happiness, and the wicked feel torment. For they would not in vain suffer calamities, nor these follow the pleasures.

pleasures of the flesh scotfree. And the godly would be far happier than the wicked.

“ Since, therefore, it is the absurdest thing in the world, to say that Christ and the apostle Paul did not argue rightly ; is it not clear that the doctrine is false, which being granted, so great an absurdity would be charged on Christ and the apostle Paul ?

“ Farthermore, why should Peter defer the salvation of souls to the last day, 1 Pet. i. 5. *who are kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time ;* and Paul the crown of righteousness to the day of judgment ; 2 Tim. iv. 8. *Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give to me at that day, &c. ?* To what purpose should the judgment be appointed ? How could it be said of the godly, under the old covenant, that they received not the promise, *God providing some better things for us, that they might not without us be made perfect ;* Heb. xi. 40. if the soul of every one presently after death, even without the body, felt celestial happiness ?

“ But the very nature of the thing itself refuseth it. Is not living, dying, feeling, hearing, acting, proper to the whole man, or the compound

pound

pound of soul and body? Is not the body the instrument of the soul, without which it cannot perform her functions; as an artist knoweth indeed the art of working, but unless he have instruments at hand, he cannot produce any effect? Let the eye be shut, the soul will not see, though the power of seeing be not taken away from it. For as soon as you shall restore the instruments, a man will presently see. Wherefore souls separated from bodies are neither dead nor live, and consequently enjoy no pleasure, and feel no pain. For those things are proper to the whole compound.

“ But the scripture saith, that the dead are not, that the spirit returneth to him that gave it; and of the spirits of the godly, that they are in the hand of God, but at the resurrection they shall be joined with the bodies; and then, having gotten instruments, they will put forth their operations.”

The translation of this piece of Stegman's is attended with a short preface, in which Mr. Biddle, besides passing encomiums on the work, chiefly labours to obviate an objection that might be urged against it, from the stress it lays on the use of reason in religion. The remarks, which Mr. Biddle offers on this point, are worthy of attention.

Speaking of those who would be displeased with it, because reason is therein much cried up; he says, “ My desire therefore is, that such persons would but consider what the holy scripture itself saith on this behalf; namely, how Paul, Rom. xii. 1. calleth the service which christians are to exhibit unto God, a *rational* or *reasonable service*. And Peter, 1 Ep. ii. 2. stileth the word of the gospel which he preached, *sincere rational milk* (for so the original hath it, as any one who is skilled in that tongue, and looketh into the greek context, may perceive). And ch. iii. 15. he saith, *Be ready always to make an apology unto every one that asketh you a reason concerning the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear*. Which passage clearly intimateth, that as there is no incongruity for others to require a *reason* of our hope in Christ, so we christians are, above all other professors whatsoever, obliged to be very *rational*; for to make an apology or defence in the behalf of so abstruse and sublime a doctrine as ours is, requireth a more than ordinary improvement of *reason*.

“ This being so, it may seem strange why so great a number even of *protestant* ministers should make *reason* a common theme to disclaim against, giving to it (without warrant of scripture) the name of *corrupt reason* and *carnal reason*, and others the like eulogies. But the truth is, they them-



themselves hold many absurd, ridiculous, and *unreasonable* opinions, and so know right well, that if men once begin to make use of their *reason*, and bring the doctrines, that are commonly taught, to the touchstone of the scripture, explained and managed in a rational way, their tenets and reputation with the people will be soon laid in the dust. Let such ministers henceforward either leave off clamouring against *reason*, or no more open their mouths against papists, and their opinion about transubstantiation; for whosoever shall sift the controversy between *papists* and *protestants*, concerning it, shall find that the principal, if not only ground why we reject it, is because it is repugnant to *reason*. But if transubstantiation is to be disclaimed, because contrary to *reason*, why shall not all other *unreasonable* doctrines, upon the same account, be exploded, especially seeing there is scarce any one of them can plead so plausible a colour of scripture for itself as that can?"

Another piece, translated by Mr. Biddle, was Przypcovius's Life of Faustus Socinus; with the preliminary discourse prefixed by that writer to the works of Socinus. The title of the tract is, "*The LIFE of that incomparable man, FAUSTUS SOCINUS SENENSIS, described by a Polonian knight. Whereunto is added, an excellent Discourse which the same author would have had premised to the*

*works of Socinus*; together with a catalogue of *these works*. The views of Mr. Biddle, in this publication, appear to have been truly laudable and liberal, viz. to do justice to a character which had been much aspersed, and to hold up, to contemplation, a great example; at the same time that he enters a caveat against an implicit deference to the judgment of his hero.

“ The life of Socinus, he says in his preface, is here exposed to thy view, that by the perusal thereof thou mayest receive certain information concerning the man, whom ministers and others traduce by custom; having (for the most part) never heard any thing of his conversation, nor seen any of his works; or, if they have, they were either unable or unwilling to make a thorough scrutiny into them, and so no marvel, if they speak evil of him.

“ To say any thing of him here, by way of eulogy, as that he was one of the most pregnant wits that the world hath produced; that none, since the apostles, hath deserved better of our religion, in that the lord Christ hath chiefly made use of his ministry to retrieve so many precious truths of the gospel, which had a long time been hidden from the eyes of men by the artifice of Satan; that he shewed the world a more accurate way to discuss controversies in religion, and to  
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fetch out the very marrow of the holy scripture, so that a man may more avail himself by reading his works, than perhaps by perusing all the fathers, together with the writings of more modern authors ; that the virtues of his will were not inferior unto those of his understanding, he being every way furnished to the work of the Lord ; that he opened the right way to bring christians to the unity of the faith, and acknowledgment of the son of God ; that he took the same course to propagate the gospel, that Christ and the apostles had done before him, forsaking his estate and his nearest relations, and undergoing all manner of labours and hazards, to draw men to the knowledge of the truth ; that he had no other end of all his undertakings, than the glory of God and Christ, and the salvation of himself and others, it being impossible for calumny itself, with any colour, to asperse him with the least suspicion of worldly interest ; that he of all interpreters explaineth the precepts of Christ in the strictest manner, and windeth up the lives of men to the highest strain of holiness ; to say the other like things (though in themselves true and certain) would, notwithstanding, here be impertinent, in that it would forestall what the polonian knight hath written on this subject.

“ To him, therefore, I refer thee, desiring thee to read his words without prejudice, and then the works of Socinus himself; and though thou beest not thereby convinced that all which Socinus taught is true, (for neither am I myself of that belief, as having discovered that in some lesser things Socinus, as a man, went awry, however, in the main, he hit the truth) yet for so much of Christ as thou must needs confess appeareth in him, begin to have more favourable thoughts of him and his followers.”

In addition to these pieces, which were translations from polish unitarian writers, we should add another tract by the knight, who was the author of the former,\* viz. *Dissertatio de pace, &c.* Or, a DISCOURSE touching the PEACE and CONCORD of the CHURCH. *Wherein is elegantly and acutely argued, that not so much a bad opinion, as a bad life, excludes a christian out of the kingdom of heaven; and that the things necessary to be known for the attainment of salvation, are very few and easy; and finally, that those who pass amongst us under the name of heretics, are notwithstanding to be tolerated.* This piece, written when the author was little more than eighteen

\* For an account of Przipeovius, we refer to the Memoirs of the life, &c. of Faustus Socinus, p. 439—452.

years old, had the honour of being ascribed to Episcopus. The composition is insinuating and masterly. The design of it was liberal; and, considering that the author did not agree, in their discriminating opinion, with those on whose behalf he wrote, it was peculiarly expressive of generosity and candor. His view was to moderate the zeal and bitterness, of which the socinians were, in general, the unmerited objects. To effect this purpose, it was introduced with some reflexions on the lot of truth and innocence in this world. In some following chapters is shewn, what things, concerning God and Christ are necessary to be known unto salvation, and what are the parts of true faith; that sincere love towards God and Christ is sufficient to salvation, and that the same may be in those who err; that though faith and the holy-spirit be the gifts of God, yet erring persons have and may have them; that nothing but disobedience and unbelief exclude a man from eternal salvation; and that such as err, are free from these; that the things necessary to be known unto salvation are few and very simple, and easy to be understood by the simplest; such is not the common doctrine concerning the trinity; that there is not in this life a perfect knowledge of God, and of divine mysteries, but in the other life; and that faith, hope, and charity are sufficient



cient to salvation. The discussion of these points is followed with a general apology for socinians on this principle, that they are not of such a persuasion out of ambition, avarice, pleasure, or superstition, nor offend out of any malice, but only out of the care of their salvation. Then follows an answer to the objection, drawn from their rejecting the consent of the church, and resting the defence of their opinion upon the authority of scripture only. This is succeeded by an answer to three other objections, with a comparison of Calvin's doctrine on predestination, with the doctrine of others. Then some particular reasons for tolerating heretics are offered; and the question, who are heretics, is considered. The tract concludes with an inquiry, what heretics are to be excommunicated, and what not, and with a fuller apology for those who in that age passed as such.

Mr. Biddle's preface, which is a short one, concludes with that serious and just exhortation, formed on the most enlarged principles, which we have quoted, p. 11 and 12.

Large and numerous quotations from this work might be deemed tedious, and superseded by modern publications on the side of candor and moderation. But a passage or two, it is hoped, will not be unacceptable to the reader. To a prejudice imbibed against the socinian sentiment concerning

cerning the person of Christ, as what must be highly displeasing to him, because derogatory from his glory, the author answers thus: " The greatest part of them, who at this day recede from the common sense of the church in so great a matter, are not out of any rashness so persuaded, touching the son of God, but rather out of a pious fear, lest they should detract from the Father somewhat of his honour. Wherein, if they unwittingly offend against the son, out of love to the Father, (so that improbity mingle not itself with their error) it seemeth very credible, that the son will, for the very love of the Father, forgive them this error. For he gave a notable proof of his meekness, when he prayed for his ignorant murderers. What, think we, will not he do for the love of the Father, who, for the love of men, forgave so great an injury to his enemies? Now if he, out of love to mankind, doubted not to assume the form of a servant, and really to endure extreme disgraces, certainly he will bear with the errors of men, who do not conceive worthily enough of his majesty and dignity, especially that which is past. Will he, who for the sake of men, did, of his own accord, debase himself to the lowest condition, punish them for this very thing, namely, because they out of ignorance, think more meanly of his condition than ]

than is fit; especially when he himself, by his debasement, did in a manner give an occasion of such ignorance? Certainly it is incredible, that he, who of his own accord underwent, for the sins of men, a reproachful kind of death, will not pardon to human weakness, a simple opinion that derogates something from his ancient excellence, if so be the error be harmless, and be removed from all sin of malice."

Another passage, in which he endeavours to remove the objection against an indulgence to those who hold certain opinions, drawn from the fear, that the interest of truth will suffer by the favour shewn to the erroneous, deserves to be quoted. "If," saith he, "we be afraid of the contagion of such errors, either in behalf of ourselves, or rather of the weaker ones, in the first place we may not thereupon renounce brotherly love, which we owe to them, although they err. For we ought not to forsake a certain and clear duty, lest an uncertain evil should happen, nor to pursue even the most holy ends by unlawful means. But, secondly, that fear is vain. For if we have not the truth, there is little danger to be feared from them, much less if we have it. For since they maintain their tenets with no arms, nor with any force, and think it not so much as lawful so to do, nor set them off with any carnal allurements,

ments, certainly the truth can never be by them either oppressed with force, or overthrown with fraud, inasmuch as the nature of truth is such, that, like to eagles feathers, she devoureth all other light plumage of opinions, never withdrawing herself from us, unless she be tired either with our servitude, or sins. Which twain being not to be feared by us in a modest liberty of dissenting, and study of true charity, what cause is there why we should so warily fence our opinions from their tenets?

“ Let us rather be possessed with a certain hope, that as earthen vessels being joined with those of tin or silver, are broken to pieces ; so also if God, the author of peace, shall bring back into the church that happy tolerance, all false opinions fighting hand to hand with the true, will be dashed to shivers, and perish. Otherwise, if we so much fear that mutual patience and friendly conference, we do not think well enough concerning the goodness of our cause.

“ Heretofore, when the dawning of gospel-light was returned, Luther and his followers would have wished that they might be tolerated in the communion of the roman church. But it concerned the pope to secure his darkness from the approach of the morning. Again, when a dissension was risen up between the lutherans and  
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the reformed, who was it that refused the form of agreement that was offered, but he that doubted of his cause? Now also in the very reformed church itself, upon the dissension concerning fate, none are more displeased with tolerance, than they that suspect the truth of this doctrine. Would error were so circumspect in the cradle of its infancy, as it is provident being once grown up. But it being blind when it is born, doth afterward become sharp-sighted, foreseeing its fate afar off, and eschewing it, and is never more ingenious to prolong its life, than when it is pressed with the conscience of its own weakness."

In aid of the design and reasonings of this tract, Mr. Biddle added a postscript; in which, among other reflexions, are the following pertinent remarks and close appeals to those who, arrogating to themselves the character of the orthodox, censure all others as heretics.

Mr. Biddle granting, that he who contradicts the divine writings of the apostles, should be no less esteemed an heretic, than he who opposed the apostle's preaching by word of mouth, adds, "but even thus can we not challenge that censorian rod against heretics, (referring to certain particular passages in the epistles.) For they whom ye place in the rank of heretics, are so far from contradicting the holy scripture, that they  
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wage war against you out of the same, and appeal to the judgment thereof, not without a certain hope of victory, in the examination of their cause, inasmuch as they embrace the scripture in all things, with as great veneration of mind as you do; nor amongst all the christian churches, which are at this day extant, shall ye shew any one (that I know of) which doth not religiously, and from the heart, yield an undoubted assent to all those things, that are proposed and taught in the holy scripture. Wherefore, there is no cause why ye should condemn any one of them for heresy, since they agree with you in giving due credence to the sacred writ. And, therefore, whatsoever pretence ye seek for your carnal zeal against such as you call heretics, yet to indifferent judgments can no other ground hereof appear, than their dissent from your interpretation of the holy scripture, as to the controverted doctrines.

“ But I will here bountifully grant you, that ye have in all things hit the true sense of the scripture, and defend it. Nevertheless, it is further requisite, that ye make this plain to them, whom ye brand with the crime of heresy. But what here is the stress of your arguments? Ye appeal again to the holy scripture, and from thence condemn heretics. But they have already stricken this weapon out of your hands, shewing

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that the holy scripture maketh for you, only in your own sense and interpretation, and that they are accordingly condemned by you, not from the sacred scripture, but from your interpretation of the sacred scripture. And this is the circle of your arguing, which they deservedly reject.

“ Draw out, therefore, against heretics these truly apostolical weapons, not the *thrafonical* prating of the chair in the university, but the power of the holy spirit, wherewith the apostles being indued, could deliver blasphemers to satan, 1 Tim. i. 10. and slay hypocrites with the speaking of a word, Acts v. If ye want the powerful efficacy of this spirit, acknowledge your rashness and iniquity in condemning them, to whom ye are not able, with evident and sufficient arguments to demonstrate your interpretation of the holy scripture, and who by the same right, and from the same foundation, object to you not only errors, but also heresies.

“ Ye know that of Christ, *condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned*. What account will you give to this just judge, for so often violating this precept? Your zeal of the divine glory will not then excuse you; for though it palliate itself under this reverend name, yet is it wholly of the flesh, and odious to God. But if ye affirm, that it proceedeth from the holy spirit, produce arguments

ments worthy of so great an author. For neither is this spirit so weak, but that he can shew forth tokens of his divine authority and presence in his ministers, and by them against his enemies. But whither am I carried away? I beseech thee, good reader, to pardon this digression of mine; and having liked the pious counsel of our author, intreat God that he would insil into other readers also a mind studious of peace and concord."

Such sentiments are so important and liberal, that they can scarcely be repeated too often, or be presented in too various forms. For every representation, whether in a modern or ancient dress, carries a recommendation of them to every candid mind, and it may be presumed, will not be wholly without effect in making them to be known, approved and felt.

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## SECTION XII.

### *His Character.*

WE have traced Mr. Biddle through the labours, &c. of a studious, and the events of an afflicted life. His studies were devoted to the

pursuit of religious knowledge, and his sufferings were incurred by a conscientious adherence to the convictions which his inquiries produced. From both, the reader will form his own ideas concerning his abilities, learning and character. They were all held in high estimation by those who personally knew him, and were acknowledged by his enemies.

His acquaintance with the holy scriptures, as was observed in the second section, was singularly comprehensive and exact. His knowledge of them was instead of a concordance, for no part could be named, but he would presently cite the book, chapter, and verse. This perfect knowledge in the scriptures, joined with an happy and ready memory, whereby he had, at recollection, what he had read in other authors, gave him a great advantage in all debates, of which, without the least ostentation, he availed himself.

The distinguishing point of view, under which the preceding account exhibits him, is that of a REFORMER, and a sufferer for conscience sake: yet, in the former character, he appears to have been modest and candid, and in the latter patient and resigned. “It was,” says his biographer, who appears to have been intimately acquainted with him, “in his heart to promote piety, and he had no design to aggrandise his name by opposition

sition to common doctrines. Indeed, he was a great asserter of common doctrines against novel opinions, that tended either to sedition, libertinism, or superstition. And in what he held contrary to the current, he did not endeavour to tie those he had won, to be of his mind in such a society, and by such a society, and by such bands, as might continue them a successive party, bearing his name as their founder; but left them to all that liberty, which the duty of owning the truth according to their conscience, and of mutual edification, would allow them\*.”

Zealous and active as Mr. Biddle was in promoting what he deemed great and important truth, he was still more zealous in promoting holiness of life and manners; for this was always his end and design in what he taught. “ He valued not his doctrines for speculation, but practice, insomuch that he would not discourse of those points wherein he differed from others, with those that appeared not religious, according to knowledge. Neither could he bear those that dissembled in profession, for worldly interests.”

His own life was pure and irreproachable. Mr. Anthony Wood acknowledges, that, “ ex-

\* Short account of his life, p. 10.



cept his opinions, there was little or nothing blame-worthy in him." He was so free from being questioned for any the least blemish in his life, that one of his advocates says, "the informers themselves, who brought on the last prosecution against him, had been heard to admire his strict exemplary life, full of modesty, sobriety, and forbearance, no ways contentious, touching the great things of the world, but altogether taken up with the great things of God, revealed in the holy scriptures\*."

Another writer, on the proceedings against him, gives this testimony to his conversation. "We have," says he, "had intimate knowledge thereof for some years; but we think he needs not us, but may appeal even to his enemies, for his vindication therein. Let those that knew him at Oxford for the space of seven or eight years, those that knew him at Gloucester about three years, those that knew him at London these eight or nine years, (most of which he hath been a prisoner) speak what they know, of unrighteousness, uncleanness, unpeaceableness, malice, pride, profaneness, drunkenness, or any the like iniquity, which they can accuse him of, or hath

\* Short account of his life, p. 16.

he, (as the manner of heretics is) 2 Pet. 2. 3. *through covetousness, with feigned words, made merchandise of any?* Hath he not herein walked upon such true grounds of christian self-denial, that none in the world can stand more clear and blameless herein also? He having shunned to make any of those advantages which are easily made in the world, by men of his parts and breeding, languages, and learning, that (if any known to us) he may truly say as the apostle, *I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel; yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered to my necessities; he ever accounting it a more blessed thing to give, than to receive\*.*"

It is a proof of the great and serious regard which he had for universal righteousness, that "he would often tell his friends, that no religion could benefit a bad man; and call upon them to resolve with themselves, as well to profess and practise the truth that is according to godliness, as to study to find it out, and that against all terrors and allurements to the contrary; being assured that nothing displeasing to almighty God, would be any wise profitable to them †. The probity of his

\* CROSBY'S History of the english baptists, vol. i. p. 210, 211, 212.

† Short account of his life, p. 10.

own conduct was eminently conspicuous : so that the appeal was made to many persons of worth and credit in London, on the justice and integrity of his heart, and on his holy care not to dissemble, play the hypocrite, or deal fraudulently with any, not even to save his life \*.

The foundation of his moral excellencies was laid, where the foundation of every good attainment must be laid, in the application of the earliest years to the pursuit of divine wisdom. Before he left school, there was discovered in him “ a singular piety of mind, and contempt of secular affairs :” he applied himself to the study of virtue, together with the study of literature and science : and, in his younger years, was an amiable example of filial affection to his mother, to whom, becoming a widow by the death of his father, he, with great diligence, gave dutiful assistance †.

The events, which we have surveyed, furnish a striking proof of the perseverance and fortitude, with which he followed truth, and met his sufferings. And, though he was conversant in the discussion of points, involved, by the inventions of men, and a mixture of human science, in great difficulties and obscurity, yet it doth not appear,

\* Crosby's history of the english baptists, vol. i. p. 210, 211.

† Short account of his life, p. 43

that he contended therein out of curiosity, vain-glory, and self-conceit ; but with great humility and courtesy : “ for they who differed from him, how mean soever, could not oblige him more, than by pertinent objections, soberly urged, to give him the opportunity of resolving them : which he always did with great simplicity and plainness of speech, without any ostentation of learning\*.”

His conversation was as remote from covetousness, as it was free from ambition. For, when he was capable of doing it, he supported himself by his own industry, and refused the supplies, which benevolence and friendship offered him, unless, when the necessities, brought on by imprisonment, sickness, and the like calamities, constrained him to avail himself of the kindness of others. After a seven years confinement, he was prevailed with to accept of a bed and board from a friendly citizen in London† : and the importunities of another induced him to do the same, after his return from exile in the isle of Scilly. But these were exceptions to his general mode of ministering himself to his wants.

\* Short account of his life, p. 10. and Crosby's History of the baptists, vol. i. p. 214.

† Mr. Firmin.

He had learned to be content with a little, and sought not more: nay, out of that little he would contribute to the necessities of others. His gratifications were very moderate, for he was remarkably temperate in eating, as well as in drinking. The purity of his character was not only most fair and unblamable; but, to avoid the least suspicion, he carried his reserve in his behaviour to the female sex, to an unusual (it may be called an extravagant) degree of delicacy and caution.

He was careful to preserve justice in his dealings towards men, and was solicitous to enforce and exemplify this virtue, and that of charity, as, in his opinion, essentially necessary to salvation. And he had such a lively sense of the obligations of humanity and kindness, that it was one of his lessons, which Mr. Firmin learnt of him, not only to relieve, but to visit the sick and poor, as the best means of administering comfort to them, and of gaining an exact knowledge of their circumstances; and as affording an opportunity to assist them by our counsel, or our interest, more effectually than by the charity we do or can bestow upon them \*.

There is another ingredient in a good and excellent character, viz. reverent, humble piety,

\* The life of Mr. Thomas Firmin, 1698, p. 10. reprinted 1791, p. 8.

which



which deserves particular mention in the delineation of Mr. Biddle's. "The virtues of the devotional kind, observes a great writer, may be shewn by arguments independent of the peculiar doctrines of revelation, to be, in their own nature, the most truly valuable, as well as the most sublime of all others, and to form what may be called the key-stone of every truly great and heroic character†." The piety of Mr. Biddle was eminent. "He was, his biographer tells us, a strict observer himself, and a severe exactor in others, of reverence in speaking of God and Christ, and holy things : so that he would by no means hear their names, or any sentence of holy scripture, used vainly or lightly, much less any foolish talking, or scurrility." While he treated sacred subjects with this reverence and gravity, he would be chearful and pleasant, and like well that the company should be so too. "Yet even in his common converse, he always retained an awe of the divine presence, and was sometimes observed to lift up his hand suddenly ; which those that were intimate with him, knew to be an effect of a secret ejaculation. But in his closet devotions, he was wont often to prostrate himself upon the

† Priestley's Letters to a philosophical unbeliever, part 1, p. 211.

ground, after the manner of our Saviour in his agony, and would commend that posture also to his most intimate friends \*."

It is a pertinent remark made on the excellent character, which Mr. Biddle supported, that the unitarians who suffered in our country, were all of them eminent examples of piety and virtue †. It is of consequence, on every occasion that offers, to point out this ; not only, as a good example can never be exhibited to view, without doing honour to religion, and leaving some good impressions on the mind ;---but also to obviate the prejudices of some, even good men, who can scarcely be induced to suppose that true piety can exist, where, what they deem, great and fundamental errors, are embraced. They have been so accustomed to blend their own peculiar ideas and phraseology, with all their meditations on the divine being, to incorporate them with all their devout addresses to him, that they cannot conceive, how devotion can exist but under such a garb, or piety be felt but with the associations, with which they always feel it. But such persons only prove by this, how limited is their acquaintance with

\* Short account of his life, p. 11.

† Mr. Lindsey's Historical view of the state of the unitarian doctrine, p. 303.

human characters, and how narrow are their own views of things. The principles which are the great grounds of devout affections, are common to all religious schemes : such as that *God is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him : that he hath given us eternal life, and that this life is in, or by, his son Christ Jesus.* Into these principles may, and must, all the sentiments and exercises of a pious mind be resolved, as their just cause and animating motive. To a benevolent mind it is a source of joyful reflection to believe, that the power and pleasure of these principles are, and must be, felt by every sincere christian, whether calvinist or arminian; whether athanasian, arian, or socinian. The lover of truth, especially of religious truth, cannot but possess a serious and devout mind : for he is conversant with the most serious subjects, and from them only can derive his support and consolation under the discouragements and evils to which his inquiries after truth may expose him. And if trinitarians can mention a Howe, a Baxter, and a Watts; anti-trinitarians can boast an Emlyn, an Abernethy, and a Lardner.

## SECTION XIII.

*Conclusion—Some general reflections on Mr. Biddle's character—and on the utility of religious controversy.*

SOME will be ready to hold the labours and character of Mr. Biddle, which we have represented, in low estimation : as distinguished chiefly by an excessive attachment to religious controversy. But the neglect or indifference, with which they themselves treat the discussion of theological questions, is not a fair and just standard by which to judge of those whose attention, like Mr. Biddle's, hath been directed to them : for how can they be supposed competent to the determination of a point, on which they have bestowed no pains ? All that their opinion of its value proves, is only that such a direction of the thoughts and studies does not suit their taste. But still, in the great circle of human actions and pursuits, it may have its peculiar importance and use.

It will not be denied, that the discovery of truth, mathematical or philosophical, is a suitable and valuable employment of the rational powers : and though it be not necessary for the good of the world, that every man should be a philosopher or  
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mathematician, yet mankind are greatly indebted to the labours, and ought to hold in high esteem the names, of those who have devoted their time and thoughts to such investigations: which, in innumerable instances, are capable of being improved, and have been actually improved, to the advantage of mankind.

Why should its due value and praise be denied to the investigation of religious truth? This hath a more extensive influence, than scientific: it hath a more intimate connexion with human conduct, in all the intercourse, and with human felicity, under all the events of life. This derives a peculiar importance, from the energy it possesseth, to form a moral character; to meliorate the whole human race in this world; and to train up individuals, who yield to its power, for eternal PERFECTION and happiness.

The revelation of religious truth, first by Moses and the prophets, and then by Jesus Christ, is a most striking and convincing argument of its value and importance. Being revealed from heaven, it becomes an object of sacred attention to all, to whom it hath been communicated. There is a merit in the improvement of any talent, in the fulfilling of any obligation. On these plain principles, the investigation of religious truth hath merit:—the merit of attending to what



God hath imparted. Diligence and assiduity heighten this merit ; but sufferings endured in the pursuit and profession of it, add still more to it. Probity and integrity are inestimable in any course of life. Can they lose their value because the principle, which calls them into exertion, is the love of divine truth ?

Let these considerations be weighed ; they will assist us to appreciate the excellence and importance of such characters as Mr. Biddle. Such characters have been rendered peculiarly necessary and useful, through the gross corruptions, in which christianity hath been, for ages, almost lost. Without such exertions, such studies, and such sufferings, as mark the life of Mr. Biddle, no reformation from popery could have taken place, could have been supported and carried on. A Biddle, as hath been seen, calls the attention to important questions, throws light by discussion on interesting points, and awakens the spirit of inquiry and zeal.

In aid of these remarks, I am induced to produce the following reflexions. “ Notwithstanding the disrespect which is occasionally shewn towards religious controversy, by little and illiberal minds, it is to such controversies as engaged the pens of Clarke, Hoadley and Sykes, that we owe much of what is most valuable and dear to us.

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An affected disparagement of the several controversies which have respected religious liberty, and the improved knowledge of the scriptures, generally indicates an indifference to the nature and obligations of religion itself, or bespeaks a total ignorance of the blessings we derive and enjoy from free inquiry and debate, by means of the press; or is the effect of a lamentable prejudice against every desire and attempt to bring all professing christians to abide by the plain and artless gospel of Christ; or, when such aversion to controversy is held by well-meaning and more candid minds, it is no other than their declaring their earnest desire to establish the *end*, while, at the same time, they inconsistently and peremptorily protest against the only *means* which can effect it\*."

The sentiments of the learned bishop Pearce are very pertinent here, and deserve to be recited. "Let it be further considered," says his lordship, "that, if no disputes had ever been raised in the christian church, there is great reason to think, that less of truth would have been preserved

\* See the very instructive and entertaining Memoirs of the life and writings of Dr. Arthur Ashley Sykes, by Dr. Disney, p. 365.

in it, than there is to be found at present. Cicero tells us (Tusc. Disput. l. ii. cap. 2.) that philosophy would not have arrived at that height of credit, to which it arrived in Greece, if it had not received force and vigour from the controversies and disputes which were there carried on among the learned. And so it fares with religion: however good men may justly dislike the methods by which disputes about religious points are too often carried on, yet we see, that, in fact, ignorance of religion is no where so gross as where free debates about it are *not* allowed. And it is observable of the earlier and better ages of the church, that when heretics arose, and carried some doctrines to one extreme, it commonly was when the church seemed inclined to bear too much towards the other extreme. These heretics then, under the guidance of providence, caused a *revulsion of humours*, as it were, in the ecclesiastical body: it brought many back again into the right channel, and made them stick more closely to the truth than they would probably have done, if no opposition had been made. So that disputes about the christian religion seem to have contributed as much to the preserving it *pure*, as the constant motion of waters does to the keeping them *sweet*: and if so, that can be no argument *against believing*

*believing christianity, which has been one great cause of continuing it worthy to be believed\*.*

After all, it is perhaps more accurate to describe Mr. Biddle, after his biographer, as a *sincere reformer*, than a controversialist: for, besides publishing but a few books, he did not reply to those diverse answers, which were given to what he did publish. For this conduct several reasons have been given. "First, that he was verily persuaded, that truth being in itself plain and simple, especially what is necessary and very useful, is easy to be apprehended by few words: it is error that seeks garnish in many words and figures of speech. Again, what he did publish, he well deliberated of; so that he did not find in the adverse writings any thing of moment, which an attentive reader might not perceive already obviated; and they that attend not to the first propositions, will not receive benefit by replies and rejoinders. We add, that he, treading in a path, long overgrown with briars and thorns of error and sophistry, it required vastly greater labour and diligence to find out the way of truth, in which no Englishman had, by any appearing footsteps, gone before him for many ages †."

\* Bp. Pearce's Sermons, vol. 1. p. 386, 387.

† Short account of his life, p. 9, 10.

To those who are convinced that, notwithstanding his mistakes in some points, Mr. Biddle had truth on his side in the great questions he discussed, concerning the unity of God, and the humanity of Christ, it will be a painful reflexion; that his opinions have made but a very slow progress during these hundred and twenty years: at least the first hundred years of this period. The progress of truth is ever slow: for it has great difficulties to encounter from the indolence and interests of mankind; the discovery of it is attended with a painful process: light must be let into the minds of men by degrees: and many arguments must be, one after another, laid before them; and presented in different forms, and repeatedly renewed, before prejudices are subdued and conviction is produced. But to every sincere lover of God's truth this is a pleasing and encouraging thought: that it is GREAT, and WILL IN THE END PREVAIL.

In the mean time, it is the duty of every one to use his own best and faithful endeavours to come at the knowledge of it, and to promote it. "Let him," to use the words of the prelate just quoted, "be indifferent, if he will, to the knowledge of the several curious sciences, with which men of leisure wisely enough fill up the intervals of their time. Let him slight, if he will (though  
I com-



I commend him not for it), the account of what history records concerning the past ages of the world, or what travellers or voyagers say concerning the distant parts of the earth. In all these things, his indifference, though not *praise-worthy*, is not *criminal*, is not *dangerous* to the health of his soul. But, when the question is, “How shall we worship God aright,” (it may be as justly said, when it concerns the *object* of our worship) “How shall we please him? Upon what terms will he receive penitent sinners into favour?—Can it be wisdom? can it be common sense, not to make a diligent and impartial inquiry?—No man who finds his mind entangled with doubts and difficulties can be justified, if he neglect, as Pilate did, to know what the TRUTH is. It is his duty to search: it is his interest to do it; for the safety of his soul is highly concerned in it\*.”

\* Ut supra, p. 388, 389.

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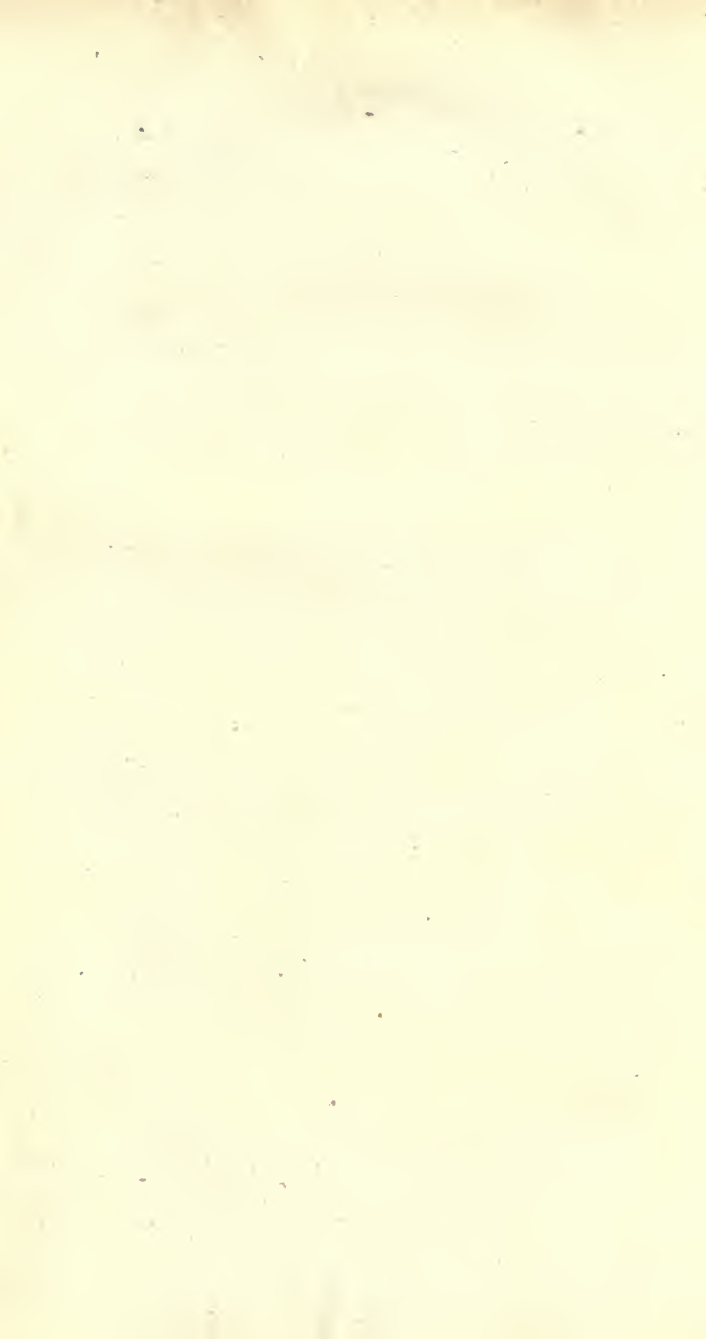
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THE LIFE  
OF  
MR. THOMAS FIRMIN,  
LATE CITIZEN OF LONDON.

---

WRITTEN BY ONE OF HIS MOST INTIMATE ACQUAINTANCE.

---

WITH  
A SERMON,  
ON  
LUKE X. 36, 37.

PREACHED ON THE OCCASION OF HIS DEATH.

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LONDON:  
PRINTED MDCCXCI.



[ Re-printed from the edition of 1698. ]

THE  
L I F E

OF

MR. THOMAS FIRMIN.

THE long acquaintance and intimate friendship I had with Mr. FIRMIN, are (I confess) warrantable causes, that so many do expect from me, an account of his (memorable) life. If some other man would answer the public expectation, with more address, as to expression, method, number and value of observations and reflections ; in a word, more elegantly ; yet I will not be wanting in sincerity or truth.

THOMAS FIRMIN was born at Ipswich in Suffolk, in the month of June, anno 1632, being the son of Henry Firmin, and of Prudence his wife. Henry and Prudence, as they did not overflow with wealth of the world, so neither was their condition low or strait. God gave them the wish of Solomon, *neither poverty nor riches* ; but that middle estate and rank, which containeth all that is valuable and desirable in wealth, without the parade, vanity and temptations, that (generally)

adhere to riches. But these two were very considerable in their degree, or place, both as to esteem and plenty; by means of their sobriety, diligence and good conduct, the effects of their piety, they were of the number of those, who were then called "Puritans," by the looser sort of people: who were wont to impute precisianism, or affected puritanism, to such as were more devout, and withal more conscientious, and exemplary, than is ordinary; though in the way of the church of England.

When he was of capable years for it, they put their son (Thomas Firmin) to an apprenticeship in London; under a master who was (by sect or opinion) an arminian, a hearer of Mr. John Goodwyn. Our young man, accompanying his master to the elegant and learned sermons of Mr. Goodwyn, soon exchanged the (harsh) opinions of Calvin, in which he had been educated, for those (more honourable to God, and more accountable to the human reason) of Arminius and the remonstrants. And now it was, that he learned, as was the commendable custom of those times, to write short hand; at which he was so dextrous, that he would take into a book, any sermon that he heard, word for word, as it was spoken by the preacher; if the sermon were not delivered with too much precipitance. Of this he made a double use, both then, and in the very busiest part of his

his life. For, if the sermon was considerable, for (judicious) morality, or weighty arguments, he often read it, in his short-hand notes, for his own further improvement : and then took the pains to write it out (in words at length) for the benefit of his acquaintance. He left behind him a great many little books of that kind ; sermons copied fair from his short-hand notes, which, not seldom, are “ multum in parvo.”

As to his demeanor in his apprenticeship ; he was so nimble in his motions, in taking down, opening goods to chapmen, &c. that some gave him the name of “ Spirit.” And in making his bargain, his words and address were so pleasing, and respectful, that after some time, the customers rather chose to deal with Thomas, than with the master of the shop : or if a bargain was struck between a customer and his master, he would decide the difference to the liking of both.

He met, however, with one rub, in the course of his service ; for the elder apprentice purloined five pounds of his master’s money, and laid it to the charge of Tom. Firmin. I know not whether the imputation was believed, probably it was not ; but it pleased God himself to judge in this case. For the elder servant was, shortly after, taken with a mortal sickness ; and, before he died, made confession, that he took and spent his master’s money, Thomas Firmin not being in the least privy to it. Thus he that made all things,

the very least, does not disdain or neglect to judge all things, even little things, in the properest time. Many crimes are suffered to rest, or are not presently called to judgment: because the delay of justice ordinarily hurts no body; but, when the innocent and virtuous lie under imputations, by occasion of the guilt of others, the detection of offenders, and the execution of wrath, are but seldom (if ever) respited.

So soon as he was made free, he began to trade for himself, though his first stock was but about one hundred pounds. By the opinion he had raised of himself among the merchants and others, and the love he had gained among his master's customers, the neighbourhood, and a great number of incidental acquaintance, he overcame the difficulties of so weak and incompetent a beginning; so that in the year 1660, he married a citizen's daughter, with five hundred pounds to her portion.

From his first setting up (as they speak) for himself, he would be acquainted with all persons that seemed to be worthy, foreigners as well as english, more especially ministers: he seldom dined without some such at his table; which, though somewhat chargeable to his (then) slender abilities, was of great use to him afterwards, both in relation to the poor and the public. For out of his large acquaintance and multitude of friends, he engaged the (powerful) interest of some, and the (weighty) purses of others, in some of those  
great



great designs of charity, or other services to the public, for which I shall hereafter account.

Now also it was, that he happened to become acquainted with Mr. Biddle, who much confirmed him in his arminian tenets, and carried him a great deal further. Mr. Biddle persuaded him, that the unity of God is a unity of *person* as well as of *nature*; that the holy spirit\* is indeed a *person*, but not *God*. He had a great and just esteem of Mr. Biddle's piety, exemplariness and learning; and is that friend (mentioned in Mr. Biddle's life) who gave Mr. Biddle his bed and board, till he was sent prisoner by protector Oliver Cromwell to the isle of Scilly; and when there, Mr. Firmin, with another friend, procured for him a yearly pension of one hundred crowns from the protector, besides what he obtained from other friends, or gave himself.

Mr. Firmin's diversion, in this part of his life, was gardening; for which purpose he cultivated a piece of ground at Hoxton, not a mile from London; where he raised flowers, and (in time) attained no small skill in the art of gardening, in the culture of flowers, herbs, greens, and fruit-trees of all sorts. I have often borne him company to his garden; but, either going or coming back, he used often to visit the poor and sick.

\* [The personality of the holy spirit is renounced by unitarian christians; and by *the spirit of God*, is very generally understood, *the power of God*, or God himself.]

It was one of Mr. Biddle's lessons, that it is a duty not only to relieve, but to visit the sick and poor; because they are hereby encouraged and comforted, and we informed of what nature and degree their straits are, and that some are more worthy of assistance than others; and their condition being known, sometimes we are able to assist them by our counsel, or our interest, much more effectually than by the charity we do, or can bestow upon, them.

Before I pass to the next scene of Mr. Firmin's life, I am obliged to take notice, that by his first wife he had a son and a daughter; the former lived to man's estate, but died (a bachelor) about seven years before his father. The mother of these two children died while Mr. Firmin was (occasionally) at Cambridge, managing there some affairs of his trade. Her death was accompanied with this remarkable circumstance. Mr. Firmin dreamed at Cambridge, that he saw his wife breathing her last: whereupon, early in the morning, he took horse for London; but, on the way thither, he met the messenger who was sent to give him notice of her decease.

Another (necessary) remark belonging to this part of his life is, that though hitherto his wealth was no more than a competence, considering his liberal humour, and the multitude of his acquaintance; yet he was even then a most kind brother, uncle, and kinsman. The reader may take account  
of

of this in the following transcript, being the copy of a paper written by one of his nearest relations, and who hath lived with him above thirty years, and was (a great part of that time) his partner, and also a person of great sobriety, diligence, integrity and prudence. “ He had many “ relations, of several degrees, who stood in need “ of his care and help; to whom he was a very “ kind brother, uncle, and kinsman; besides the “ great pains he took to promote them, as it lay “ in his way or power. His loss by some of them, “ for whom he advanced money, and his disburse- “ ments for others of them, amounted to very “ considerable sums; a good part of which was “ not long after his first beginning in the world. “ This was the greater prejudice to him, be- “ cause then his own circumstances required “ money to carry on his trade with ease and “ advantage; for he had then more occasion “ for his money, than when he was arrived to a “ very considerable estate, which he did not till “ about seventeen years before his death. His “ estate at (about) seventeen years before his “ decease, was *three times greater than when he “ died*, though then considerable. He might “ easily have increased it, as much as he dimi- “ nished it, had he set his heart on riches; but “ those he never valued in comparison of doing “ good: and I have often heard him say, *he would “ not die worth more than five thousand pounds.*”

Of his liberalities to the poor, and the deserving, and the motives to them, I may say enough hereafter. But for his beneficence to his kindred, it proceeded not merely from the benignity of his nature, or natural affection; which (however) to cherish and improve is a great virtue; but from his reverence to the christian religion. For as he would frequently say, that passage of St. Paul to Timothy is to be read as it stands in the margin of our bibles, "He that provides not for his OWN KINDRED, is worse than an infidel:" so he was wont to give that text as the reason of his bounties to his relations. So far was he from that deism, of which some have been so over-forward to suspect him.

During the imprisonment of Mr. Biddle in the isle of Scilly, Mr. Firmin was settled in Lombard-street, where first Mr. Jacomb, then Dr. Outram, was minister: with these two, being excellent preachers, and learned men, he maintained a respectful and kind friendship; which was answered as affectionately and cordially on their parts. Now also he grew into intimacy with Dr. Whichcote, Dr. Worthington, Dr. Wilkins, Mr. Tillotson: Dr. Wilkins was afterwards bishop of Chester, Mr. Tillotson (for he was not yet made doctor) archbishop of Canterbury; but in their dignity, and to the very last, Mr. Firmin had the same place and degree in their esteem and friendship,  
that

that at any time formerly he had. While Dr. Tillotson preached the Tuesday's lecture at St. Lawrence, (so much frequented by all the divines of the town, and by a great many persons of quality and distinction) when the doctor was obliged to be at Canterbury, where he was dean, or was out of town, either for diversion or health, he generally left it to Mr. Firmin to provide preachers for his lecture, and Mr. Firmin never failed to supply his place with some very eminent preacher; so that there never was any complaint on the account of Dr. Tillotson's absence. And this Mr. Firmin could easily do, for now there was hardly a divine of note (whether in London, or, in the country, that frequented London) but Mr. Firmin was become acquainted with him. This helped him much to serve the interests of many (hopeful) young preachers and scholars; candidates for lectures, schools, cures, or rectories; for whom he would solicit with as much affection and diligence as other men do for their sons, or near relations.

See here a trader, (who knew no latin or greek, no logic or philosophy) compassed about by an incredible number of learned friends, who differed so widely in opinion from him, and were continually attacking him for his (supposed) errors; yet could they never remove him from the belief of the **UNITY OF GOD**, nor did their importunities,  
or



or his resistance, break off (or so much as lessen) the friendship between them; certain arguments of the extraordinary wit and good address of our friend.

Her late majesty (queen Mary) of most happy memory, having heard much of Mr. Firmin's usefulness in all public designs, especially those of charity; and that he was heterodox in the articles of the trinity, the divinity of our saviour, and the satisfaction; she spoke to archbishop Tillotson, and earnestly recommended it to him, to set Mr. Firmin right in those weighty and necessary points. The archbishop answered, that he had often endeavoured it; but Mr. Firmin having so early and long imbibed the socinian doctrine, was not now capable of a contrary impression. However, his grace published his sermons (formerly preached at St. Lawrence's) concerning those questions, and sent Mr. Firmin one of the first copies from the press. Mr. Firmin, not convinced by his grace's reasonings, or his arguments from holy scripture, caused a very respectful answer (although some have stretched one expression too far), entitled, *Considerations on the explications and defences of the doctrine of the trinity*, to be drawn up and published, himself giving to his grace a copy of it\*. I

\* [See third volume of *Unitarian tracts*, 4to. 1694.]

must not omit to do the archbishop justice against those who pretend, that the archbishop, notwithstanding those sermons, was in his heart an unitarian. For Mr. Firmin himself told me, shortly after the archbishop had published those sermons, that going to Lambeth, and the archbishop happening to dine in private, he sent for Mr. Firmin to him, and said to this effect, " that the calumnies of people had obliged him to publish his sermons, some time since preached at St. Lawrence's against the tenets of Socinus ; that he had sincerely preached as he then thought, and continued still to think, of those points ; that, however, nobody's false imputations should provoke him to give ill language to persons who dissented conscientiously, and for weighty reasons. That he knew well this was the case of the Socinians, for whose learning and dexterity he should always have a respect, as well as for their sincerity and exemplariness." Afterwards, when Mr. Firmin gave him a copy of *The Considerations*; after he had read it, he only said, " My lord of Sarum shall humble your writers." Nor did he afterwards, at any time, express the least coldness on the account of the answer made to him, but used Mr. Firmin as formerly, inquiring, as he was wont, "*How does my son Giles?*" for so he called Mr. Firmin's son, by his second wife.

About the time the (great and good) archbishop died, the controversy concerning the trinity, and the depending questions, received an unexpected turn. The unitarians took notice, from D. Petavius, Dr. R. Cudworth, S. Curcellæus, the Oxford heads, Dr. S——th and others, that their opposers agreed indeed in contending for a trinity of divine persons, but differed from one another, even as much as from the unitarians, concerning what is to be meant by the term *persons*. Some of them say, three divine *persons* are three (eternal, infinite) *minds, spirits, substances* and *beings*; but others reject this as heresy, blasphemy, and tritheism. These latter affirm, that GOD is *one* (infinite, eternal, all-perfect) *mind and spirit*; and the trinity of *persons* is the godhead, divine essence, or divine substance, considered as *unbegotten, begotten, and proceeding*: which *modes* or *properties* they (further) explain by *original wisdom*, unbegotten, and therefore named “the father;” the *reflex wisdom*, *logos*, or *WORD*, which being generated or begotten, is called “the son;” and the eternal spiration of *divine love*, that has therefore the name of “holy spirit.” The *unitarians* never intended to oppose any other trinity, but a trinity of (infinite) *minds* or *spirits*; grant to them, that GOD is one infinite spirit or mind, not two or three, they demand no more. They applied themselves,

selves, therefore, to inquire, which of these trinities, a trinity of *spirits* or of *properties*, is the doctrine of the catholic church. They could not miss of a ready satisfaction. All systems, catechisms, books of controversy, councils, writers that have been esteemed catholic, more especially since the (general) Lateran council, anno 1215, and the reformation, have defined God to be *one infinite all perfect spirit*; and the divine *persons* to be nothing else, but the divine essence or *godhead*, with the three *relative properties*, unbegotten, and begotten, and proceeding. They saw, therefore, plainly, that the difference between the church and the unitarians had arisen from a mere mistake of one another's meaning: a mistake occasioned (chiefly) by the unscriptural terms *trinity*, *persons*, and such like. They resolved, that it became them, as good christians, to seek the peace of the catholic church, and not to litigate about terms (though never so improper, or implying only trifles,) when the things intended by those terms are not unsound or heterodox. These (honest, pacific) inclinations of men, who had no design in their dissent from the church, gave birth to "*The agreement between the unitarians and the catholic church*;" a book written at the instance (chiefly) of Mr. Firmin, in answer to Mr. Edwards, the bishops of Worcester, Sarum, and Chichester, and monsieur de Luzanzy. I

need not to say, what will be owned by every (ingenuous) learned person, without hesitation, that *The Agreement* is as well the doctrine of the catholic church, as of the unitarians; and that in all the points, so long and fiercely debated and controverted by the writers of this and former ages. It must be confessed, the hands of a great many excellent persons did concur to this re-union of parties, that seemed so widely and unreconcilably divided, and did encourage the author of *The Agreement* in his (disinterested, laborious) searches into antiquity, and other parts of learning; and several learned men, some of them authors in the socinian (or unitarian) way, examined the work with the candour and ingenuity that are as necessary, in such cases, as learning or judgment are. Mr. Firmin published it, when examined and corrected, with more satisfaction than he had before given in different controversial writings. I did not wonder, however, that our friend was so ready to embrace a reconciliation with the church: for he was ever a lover of peace, and always *conformed as far as he could*, according to that direction of the apostle, *Whereunto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule*. Which with the best interpreters he understood thus: “ Conform to the doctrines, terms and usages, “ that are commonly received, as far as you can; “ if, in some things, you differ from the church, “ yet



“ yet agree with her, and walk by her rule, to  
 “ the utmost that in conscience you may; or, as  
 “ the apostle himself words it, *so far as* (or where-  
 “ unto) *you have attained.*” From this prin-  
 ciple it was, that our friend never approved of  
 those who separate from the communion of the  
 church on the account of ceremonies, habits, form  
 government, or other mere circumstantial of re-  
 ligion. He was wont to tell such, that seeing it  
 was undeniable they might communicate with the  
 church without either sin or scandal, and did com-  
 municate on some occasions; it is therefore both  
 scandal and sin to separate and divide. With this  
 he silenced many, and reclaimed divers\*.

In the year 1658, the unitarians were banished  
 out of Poland; the occasion was this: Poland had  
 been long harassed with most dangerous civil and  
 foreign wars, insomuch that at one time there  
 were in arms in Poland, Lithuania, and the Ukrain,  
 one hundred and fourscore thousand Poles, as many

\* [This argument for conformity will not, in the most distant  
 degree, apply to those who, believing the proper unity of God,  
 shall continue to join in giving religious worship to Jesus Christ,  
 the creature of God; or to a trinity of Gods. A practice highly  
 reprehensible upon every principle of religion and morals; and  
 which, it may reasonably be supposed Mr. Firmin himself  
 would have viewed in the same light, had the subject been pre-  
 viously discussed, as in our day, or had his temper and habits  
 admitted him to think for himself in this respect.]

Tartars, and two hundred thousand Cossacks, besides powerful bodies of Austrians, and Transilvians, who attacked Poland on the west and south. The ravages and desolations committed, and caused, by so many great armies, in a country that has but few fortified places, were inexpressible. Poland, therefore, was reduced to such a feeble and desperate condition, that their king withdrew himself; and the king of Sweden took the advantage of their confusion and low estate, to invade them with forty thousand men, regular troops. He took the cities of Warsaw and Cracow, and with them almost all Poland: he constrained the Poles to take an oath of subjection and allegiance to him; which oath was first submitted unto, and taken, by the roman catholics, then by the protestants, and, not till last of all, by the unitarians. But the swedish king engaging himself in other wars, particularly with Denmark, and in Germany, John Casimire, king of Poland, appeared again; and the Poles generally joining their king, at length drove the Swedes out of Poland: the swedish king found himself obliged to condescend to a (reasonable) peace with king Casimire. As the unitarians were the last that submitted to the obedience of Swedeland, so being bound thereto by an oath, they did not concur with the other Poles in rebelling against him. They considered the swedish king as a fair conqueror, and a protestant

testant prince, and themselves as tied to him by  
 oath ; therefore, they even opposed, in some places,  
 the revolt from him. This was interpreted a  
 desertion of their natural prince, and native coun-  
 try ; and (though all the partakers, with the swedish  
 king, were included in the peace made with him)  
 was avenged in the very next diet after the peace,  
 by a decree and edict, the sum of which was as  
 follows : “ The toleration granted by the laws,  
 “ and coronation-oaths of the kings, to dissenters  
 “ from the church, does not legally extend to the  
 “ unitarians (whom they called arians, or ana-  
 “ baptists), this being a new heresy, since the  
 “ granting that indulgence or toleration ; there-  
 “ fore all unitarians, who within such a limited  
 “ time will not embrace the roman-catholic reli-  
 “ gion, shall be banished out of Poland ; allow-  
 “ ing, however, two years (in effect but one) to  
 “ sell their estates, whether real or personal.”  
 Hereupon, the unitarians left Poland, and settled,  
 some in Transilvania, where divers provinces and  
 cities are unitarian ; some in ducal Prussia, and  
 Brandenburg, where they enjoy like privileges  
 with his electoral highness’s other subjects ; some  
 (few) in Holland. These unitarians were (in  
 my opinion) unhappy, that they had not a man  
 among them who could discern it, and shew them,  
 that neither in the article of the trinity, nor of  
 the divinity of our saviour, they had any *real* dif-  
ference

ference with the catholic church : and that the terms used by the church, imply nothing that is contrary to the unity of God, as it is held by learned men. Their confession, which they published upon their banishment, ascribes as much to our saviour, as is intended by the catholic terms *incarnation, God-man, God the son, hypostatical* (or personal) *union*, and the rest : therefore, seeing the church will not dismiss those (unscriptural) terms, but (for certain reasons) contents herself to interpret them to a sound sense, it had been well if the polish unitarians had been so dextrous, as to distinguish between an unsound sense, and improper terms ; disclaiming only the former, and submitting to the latter \*. The unitarian congregations in Poland had many poor persons ; therefore the nobility and gentry prayed a contribution for them, from all unitarian churches of foreign parts : and though they knew there were but few unitarian families in England, they sent a letter to us to intreat our help. Mr. Firmin procured for them some assistances from private persons ; and, though without a brief, some collections in churches : both these in the year 1662. But I

\* [Mr. Firmin's biographer appears to have fallen into the casuistry of Mr. Firmin himself on the subject of conformity ; which we cannot but greatly disapprove, however we may value his principles of integrity in other respects.]

mention this for the sake of what happened anno 1681, for then king Charles granted a brief for another sort of polonian sufferers, protestants also : these were they who had suffered the unitarians to be banished about twenty years before, when it was in their power to have prevented it, if so much as one of their deputies had protested against it in the diet. They willingly permitted, nay, they promoted, the violation of the liberty of dissenters not twenty years before ; and now, weakened by the loss of the whole unitarian interest, it came to their own turns to be the sufferers. They had never lost either country, or liberty, if they had not voted themselves out of both, by their (former) votes against the unitarians. A toleration or liberty of religion, once violated, will soon be disregarded ; for break it only in one instance, or party, and you have disannulled the whole reason of it, and all the pleas for it. The malice of any against the English unitarians comes now too late ; they less dissent from the church (if they are at all dissenters) than any other denomination of dissenters\* : therefore let those dissenters look to it, who have promoted

\* [This argument is founded upon the presumption that the church of England is unitarian ; but the inconsistency in her doctrines, and the difference between the liberty she claims, and that which she allows, justifies the plea of the unitarian dissenter beyond the possibility of refutation.]



a bill, in name and pretext, against immorality, and blasphemy; in truth and real design against the unitarians. I said king Charles granted a brief for the polonian protestants, who had assisted in banishing the polonian unitarians—This brief Mr. Firmin promoted as much as in him lay: I find he received of nine dissenting congregations, 110l. 16s. 10d. and in another book I find the sum of 568l. 16s. 0½d. collected on the same account.

We are now come to another part of Mr. Firmin's life, his second marriage. In the year 1664 he married a daughter of a justice of peace in the county of Essex, and had with her, besides all the qualifications of a good wife, a considerable portion. God was pleased to give them several children; but one son, Giles Firmin, lived to man's estate. He promised to become an eminent merchant, his father giving him the whole portion he had received with his mother: and the young gentleman going into Portugal, to manage there his own business, he was called by the heavenly father to eternal mercies.

In the year 1665 was a great plague, of which there died in that one year, in London only, near one hundred thousand persons: most of the wealthier citizens removed themselves and children into the country; so did Mr. Firmin, but left a kinsman in his house, with order to relieve some

poor weekly, and to give out stuff to employ them in making such commodities as they were wont. He foresaw that he should be hard put to it, to dispose of such an abundance of commodities as these poor people would work off, in so long time, for him only: but when he returned to London, a wealthy chapman (who was greatly pleased with his adventurous charity) bought an extraordinary quantity of those goods; so that he incurred no loss, at that time, by employing the poor.

The year after the sickness, happened the great fire, by which the city of London sustained the damage of ten millions of pounds sterling. Mr. Firmin, with his neighbours, suffered the loss of his house in Lombard-street, and took (thereupon) a house and warehouse in Leadenhall-street. But now his fine spirit, and generous way of trading, were so well known, that in a few years he so improved his stock, that he rebuilt his house, and built also the whole court (excepting two or three houses) in which he lived. And having now provided sufficiently for himself and family, he began to consider the poor.

His first service to them, or rather to God in their persons, was the building a warehouse by the water-side, for the laying up corn and coals, to be sold to the poor, in scarce and dear times, at moderate and reasonable rates, at the rates they had been purchased, allowing only for loss (if any should

should happen) by damage of the goods while kept.

He went on with his trade in Lombard-street till the year 1676, at which time I estimate he was worth about nine thousand pounds. If we consider, that this estate was raised from a beginning of about one hundred pounds, in an ordinary way of trade, and in about twenty years time; to what a mighty wealth would it have grown, in the hands of such a manager, in his remaining twenty or one and twenty years; had not his native liberality, great mind and zeal of serving the divine majesty, turned his endeavours a contrary way; to support, and to raise others, while he lessened and impaired himself? For in this year he erected his warehouse in Little Britain, for the employment of the poor in the linen manufacture. Let us hear what archbishop Tillotson (then but dean Tillotson) says of this design of Mr. Firmin, in his funeral-sermon on Mr. Gouge, anno 1681.

“ He (Mr. Gouge) set the poor of St. Sepul-  
 “ chre’s parish (where he was minister) to work,  
 “ at his own charge. He bought flax and hemp  
 “ for them to spin; when spun, he paid them for  
 “ their work, and caused it to be wrought into  
 “ cloth, which he sold as he could, himself  
 “ bearing the whole loss. This was a very wise  
 “ and well-chosen way of charity; and in the  
 “ good effect of it, a much greater charity, than  
 “ if

“ if he had given to those very persons (freely  
 “ and for nothing) so much as he made them to  
 “ earn by their work : because, by this means he  
 “ rescued them from two most dangerous tempta-  
 “ tions, idleness and poverty. This course, so  
 “ happily devised and begun by Mr. Gouge, gave,  
 “ it may be, the first hint to that useful and wor-  
 “ thy citizen, Mr. Thomas Firmin, of a much  
 “ larger design ; which has been managed by  
 “ him some years, in this city, with such vigour  
 “ and good success, that many hundreds of poor  
 “ children, and others, who lived idle before,  
 “ unprofitable both to themselves and the public,  
 “ now maintain themselves, and are also some  
 “ advantage to the community. By the assistance  
 “ and charity of many excellent and well-disposed  
 “ persons, Mr. Firmin is enabled to bear the un-  
 “ avoidable loss and charge of so vast an under-  
 “ taking ; and by his own forward inclination to  
 “ charity, and unwearied diligence and activity,  
 “ is fitted to sustain and go through the incredible  
 “ pains of it.” (Sermon on Mr. Gouge, p. 62,  
 63, 64.)

It is of this project and warehouse that Mr.  
 Firmin himself speaks, in a book of his, entitled,  
*Proposals for the employment of the poor*, in these  
 words : “ It is now above four years since I set  
 “ up my workhouse in Little Britain, for the  
 “ employment of the poor, in the linen manu-

“ facture ; which hath afforded so great help and  
 “ relief to many hundreds of poor families, that  
 “ I never did, and I fear never shall do, an action  
 “ more to my own satisfaction, or to the good  
 “ and benefit of the poor.” He employed, in this  
 manufacture, sometimes sixteen hundred, some-  
 times seventeen hundred spinners, besides dressers  
 of flax, weavers, and others.

Because he found that his poor must work sixteen hours in the day to earn sixpence, and thought that their necessities and labour were not sufficiently supplied, or recompensed, by those earnings ; therefore, he was wont to distribute charity among them, as he saw their need, especially at Christmas, and in hard weather. Without this charity, some of them would have perished for want, when either they or their children fell ill. He used also to lay in vast quantities of coals, which he gave out by a peck at a time : whoever of the spinners brought in two pounds of yarn, might take away with them a peck of coals, besides what coals were given to such as were ancient, had many children, or any sick in their family. But, because they soiled themselves by carrying away coals in their aprons or skirts, he obviated that inconvenience, and damage to them, by giving them canvas bags. Cleanliness contributing much to health, he distributed among them shirts and shifts made of the coarser and stronger sort of cloth, that had been spun



spun by themselves, and he gave the same also among their children. Much of this linen he begged for them ; for he found, among his acquaintance and friends, divers charitable persons, who would rather buy the cloth that had been wrought by our home-poor, than purchase it, though at somewhat cheaper rates, from merchants or shops, that sell scarce any except foreign cloth. By the assistance and order of his friends, he gave to men, women, and children, sometimes three thousand shirts and shifts in two years. But still further to encourage and help his poor, he would invite persons of ability to come to his workhouse, on days the spinners brought their yarn, that, seeing their poverty and diligence, he might the more easily persuade them to give, or subscribe, something for their relief. Some would work, but knew not the art of spinning, or were not able to purchase wheels and reels ; for these he hired teachers, and freely gave them their reels and wheels. He often took up poor children as they were begging in the streets, whom he caused to be taught at his own charge, and provided for them their reels and wheels, which were never deducted out of their work.

In his book of *proposals* he takes notice that, “ In  
 “ above four thousand pounds laid out the last year,  
 “ reckoning house-rent, servants’ wages, loss by  
 “ learners, with the interest of the money, there

“ was not above two hundred pounds lost. One  
 “ chief reason of which was, the kindness of several  
 “ persons, who took off good quantities of commo-  
 “ dities at the price they cost me to spin and  
 “ weave: and, in particular, the East India and  
 “ Guinea companies gave me encouragement to  
 “ make their *Allabas* cloths, and coarse canvas for  
 “ pepper bags; which before they bought from  
 “ foreign countries.”

He published that book of *proposals* to engage others to set the poor to work, at a public charge; or at least to assist him, and two or three friends, in what he had now carried on, for above five years, at the loss of above one thousand pounds. But, finding that the lord mayor and the aldermen were not persuaded by what he had offered in his book, and by discourse with them, and other wealthy citizens, he began to lessen the spinning trade: for I find that in the year 1682, the whole disbursement was only two thousand three hundred and thirty-seven pounds three shillings, and yet the loss thereby that year was two hundred and fourteen pounds.

It should seem he did not meet with so many charitable persons, who would buy his manufacture at the price it cost him, as in some former years.—Nay, from this time the loss increased yearly upon him. For seven or eight years together he lost two-pence in the shilling, by all the work of his poor; but he

was.

was contented, for he would say, *Two-pence given them by loss in their work, was twice so much saved to the public, in that it took them off from beggary or theft.* But his loss some years was extraordinary. In the year 1683, the trade increasing again, his own disbursements, besides his friends, were not less than two thousand pounds; the loss for that year was four hundred pounds. Continuing thus, in the year 1684, the balance of loss, not then received, amounted to seven hundred and sixty-three pounds. And in the year 1685 it increased to nine hundred pounds eleven shillings and three-pence; toward which loss, an eminent citizen, who had five hundred pounds in that stock, quitted the whole principal, and required no interest. In the years 1686, 1687, 1688, and 1689, the trade declined for want of more such benefactors. The loss now remaining was four hundred and thirteen pounds, eleven shillings and three-pence; the value of the goods then in hand, and debts standing out being computed at three hundred and seventy-two pounds three shillings and one penny, I find no more in the whole received than two hundred and seventy-nine pounds and one penny, which falling short ninety-three pounds three shillings, added to the former loss of four hundred and thirteen pounds eleven shillings and three-pence, makes five hundred and six pounds fourteen shillings and three-pence. This whole sum I find not any way made

good, but remains due to Mr. Firmin, though never reckoned by him as any part of his estate.

Anno 1690. The design was taken up by *the patentees of the linen manufacture*; who made the poor, and others, whom they employed, to work cheaper; yet that was not sufficient to encourage them to continue the manufacture. The patentees agreed with Mr. Firmin, to give him one hundred pounds a year to oversee and govern their manufacture: but seeing their undertaking had not answered their, or his, expectations, he never received the promised salary, nor discounted it to them; and if he had, he would certainly have given it (in money, linen, and coals) among the spinners. This I venture to say, because when he drew some prizes in one of Mr. Neal's lotteries to the value of one hundred and eighty pounds, he reserved to himself only the money he had adventured: the money gained, he gave partly to some relations, and partly to the poor.

But the poor spinners, being thus deserted, Mr. Firmin returned to them again, and managed that trade as he was wont: but so, that he made it bear almost its own charges. But in order that their smaller wages might be comfortable to them, he was more charitable to them in his distributions, in this than in any former years; and begged for them of almost all persons of rank, with whom he had intimacy, or so much as friendship.

He

He would also carry his cloth to divers persons, with whom he scarce had any acquaintance ; telling them, “ it was the poor’s cloth, which in “ conscience they ought to buy at the price it could “ be afforded :” If the buyers were very wealthy, he prevailed on them to give some of the cloth they had bought, in shirting ; and he would quickly send for the money, that was due for the cloth. But, without these ways, it had been impossible for him, to imploy such a multitude of people, who could not stay a minute for their money. This continued to be his chief business and care, to the day of his death : saving that about two years since, when the calling in the clipped money occasioned such a scarcity of current coin, that it was hard with many rich to get money enough to go to market, he was forced to dismiss some of his spinners, for mere want of money to pay them. I heard his partner and kinsman, Mr. James, tell him, that he had taken about seven hundred pounds out of their cash already, for the spinners ; and that he should take out no more, as yet. Not that Mr. James was not always an encourager and promoter of the work-house charity ; for he never took any interest-money, for his share in that stock : but, their whole common trade going through the hands of Mr. James, and being managed by him, he was more sensible than Mr. Firmin, that more ready money could  
not



not be spared to that use, without great disadvantage to their trade.

Flax and tow being goods very combustible, Mr. Firmin was always a little uneasy, lest by some accident, the work-house, being in the keeping only of servants, should take fire: and I remember the boys, in one of their licentious times of throwing squibs, flung one into the work-house cellar, where the tow and flax were stowed; but providence did not permit it should do any hurt.

Before I dismiss this work-house, I must take notice, that at his death, our friend told Dr. L. that he did not regret his dying, only he could have been willing (had God so pleased) to have continued two months longer, to put his work-house and spinners into another method. That method is now settled by Mr. James; and the poor spinners employed as formerly.

Concerning this work-house, and the spinners, Mr. Firmin would often say, that, *To pay or relieve the spinners, with money begged for them, with coals, and shirting, was to him such a pleasure, as magnificent buildings, pleasant walks, well cultivated orchards and gardens, the jollity of music and wine, or the charms of love or study, are to others.* I am persuaded he said no more than the truth; for Mr. James, who was his apprentice, journeyman, and partner, upwards  
of

of thirty years, gives this account of his uncle's expence on this and other charities ; " Comparing " and balancing, says he, his expences and losses with " his gains, he might have left an estate behind him " of at least twenty thousand pounds, if he had not " given and spent it in public and private charities, " buildings, and other good works ; whereas now " his estate amounts to no more than a sixth part of " that sum." But it was his settled resolution not to be richer : he told me, but a little before he died, that were he now worth forty thousand pounds, he would die but very little richer than he then was. I inclined to think that in such case, he would have died much poorer ; for such a sum would have engaged him in such vast designs for his province, the poor, that (probably) he would have gone beyond the expence he intended at first for them. I have heard his physician blame him sometimes, that he did not allow himself competent time for his dinner ; but hastened to Garraway's coffee-house, about his affairs. But those affairs were seldom, if ever, his own ; he was to solicit for the poor, or in the business of some friend who wanted Mr. Firmin's interest : or he was to meet on some design relating to the public good. In these matters his friends, that were not quick in their dispatches, had reason oftentimes to complain of him, as not giving them sufficient time, to dispatch business with him : for he was nimble.

nimble above most men, in apprehension, in speech, judgment, resolution, and action.

He was persuaded by some to make trial of the woolen manufacture ; because at this, the poor might make better wages, than at linen work. For this, he took a house in Artillery Lane : but the price of wool advancing very much, and the London spinsters being almost wholly unskilful at drawing a woolen-thread, after a considerable loss by them, and twenty-nine months' trial, he gave up the project.

He laboured with a particular zeal and activity, in redeeming poor debtors out of prison ; not only as it was charity to the persons, but out of regard to their (in the mean time) distressed and starved families : he would say, the release of one man out of prison, is a relief bestowed on his whole family. I have sure grounds to believe, that it was himself of whom he spake, in his book of *Proposals*, p. 83. *I know one man, who, in a few years last past, with the charity of some worthy persons, has delivered some hundreds of poor people out of prison ; who lay there, either only for jailor's fees, or for very small debts : I have reason to believe that many more have been delivered by others ; and yet one shall find the prisons very full of prisoners at this time.*

As he discharged great numbers of prisoners, he took care for the better and easier subsistence  
of

of others, while in prison : for he would examine the prisoners, concerning their usage by their keepers ; and sometimes prosecuted jailors, before the judges, for extorting unlawful fees, and other exorbitant practices. I remember, one of the jailors prosecuted by Mr. Firmin, made a rope, and hanged himself before the matter was determined : a strong presumption, that he was conscious to himself, of great faultiness, and a demonstrative proof, of the great need of such prosecutions, and of the virtue of him that undertook them.

He continued these endeavours for poor debtors, from before the year 1681 to his last breath : but being grieved, that he could do nothing for debtors, confined for great sums ; therefore, on behalf of such he always vigorously promoted acts of grace by parliament, whereby insolvent debtors were discharged. Tho' he never was a parliament man, he had mighty interest in both houses ; and was the cause that many bills were quashed, and others passed : insomuch, that once, when an act of grace for poor prisoners, that was liable to have, and had, an ill use made of it by unconscionable or knavish people, passed the houses and royal assent ; he was upbraided with it by some of the creditors, and told that it was his act.

Mr. Firmin was not insensible, that sometimes people come into prisons, or otherwise become  
 poor,

poor, more by their own negligence, idleness, riot, and pride, than by mishap and misadventure; yet he could not join with those, who say hereupon, *they hate the poor; and that such well deserve the straits, and miseries, that they bring on themselves.* He was wont to answer, to such reasonings, that; *It would be a miserable world indeed, if the divine providence should act by that rule: if God should show no favour, grant no help, or deliverance to us, in those straits or calamities, that are the effects of our sins. If the universal Lord seeks to reclaim, and to better us, by favours, and graces; do we dare to argue against the example set by him; and against a method, without which, no man living may ask any thing of God?*

There is no place whatsoever, but of necessity it must have divers poor, more especially London: where every house having one or more servants, who are obliged to spend their whole wages in clothes; when these servants marry, every little mishap in the world reduces them to beggary; their small, or rather no, beginnings are crushed by every accident. Mr. Firmin had so full a sense of this, that (in some years of his life) he begged about five hundred pounds a year; which he distributed to the poor, at their houses, or at his own, by the sums of two shillings and six-pence, or five shillings, or ten shillings, or fifteen shillings, as he  
saw



saw (or was well informed of) the necessities of the persons. The way he took for the better effecting this charitable distribution, was ; he would inquire of the most noted persons for honesty and charity, in the several parishes, who were the most necessitous and best deserving poor in that neighbourhood : he went then to their houses, that he might judge farther, by their meagre looks, number of children, sorry furniture, and other circumstances, in what proportion it might be fit to assist them. He always took their names and numbers into a book ; and sent a copy of so much of his book, to the persons who had intrusted him with their charity, as answered to the money trusted to him by every such person : that if he so minded, he might make inquiry, by himself or any other, concerning the truth of the account given in. But Mr. Firmin's fidelity grew to be so well known, that after a few years, many of his contributors would not receive his accounts. I know a certain person, whose hand was with Mr. Firmin in all his charities ; I should not exceed (I believe) if I said, that in twenty-one years time he hath given by Mr. Firmin's hand, or at his recommendation, five or six thousand pounds : this person hath himself told me, that Mr. Firmin was wont to bring him the accounts of his disbursements, till he was even weary of them, and (because he was so well assured of him) he desired him not to bring

D

him

him any more. Sometimes the sums brought, or sent in, to Mr. Firmin, for the poor, were such, as did enable him to spare some part to some whom he knew to be charitably disposed like himself: in that case he would send small sums, such as forty shillings, or three pounds, sometimes more, to those his acquaintance, which sums they were to divide among the poor of their vicinage; whose names and case those friends were to return to him. He hath sent to me, and divers others that I know of, many such sums, in christmas time, in hard weather, and times of scarcity.

In these distributions, Mr. Firmin sometimes considered others, besides the mere poor; particularly the poorer sort of ministers: I doubt not he hath made use of many hands besides mine; but by me he hath sent, (of his own proper motion) divers times the sum of forty shillings, sometimes two guineas, to ministers who were good preachers and exemplary, but whose vicarage, curacy, or lecture was small. I have known that he has sent no less than ten pounds to a clergyman in debt, or oppressed with many children, when he hath been well assured, that the person was a man of probity and merit. He asked me once concerning Mr. P. of Gr. Ch. what sort of man he was? I answered; his mind was much above his purse; he was charitable, curious, learned; a father among young scholars, who were promising men; but

but his living not above eighty or ninety pounds a year. Mr. Firmin said, *I have done considerably for that man.* I answered as I thought myself obliged, *you may take it on my word that your liberality was never better placed.* Afterwards I met the widow of Mr. P. in London; I desired her to accept half a pint of wine at the next tavern. While we were together, I asked her whether there had not been some acquaintance between her husband and Mr. Firmin. She said, the acquaintance was not much; but the friendship great. She said her husband was acquainted with many persons of quality, that he had experienced their liberality through the whole course of his life: because his address, as well as his merit, was so remarkable. She said, that of so many benefactors to Mr. P. Mr. Firmin had done most for him both in life and death. When her husband died, his estate would not pay his debts; she was advised hereupon, by a clergyman, to propose a composition with the creditors: seeing that every one could not be fully paid, yet all of them might receive part of their debt. She consulted Mr. Firmin, by letter, about this; he approved the advice, and was one of the first that subscribed the composition: but withal, sent her a letter, wherein he remitted his whole debt; and desired to see her, when her affair was cleared, and she at quiet. When she came to him, he said, *he had missed in*

his aim, in what he had designed to procure for her, but he would do something himself. Shortly after, he sent her a good Norwich stuff, that very well clothed her and her four children. She told me this, with many tears; to which I had the more regard, because I had long known her to be a virtuous, and a very prudent woman.

As Mr. Firmin's pains, and care, in giving forth these charities, were not small, so neither were they little, in procuring them: not only because many persons are hardly persuaded to give the bread of themselves and families to others; but because it is much more difficult to beg for others, than to give ones self. He that begs for others, must be master of a great deal of prudence, as well as wit, and address: he must know, how to choose the *Mollia tempora fandi*, the fittest opportunity of speaking; and when he speaks, he must apply himself to those passions of the person, by which only he can be wrought on. I remember Mr. Firmin told me, of his applying to a citizen of the highest rank, for his charity in rebuilding St. Thomas's Hospital; of whom he demanded no less than one hundred pounds. The person had been some way disoblged by the governors of that hospital; so he refused to subscribe any thing: but our friend seeing him one day among some friends whom he respected, and by whom he was willing to be respected; and that also he was in a very good



good humour, he pushed on his request for the hospital, and prevailed with him so far as to subscribe the whole one hundred pounds. But to his personal solicitations, he was forced sometimes to add letters; and sometimes succeeded by the arguments in his letters, better than by the authority of his personal mediation. I find in one of his books, in the year 1679, the sum of five hundred and twenty pounds six shillings, received of seventy-two persons; in a book of the year 1681, the sum of five hundred and thirty-one pounds nineteen shillings and six-pence, received of forty-three persons. All these were to be treated with privately, and opportunely, which required much time, caution, industry, and discretion; and which, laid out on his own business, what great effects would it have produced? Mr. Firmin might, much more easily, have been one of the great men of the world, than almoner general, for the poor and hospitals. I observe in the same book of 1681, that the disbursements against the sum of five hundred and thirty-one pounds nineteen shillings and six-pence, do amount to five hundred and ninety-four pounds fifteen shillings and eleven pence; the balance overpaid is sixty-two pounds fifteen shillings and five-pence; which over-paid balance is to be found in many of his accounts, and I believe it came out of his own purse. I must note also, that the sums were not given for the



poor alone, or for the spinners alone ; but of fifty pounds given, thirty pounds of it is for the spinners, and twenty pounds for the poor ; sometimes twenty for the spinners, and thirty for the poor : elsewhere, one hundred pounds is given, fifty for the poor, and fifty for the spinners ; another gives fifty pounds for cloth, to be divided to the poor ; another one hundred pounds for the same use.

Mr. Firmin having set his heart so much on charity, could not but esteem and love Mr. Gouge, a man of the same spirit : whom while he was in London, he got to table with him. It is not to be doubted, that it was the intimate friendship of these two persons, that gave occasion to that (remarkable) passage in Dr. Tillotson's funeral-fermon on Mr. Gouge, p. 82. " Mr. Gouge was  
 " of a disposition ready to embrace and oblige all  
 " men ; allowing others to differ from him, even  
 " in opinions that were very dear to him. Pro-  
 " vided, men did but *fear God and work righte-*  
 " *ousness*, he loved them heartily, how distant so-  
 " ever from him in judgment about less necessary  
 " things, in which he is worthy to be propounded  
 " as an example to men of all persuasions." And  
 till the example is followed, the world will never  
 have peace.

That great preacher has given us an account of Mr. Gouge's religious charity, in printing divers good books in the Welch and English tongues,

to be given to those that were poor, and sold to such as could buy them. The chief of those prints, and the most expensive, was an edition of the bible and liturgy in the Welch tongue; no fewer than eight thousand copies of this work were printed together. One cannot question that Mr. Firmin contributed to, and procured, divers sums for this excellent undertaking of his friend; though all is attributed to Mr. Gouge, who was chief in that great and good work. After Mr. Gouge's death I find the sum of 419l. 9s. given to buy a number of those bibles; whereof Dr. Tillotson, (then Dean of St. Paul's) gave 50l. Mr. Morrice, 67l. other persons the rest: but there wants in the receipts 26l. 13s. to balance the disbursement, and that I judge was Mr. Firmin's money. Now that we are speaking of *books*, I ought not to forget, that Mr. Firmin often printed ten thousand copies of the *Scripture catechism*, which some think was written by Dr. Worthington; but I have cause to believe that the author was Dr. Fowler, now bishop of Gloucester; who in compiling it, followed the method of Dr. Worthington. These Mr. Firmin gave to his spinners and their children, and to the children of the hospital; engaging them to get it by heart, and giving something to those that did. He lodged also great numbers of them with booksellers, at cheaper rates than they were

were printed, that they might be sold also cheaper; and thereby, be dispersed all over England. His acquaintance might, at all times, have of them what numbers they would, *gratis*. He valued this catechism, because it is wholly in the words of scripture, favours no particular party or persuasion, and therefore is of general use: the aim of the judicious author being to instruct the young and the ignorant, in what *all parties agree* is necessary to be believed, and done; leaving it to others to engage them in controversies and debates.

In the year 1680, and 1681, came over the French protestants; these afforded new work for Mr. Firmin's charity and zeal: for of all the objects of charity, he thought those the most deserving, who were undone for conscience toward God; whether such conscience be a well-informed conscience, or an erroneous and mistaken one. It is not the truth or falsehood of the opinion, but the zeal for God, and the sincerity to the dictates of conscience, that makes the martyr. Therefore now our eleemosinary general had to beg, not only for the spinners, the poor of the out parishes of London, the redemption of debtors from prison, for coals and shirting; but for a vast number of religious refugees, whose wants required not only a great, but an immediate, succour. The first, and one of the most difficult cares for them, was, how to provide lodgings for  
such

such multitudes, in a city where lodgings are as costly as diet? But Mr. Firmin bethought him of the *Pest-house*, then empty of patients: the motion was approved by the lord mayor and court of aldermen; and some hundreds of these strangers were accommodated in that spacious and convenient place. As for relief in money, they made their first application to the French church: therefore I find in Mr. Firmin's books, *Delivered to the deacons of the French church*, 50l. *to J. S.* 10l. *to an old man at Ipswich* 20l. This was immediately upon their coming over. In 1681, and 1682, I find the sum of 2363l. 10s. 1d. issued forth, for the use of the French, through his hands; and in 1683, for the French children at Ware, 443l. 18s. 9d. For their meeting-house at *Rye*, 20l. I find upon his books these following sums, before a *brief* was granted to them, 100l. then 155l. in the next page 70l. 15s. To answer these receipts, the books say, Sept. 15. *Delivered to Mr. Carbonel, &c. in 16 pieces of cloth*, 50l. Sept. 24. *To the deacons of the Savoy, in cloth*, 20l. Oct. 7. *To Carbonel, &c. in thirty-two pieces of cloth*, 100l. 14s. The balance is 27l. 8s. which (it is likely) was his own money.

In the year 1682, he set up a linen manufacture for the French at Ipswich, to which himself gave 100l. which was all sunk in their service, saving that at last he received 8l. 2s. 6d. He paid also  
for



for their meeting-house at Ipswich 13l. In the same year also he disbursed for them for coals 60l. 10s. whereof he received only 20l. 10s. There have been four briefs granted to the French, one by king Charles in 1681; a second by king James in 1686; another by king James in 1687; the fourth by king William in 1693. Besides which king William gave to them 1000l. per month, for thirty-nine months. It was Mr. Firmin that was chiefly concerned in the distribution of all this money; especially of the thirty-nine thousand pounds, which was committed to two bishops, two knights, and a gentleman; but almost the whole distribution was left to Mr. Firmin, sometimes *with*, but more commonly *without* their inspection. I see I have omitted, before I was aware, the following sums, paid to the French protestants at Ipswich, before their brief was collected; 45l. 10s. and 42l. and 45l. 9s. another 42l. to twenty-one families at Ipswich.

He had a principal hand in the special collections, that are now made every winter, about Christmas time, in churches, for the poor in and about London. He was the man that solicited the king's letter for making those collections. He took care of printing and distributing the king's and bishop of London's letters to the several rectors, and other ministers, of churches in London, to be by them read in their respective churches.

He



He waited on the lords of the treasury for the king's part of that charity. And when the money, as well of the king as the parishes, was collected, and paid into the chamber of London, and was then to be divided, among the poor of the several parishes, by my lords the bishop and mayor of London, no man could so well proportion their dividends as Mr. Firmin. This was well known to their lordships, who, therefore, seldom made any alteration in his distributions. In these matters, all the churchwardens made their applications to Mr. Firmin; and, when the dividend was settled, received their warrants from him: for which purpose, the bishop of London would many times intrust him with blanks, and the lord mayor was always ready to give his hand. The whole of this charity was so constantly, and so many years, managed by Mr. Firmin, that, he dying some days before Christmas last, the king's letter, for the collection, was not given till the 12th of January: and when the collection was brought in from the several parishes, they were at a loss for the distribution, and were glad to take direction from Mr. Firmin's pattern.

There hath been occasion, in my last section, to mention the bishop of London, Dr. Henry Compton. I ought not to omit, that Mr. Firmin could never speak of this bishop, without a particular respect and deference. He admired the candour,

dour, moderation, wisdom, and dexterity, accompanied and tempered by caution and vigour, which (said he often) are so eminent in his lordship, and so constantly appear, upon all occasions proper to any of those virtues, that I wish it were as easy to be like, as it is impossible not to esteem him. I return to Mr. Firmin.

During the last twenty-three or twenty-four years of his life, he was one of the governors of Christ-church hospital in London. It is known to every body almost, in London, that Mr. Firmin procured a great number, and very considerable donations to this hospital; but I cannot specify many particulars, because he kept not exact accounts of them; but those that have come to my knowledge, are remarkable. Give me leave to give the reader this account of one of them. The honourable sir Robert Clayton, having had it in his thoughts to make a provision for a mathematical master in that hospital, became the happy proposer, and (by his interest in the then lord treasurer Clifford, and sir Robert Howard) the successful procurer of the establishment of a mathematical school in that hospital, for the constant breeding of the number of forty boys, skilled in the Latin tongue, to a perfect knowledge in the art of navigation. The occasion was this. There was 7000*l.* given to this hospital, by a citizen, (payable out of Weavers-hall) for the main-

maintenance of forty boys. Upon the restoration, the fund, out of which this issued, reverting to the crown, king Charles the second, upon the said proposal and petition to that purpose, was graciously pleased to grant to the hospital the said 7000*l.* to be paid them by 1000*l.* per annum for seven years; upon which the hospital was obliged to maintain the said forty boys, successively to be so educated for ever. Sir Robert Clayton, being greatly pleased that he had been an instrument in so charitable and beneficial a constitution, did afterwards meditate a donation from himself to this hospital, and so to take it into his special care and beneficence. And that which instigated him to these thoughts, was, he had laboured under a very grievous sickness, even to despair of recovery; but it pleased the almighty governor that he did recover; and Mr. Firmin was very instrumental in it, both by his personal ministry, and giving quick notices to physicians of several symptoms. Hereupon sir Robert advised with Mr. Firmin about the building and adding a ward for girls to this hospital, as a testimony of his gratitude to God; and determined that Mr. Firmin should have the management of that affair. Accordingly he went about it, you may be sure, with great alacrity and diligence; but at whose charge he erected this large building was a secret, not known to any of the family but John Morris, esq;

fir Robert's partner in this work also ; and perhaps to my lady. In this was laid out near 4000l. but it was not yet finished, when upon occasion of the unhappy difference between the passive-obedience men and the law-obedience men, the former, having the power on their side, turned the latter both out of the government of the city and of that hospital, among whom fir Robert (though eminent) was ejected, together with his faithful agent and friend Mr. Firmin; another governor, as I have said. Then it was that Mr. Firmin broke silence, and upbraided those excluding governors with depriving the hospital of such a benefactor as the builder of that ward. For fir Robert was now alone, Mr. Morris being deceased, and having left him the residue of his estate. Mr. Firmin also built a ward for the sick, to prevent infecting the healthy and sound ; if the small-pox, or other contagious distemper, should happen among the children, as it often doth. This ward cost 426l. 4s. besides 6l. 5s. for a press ; but the gentleman that gave the money for both, would not then be known ; and continues still of the same mind. I find, however, an account in Mr. Firmin's books of 1,537l. (the sick ward included) received, and laid out, by Mr. Firmin : and another account of 704l. 10d. received, with the names of the persons who gave it, and the uses for which it was given. In the  
 year

year of our lord 1675, our friend built two houses for the two beadles, or other officers, of the hospital, at his own charge; of which I have a certificate, under the clerk's hand, in these words:

“ At his own proper cost and charges, Mr. Fir-  
 “ min set up a clock and dial, for the use of the  
 “ hospital, at the top of the north-end of the  
 “ great hall. The said Mr. Firmin built two  
 “ new brick houses in the town-ditch, one at the  
 “ south-west end, the other at the north-east, to  
 “ be disposed to such officers, as the government  
 “ of the hospital should think fit. Farther, at his  
 “ own cost and charge, a shed, or little room,  
 “ at the east-end of the late bowling-alley; and  
 “ a new brick wall. He repaired all the walls,  
 “ and levelled the ground.”

At the charge of a friend of his, a citizen, he laid leaden pipes to convey the water to the several offices of the hospital; and bought them a large cistern; which in all cost about 200l. These were great conveniences to the house, for the orphans, (who before fetched up the water they used on their backs, which agreed not well with their strength,) kept the house foul, and prejudiced their clothes. Out of town he built a school, with all conveniences to it, for the hospital children; this he set up at Hertford, where many of the hospital children are boarded: the school cost 544l. 13s. of which he received, by the charity



of ten persons, the sum of 488l. the balance is 56l. 13s. which lies upon himself for any thing that appears. He was wont every lord's-day, at five in the evening, to see the orphans of the hospital at their evening service; at which time they prayed, and sung an anthem by select voices, the chorus by all the boys. After this, they sat down to supper, at the several tables, under the care of their matrons: here Mr. Firmin viewed them in their provisions, and in the behaviour both of them and their officers and attendants, commending, or admonishing, as there was occasion. To this sight he invited, one time or other, all his friends, whether of the town or country; and at last led them to the orphans' box, into which they would put somewhat, more or less, as they were charitably disposed. A countryman was very remarkable: for having seen the order and method of the hospital, when he came home, he made his will, and gave very considerably to the place. I was once with our friend at the hospital, when looking over the children's supper, which was pudding-pies, he took notice of a pie that seemed not of due bigness; he took it immediately into the kitchen, and weighed it himself; but it proved down-weight.

These cares did not so wholly employ this active man, but that he was also a great and good commonwealth's-man. He was always mindful of  
those

those who suffered for conscience, or for asserting the rights and liberties of the nation: and he printed a great many sheets, and some books, of that tendency and nature; great numbers of which he himself dispersed. When king James commanded the reading his declaration (for toleration and indulgence in religion) in the churches; a great number of well-written pamphlets were printed and dispersed, to convince people of the bad design of that specious declaration: Mr. Firmin was a principal encourager and promoter of those prints, which cost him considerable sums, as well for their publication as otherwise. He furthered, as much as in him lay, the heroical attempt of the prince of Orange, to rescue this nation from slavery and popery: and since his majesty has been seated on the throne, our friend has been particularly diligent in promoting the manufacture of the Lustring-company; because it is highly beneficial to this nation, and as prejudicial to our (then) enemy. He had the greatest hand, and used the most effectual endeavours, for procuring acts of parliament, and rules of court, in that behalf.

He and Mr. Renew took great pains, and were at much expence, to prevent correspondence with France, and the importation of silks, and other commodities, from thence. For this, they ran the hazard of their lives, from the revenge of mer-

chants and others, whom they prosecuted to execution. A merchant was so desperately angry at his detection, and the great damage he should unavoidably sustain thereby, that he went into a room alone, in a tavern, and ended his life by shooting himself in the head. The agents of Mr. Renew and Mr. Firmin gave either the first, or very early intelligence of the French invasion; which was to have been followed by the assassination of the king.

But he was not more a friend to the liberties of the nation, and to the present establishment, than he was an enemy to licentiousness. He was, from the first, a member of *The society for the reformation of manners*; he contributed to it by his advice, assistance, solicitations, as much as his leisure from the cares and endeavours (before mentioned and exemplified) would permit him: but his purse was always with them. He had such a zeal against needless swearing, whereby the religion of an oath grows vile and contemptible, and false-swearing becomes almost as common as idle and unnecessary swearing, to the indelible scandal of the christian name, and the great danger (even as far as life and estate) of particular persons: I say his zeal against common needless swearing, in what form soever, was so great, that in coffee-houses, or other places, where he overheard such swearing, he would immediately challenge the forfeiture

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(appointed by law) for the use of the poor; so that, in companies where he was frequent, an oath was seldom heard. But he raised the forfeiture according to the quality of the person; if a nobleman, or other person of distinction, or a clergyman, swore, they came not off at the ordinary forfeiture, appointed in the law, it was doubled or trebled upon them; especially if any such were very common swearers, or their oaths of a profane or impious sort. If any person refused to pay the forfeiture required, our friend would tell them, the forfeiture was to the poor, whose collector and steward he was: if still they refused to pay, their punishment (he told them) was, to be set down, by him, in the list of his *incorrigible swearers*; and that, for the future, he would not own them as his acquaintance, or speak to them as such. Divers noble persons would not endure this last; but would immediately condescend to pay the forfeiture, or promise payment, which he seldom remitted; particularly if they were often in that fault. As for himself, I never heard an oath from him in forty-four years (almost daily) conversation with him; though his temper was naturally quick and warm, and he had often great provocations to anger, one of the principal causes of rash and intemperate swearing.

But let us return to Mr. Firmin's charities. Nobody can have forgotten the great number of  
Irish

Irish nobility, clergy, gentry, and others of all qualities, and both sexes, who fled into England from the persecution and proscriptions of king James. A brief was granted to them, of which Mr. Firmin was one of the commissioners; but, besides that, the ministers, churchwardens, and collectors, of every parish in England, were to give account, by letter, to Mr. Firmin, what sums they had collected, and paid to the archdeacons. Therefore, on many post-days, several hundred letters came to his hand, for a long time: and many of the collected sums were sent to him, and by him paid into the chamber of London: the money given by the king and queen was wholly, in a manner, solicited and received by him. The numbers and necessities of these refugees required a second brief: the sum total (paid to these two briefs) that went through Mr. Firmin's hands, was fifty-six thousand five hundred sixty-six pounds, seven shillings, and sixpence. The distribution of the money, gathered on these briefs, was by a certain number of the commissioners; but Mr. Firmin was the most constant man at their meetings: sometimes he attended the distribution from morning to night, without intermission for food. But, besides the sums paid into the chamber, and distributed as aforesaid, I am assured our friend solicited, and gave many private sums to particular persons, whose quality made them ashamed to



to take of the common stock, or whose necessities required more than (without giving offence) could be allowed out of it. When by the mercy of God, and the magnanimity of the king, Ireland was reduced, and the protestants might now return to their houses, employs, and estates, Mr. Firmin doubled his industry and diligence to furnish them for their journey; because thereby he not only served them, but eased the nation, especially the better (that is, the charitable) part of it. He obtained great sums for this purpose; sir Thomas Cook (to whom I think it a debt to name him) gave fifteen hundred pounds to this service, apprehending it a charity to England, as well as to the poor sufferers. See here a letter from the most reverend the archbishop of Tuam, and seven others; all of them, I think, bishops of that kingdom; I am sure most of them are.

#### TO MR. THOMAS FIRMIN.

SIR,

BEING occasionally met together at Dublin, on a public account; and often discoursing of the great relief, which the protestants of this kingdom found among their brethren in England, in the time of our late miseries; we cannot treat the subject without as frequent mention of your name, who so chearfully and entirely devoted yourself to  
that

that ministry. We consider, with all thankfulness, how much the public charity was improved by your industry; and we are witnesses of your indefatigable pains and faithfulness in the distribution; by which many thousands were preserved from perishing. We know also, that some who refused to take out of the common stock, as being desirous to cut off occasion of murmurs, were, however, by your mediation, comfortably subsisted by private benevolences. We doubt not, but you and they have the earnest of your reward in the peace of your minds; which we pray God to fill with comforts, and illuminate with his truths; making his grace to abound in them, who have abounded in their charity to others. And we intreat, that you, and all such as you know to have had their parts in this service, would believe, that we shall ever retain a grateful remembrance of it; as some testimony whereof, we desire you, for yourself in particular, to receive this acknowledgement of your kindness to our brethren, and therein to

Your much obliged

and most humble servants,

Jo. Tuam,

W. Clonfert,

Bar. Fernleigh,

S. Elpin,

Edw. Cork and Ross,

N. Waterford,

R. Clogher,

W. Raphoe.

Certainly

Certainly, a letter very worthy of their episcopal character ; and which I have inserted in these memoirs, as much out of regard and reverence to them, as for the sake of Mr. Firmin.

In April, 1693, Mr. Firmin entered upon part of the care of another hospital, that of St. Thomas, in Southwark ; a foundation intended for the relief of all sorts of lame, or wounded, or sick persons, till they are recovered by the application of proper medicines, and other means, and by the service of the physicians and surgeons of the hospital. Sir Robert Clayton (now father of the city of London) being, upon the decease of sir John Lawrence, chosen president of this hospital, thought fit to accept of that province : but upon view of it, he took notice that it was greatly gone to ruin, the ground about the lodgings in a long tract of time raised so high, that the patients lay as it were in a cellar, without the benefit of air or good scent, but close and noisome : and the roof and walls so out of repair, that the poor patients oft-times could not lie dry in their beds. He saw the greater part of it must be rebuilt, it could not be repaired ; and that the rebuilding could not be delayed without great danger and damage to the place, whereof some part prevented the workmen's pulling it down, by falling of itself : therefore, knowing well his friend Mr. Firmin's activity, and good address, in works of that nature,

nature, he caused him to be chosen one of the governors of that hospital. He was chosen in April; and finding that the revenues of the hospital would go but a little way in the rebuildings or repairs, and besides could not be well spared from the supply of the wounded and sick; in July he provided three round boxes, in each of them a parchment, one for subscriptions of one hundred pounds, the second for subscriptions of fifty pounds, the third for twenty-five or twenty pounds subscriptions. The president was pleased to subscribe three hundred pounds, and other governors were liberal; so were divers merchants, and other rich traders; that the whole subscription was not much short of four thousand pounds. Without doubt, the greatest part of this money would have been subscribed, though Mr. Firmin had not been the solicitor for it: yet I reckon, and am supported in my computation by knowing and equal judges, that the subscription was greater by a thousand pounds, than it would have been if Mr. Firmin had not been concerned in procuring and improving the subscriptions. A prospect of the charge being taken, and some money (near four thousand pounds) toward it procured; materials must also be provided; and workmen consulted and agreed with. Mr. Firmin was constant in the committee appointed for that matter. I took notice, that the master-builders made their most frequent

frequent application to him ; and he was as careful to oversee their proceedings. Several of the wards for the patients are now finished ; besides a spacious hall, supported by pillars, which make a very handsome piazza. It troubled the governors very much, that they were obliged to rebuild the church of that parish, which would cost some thousands of pounds, that could not be taken out of the revenue of the hospital, without great prejudice to the house and patients. It happened that the parliament were then about settling a tax for finishing St. Paul's church, in London ; so the governors of St. Thomas's hospital petitioned the house of commons to have some share in that tax toward the rebuilding their church : but because many other parishes prayed the like assistance at the same time, the house, upon a debate in a grand committee, resolved, that only St. Paul's and Westminster-abbey churches should have any such provision allowed to them. Mr. Firmin hereupon came home, not a little heavy : but he, and another of the governors, put into writing (that very night) some reasons, why St. Thomas's church might better claim some favour of the honourable house, than other ordinary churches. They used such diligence as to get their paper printed against the next morning. Mr. Firmin and his associate gave copies of it to the members as they entered the house ; telling them, they must not expect to



have any sick or wounded seamen cured, if they did not grant something towards the rebuilding of that church. The effect was, that the house took the matter again into consideration, and allowed three thousand pounds to the hospital for the use he desired: on which our friend came home with more pleasure and satisfaction, than if an estate of that value had fallen to himself.

Among his other charities, he was not unmindful of those that suffered by fire, but would immediately apply himself to them for their present relief: afterwards, he assisted them in soliciting their briefs, and in managing their briefs (when obtained) to the best advantage. He often lent money to honest persons, to answer sudden emergencies or distresses; but he lost so much this way, that he was forced, at last, resolutely to forbear lending: but, instead of lending, he would many times give some part of what they desired to borrow.

He put very many boys to apprenticeships, and contributed to the setting them up, if they had served their apprenticeships faithfully and diligently. He has told me, that the clergy of London, and other dignified persons in the church, often enabled him in this kind of charity: he said, he had put many boys out with the money of some of the richer clergy; who considered this (he thought) as a sort of charity that extends to the person's whole life,

life, and might be the ground of many charities in time to come.

It deserves, in my opinion, to be reckoned among his charities, that when (some two or three years since) there was a great scarcity of current coin, all the money in England being either clipped, or debased by mixture of coarse metals, he lessened his expence by laying down his coach, that he might be the more able to continue his former charities, at a time when they were more needful than ever.

I have now accounted for the general endeavours and performances of Mr. Firmin's life: the particulars, to each general head, were too numerous to be reckoned up, without tiring the reader, if not also the writer. We have therefore taken only a short view of a person, of middle extraction, and slender beginnings, who raised himself to the honour of a very great number of illustrious friendships, and to an affluence of worldly wealth, which, when he had attained, by industry, integrity, and worth, like our saviour, *he went about doing good*. Nay, like the same saviour, *he became poor, that, through his poverty, others might be rich*. A person, who, in respect of his endeavours in all kinds of charity, may deservedly be called *the father of the poor*; in respect of the Irish and French refugees, *the almoner of England*. The divine hand had quali-

fed him to do much good ; himself fought out the objects and occasions for it, and delighted in the doing. He did it with so much diligence and application, that he might even have said, with our saviour, *My meat is to do the will of him that sent me ; and to finish his works ;* i. e. the works that he hath commanded. (John iv. 34.)

The jesuit that assisted the late famous marshal Luxembourg in his last hours, thought he might put this question to him : “ Well, sir, tell me, had you not rather, now, have given one alms to a poor man, in his distress, for God’s sake, than have won so many victories in the field of battle ? ” The marshal confessed he should now choose the former ; seeing nothing will avail any man, in the eternal world, but only the actions of charity, or of justice and piety. The confessor doth not seem to have been impertinent in the question ; for, in our serious last hours, we shall all be sensible, and forward to confess, that we were wise only in that part of our life that was laid out in the duties either of humanity to men, or piety to God. The Craffi and Croësi, the Hannibals and Luxemburghs, the most conspicuous for wealth, or military glory, how gladly would they now give all that tinsel, for some part of our Firmin’s sweat and drudgeries for the poor, and for the deserving ? Is it for want of faith, or of consideration, that we so much more delight to  
read

read the acts of the Alexanders, the Charlemaigns, and other false heroes, than of persons that have been exemplary for justice, beneficence, or devotion; and are now triumphant in heaven, on the account of those services to God, and to men? But so it is, either because we *are not christians*, or because we *are fools*; we are (commonly speaking) better pleased with the sons of earth, than of heaven.

I have read somewhere, (but so long since, that I forget the author's name, and the subject of his book,) that the punishment of Judas, who betrayed our saviour, is, that he stands on the surface of a swelling dreadful sea, with his feet somewhat below the water, as if he were about to sink. The writer saith, besides his continual horror and fear of going to the bottom, a most terrible tempest of hail and wind always beats on the traitor's naked body and head: he suffers as much by cold, and the smart of the impetuous hail, as it is possible to imagine he could suffer by the fire of purgatory, or of hell. But, saith my author further, in this so great distress, Judas has one very great comfort and relief; for whereas the tempest would be insupportable, if it beat always upon him from all sides; at a little distance from him, and somewhat above him, there is stretched out a sheet of strong coarse linen cloth, which sheet intercepts a great part of the tempest. Judas

regales himself by turning sometimes one side, sometimes another side, of his head and body, to the shelter of this sheet. In short, the sheet is such a protection to him, that it defends him from the one half of his punishment. But by what meritorious action, or actions, did Judas deserve so great a favour? Our author answers, he gave just the same quantity of linen cloth to a certain poor family, for shirting. It had been impossible that this gentleman should hit on such a conceit as this, but from our natural opinion of the value and merit of charity; it seems to us a virtue so excellent, that it may excuse even Judas from some part of his punishment. I can hardly afford to ask the reader's pardon for this tale; I incline to think, that divers others may be as well pleased with the wit of it, and the moral implied in it, as I have been, who remember it after above forty years reading, without remembering either the author, or argument of the book.

I return once more to our dear Firmin, to take leave of him for ever. He had very much weakened his (otherwise) strong and firm constitution, by his manifold charitable employments, &c. having been sometimes liable to the jaundice, often afflicted with cholics, and scarce ever without a cough; his lungs had long been phthysical. He would often return home so tired and depressed in his spirits, that his pulse was scarce to be felt,

or



or very languid: he would then take a little rest in his chair, and start up from it, and appear very vigorous in company, especially where any good was to be done. The more immediate cause of his death was a fever which seized his spirits, beginning with a chillness and shivering, and then a heat ensued. He was, at the same time, afflicted both in his lungs with a great shortness of breath, not having strength to expectorate, and also with such terrible pains in his bowels, that for many hours nothing could be made to pass him. He had for many years been troubled with a large rupture. All which made his sickness very short. He had wished, in his life-time, that he might not lie above two days on his last sick-bed; God granted to him his desire; he lay not so long by eight hours; and December 20, about two of the clock in the morning, anno 1697, he died.

During his last illness, he was visited by his most dear friend, the bishop of Gloucester. What passed between them, his lordship hath made me to know, under his own hand, in these words: *Mr. Firmin told me he was now going: and I trust, said he, God will not condemn me to worse company than I have loved, and used, in the present life. I replied, That he had been an extraordinary example of charity; the poor had a wonderful blessing in you: I doubt not, these works will follow you, if you have no expectation from*  
the

*the merit of them ; but rely on the infinite goodness of God, and the merits of our saviour. Here he answered, I do so : and I say, in the words of my saviour, When I have done all, I am but an unprofitable servant. He was in such an agony of body, for want of breath, that I did not think fit to speak more to him, but only give him assurance of my earnest prayers for him, while he remained in this world. Then I took solemn and affectionate farewell of him ; and he of me.*

It is usual to conclude Lives with a character of the persons, both as to their bodies, and the qualities of their minds : therefore I must further add : Mr. Firmin was of a low stature, well proportioned ; his complexion fair and bright ; his eye and countenance lively ; his aspect manly, and promising somewhat extraordinary ; you would readily take him for a man of good sense, worth, and dignity. Walking or sitting he appeared more comely than standing still ; for his mien and action gave a gracefulness to his person.

The endowments, inclinations, and qualities of his mind, may be best judged of by the account we have given of his life. It appears, he was quick of apprehension, and dispatch, and yet almost indefatigably industrious ; properties that very rarely meet in the same man. He was, besides, inquisitive, and very ingenious ; that is, he had a thirst of knowing much ; and his fine and mercurial  
wit

wit enabled him to acquire a large knowledge, with little labour; but he was utterly against subtilities in religion. He could not dissemble; on the contrary, you might easily perceive his love or anger, his liking or dislike: I have thought, in both these respects, he was rather too open; but both are the effects of sincerity, and arguments of an honest mind. He never affected proudly the respects of others, whether above or below him: with which I was the better satisfied, because it follows, that his charities proceeded not from any affectation of honour, or glory, among men; but from the love of God, and his afflicted brother. He was facetious enough, but without affecting it; for he valued (what indeed himself excelled in) judgment, rather than wit. He was neither presuming nor over-bold, nor yet timorous; a little prone to anger, but never excessive in it, either as to measure or time: which affections, whether you say of the body or mind, occasion great uneasiness, and sometimes great calamities and mischiefs, to persons who are governed by those passions. If the mind is turbulent by strong passions of any sort, the life is seldom serene and calm, but vexed with great griefs and misadventure. His manner of conversing was agreeable; so that seldom any broke friendship with him. Being well assured in himself of his own integrity, he could even unconcernedly hear that this or  
that

that man spoke ill of him. When I told him of that infamous story of the impudent coffee-man, which had been broached six or seven years before, had he not been over-persuaded, he would not have taken any notice of him: yet was more concerned at Mr. B.'s printing it, than at the other fellow's inventing it; not from the least consciousness of guilt, but that he should be so unchristianly used by a minister of the gospel, who too rashly took up the story against him. Which shews what strange things may be done under pretence of a zeal for religion.

My lady Clayton has so great a respect for his memory, that she has (with the concurrence of sir Robert), since his death, erected a handsome monument in their garden, at Marden, in Surry, in a walk there, called Mr. Firmin's walk, by reason of his contrivance and activity in it. This monument is a marble pillar, about eight feet high, with an urn, and flowers growing out of the top of it, with this motto, *Florescit funere virtus*; an emblem, you may conceive, of death and resurrection. There is also a marble table fixed to one side of this pillar, with the inscription following.

TO PERPETUATE (AS FAR AS MARBLE AND LOVE CAN DO IT) THE MEMORY OF THOMAS FIRMIN, CITIZEN OF LONDON.

*None ever passed the several periods of human life more irreproachably, or performed the common duties of society with greater sincerity and approbation. Though it appears, by his public spirit, that he thought himself born rather for the benefit of others, than his own private advantage; yet the satisfaction of doing good, and the universal esteem of honest men, made him the happiest person in the world. But his charity (which was not confined to any nation, sect, or party) is most worthy thy imitation, at least in some degree, O reader. He was as liberal of his own, as faithful in distributing the pious donations of others, whom he successfully persuaded to relieve the distressed, particularly the laborious poor; for of vagrant, idle, and insolent beggars, he was no advocate nor encourager. His agreeable temper rendering him an extraordinary lover of gardens, he contrived this walk, which bears his name, and where his improving conversation and example are still remembered. But since heaven has better disposed of him, this pillar is erected to charity and friendship by sir Robert Clayton, and Martha his lady, who first builded and planted in Marden.*

*Born at Ipswich, in Suffolk.*

*Buried in Christ-church hospital, London.*

I have



I have now answered the demand of divers, as well strangers as friends, of writing and publishing some account of Mr. Firmin's life and death: I hope the well-minded reader will find much in it, that may both confirm and strengthen him in the best ways, especially in humanity and charity. He may see here, how much beneficence a good man, of but indifferent estate, is capable of exercising, by means of acquaintance and conversation with well-chosen friends, whom he may excite, by his example and solicitations, to be highly useful in their generation; and thereby be himself incomparably more useful, than otherwise he could be. But if I am less successful in that part of my design, than I wish to be; yet I have much eased my own mind, by paying some part of the debt that I owe to the memory of our friend. The rest I shall be always paying, by a grateful and mournful sense of the public and my own loss and benefit by him, when present, and as now deceased.

I cannot better conclude these short memoirs, than in the words of a letter, written to the author of the ensuing sermon, by a person of great worth; and who, from the time that they became acquainted, enabled Mr. Firmin to do many of those great services to the public, the deserving, and the poor, for which he was so highly commendable.

“ Sir,

“ Sir,

“ I received your letter of February 16, and  
 “ therewith the parentation to our valuable friend  
 “ Mr. Thomas Firmin; that man of so extraor-  
 “ dinary affections, and abilities, for the great  
 “ works of charity and piety. May it please the  
 “ divine providence to raise up to us adequate suc-  
 “ cessors. In the mean time, what an abate-  
 “ ment of sorrow is it to us, that He who alone is  
 “ absolutely good and all-powerful, lives for ever?  
 “ —I am your affectionate and assured friend,

“ B R. P R.”

He had often signified his desire to be buried in Christ-church-hospital, when dead, the care of which had been so much upon his heart while living. In compliance with which desire, his relatives have interred him in the cloysters there, and placed, in the wall adjoining, a marble to his memory, with this inscription, viz.

*Under that stone, near this place, lyeth the body of Thomas Firmin, late citizen of London, a governor of this and saint Thomas's hospital; who, by the grace of God, was created in Christ Jesus good works, wherein he was indefatigably industrious, and successfully provoked many others thereto; becoming also their almoner, visiting and relieving the poor at their houses; and in prisons, whence*

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also

*also he redeemed many. He set many hundreds of them at work, to the expending of great stocks: He rebuilt, repaired, and added conveniencies to hospitals, weekly over-seeing the orphans. The refugees from France and from Ireland, have partaken largely the effects of his charity, pains, and earnest solicitations for them. He was wonderfully zealous in every good work, beyond the example of any in our age. Thus shewed he his faith by his works, and cannot reasonably be reproached for that which brought forth such plenty of good fruits.*

*He died December xx. 1697, and in the 66th year of his age.*

T H E E N D.

A S E R M O N,  
ON LUKE X. 36, 37.  
OCCASIONED BY THE  
D E A T H  
O F  
MR. THOMAS FIRMIN;  
A N D  
PREACHED IN THE COUNTRY.

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## A S E R M O N,

ON LUKE X. 36, 37.

WHICH OF THESE THREE, THINKEST THOU, WAS NEIGHBOUR TO HIM THAT FELL AMONG THE THIEVES? HE ANSWERED, HE THAT SHEWED MERCY ON HIM. THEN SAID JESUS, GO, AND DO THOU LIKEWISE.

OUR saviour is talking here with a learned jew ; one of the questions between them, as we are taught by another evangelist, was, which is the great, or chief, commandment of God's law ? It is an inquiry not altogether needless, for it happens sometimes, that there is a clash, as they speak, of laws ; if you will keep one law, you must break another. For instance, one law said ; *Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy ; in it thou shalt do no manner of work, thou, or thy son, or daughter.* But the law at *Gen. xvii. 12.* says, *He that is eight days old shall be circumcised.* And the law at *Numbers. xxviii. 3, 9.* *This is the offering to be made by fire ; —two lambs without spot, day by day, the one in morning, the other in the evening : but on the sabbath two lambs.* Every one sees these laws would

often clash with one another ; in keeping one the other must be neglected. If your child happen to be *eight days old* on the sabbath-day, either you violate the sabbath by *the work* of circumcision ; or, out of regard to the law of the sabbath, you must transgress the law of circumcising on the eighth day. In like manner, if you keep the sabbath, as the law of the fourth commandment requires, by doing therein *no manner* of work ; you could not obey the law about the burnt-offering or sacrifice, that was to be made in the temple of God twice every day : namely, two lambs to *be killed*, their skins drawn off, and their bodies burnt on the altar, every morning, and every evening. It is in consideration of this that our saviour says, (*Matth. xii. 5.*) *Have ye not read, how, on the sabbath days, the priests do profane the sabbath, and yet are blameless ?* His meaning is, though the priests do break the law of the sabbath, which saith, *Thou shalt do no manner of work on the sabbaths* ; yet they are blameless herein, because at the same time they obey another law, which saith, *They shall offer the appointed sacrifices every morning and evening.* A great number of such like cases happening every day ; cases, wherein, by observing one law of God, you could not avoid to omit another : therefore, it was very requisite to determine which of God's laws were chief laws ; or were to be observed

observed in a clash with another law (or laws) of God.

The jewish rabbies had established some rules, that were of great authority among the more zealous of their nation, for directing men's practice in doubts of this nature; yet so, that divers cases were left undecided, and many questions were debated warmly enough among them. They could not agree in resolving *this* question, Which is the great or chief law of *all*? Some said, the law of *the sabbath*, or fourth commandment, is the principal of all the divine laws; for two reasons. It is that law, or appointment, by which our religion is preserved, and kept up; and that both as to the knowledge, and the practice of duty. And it was that law which was first given by God; no sooner had he made the world, than he blessed and sanctified the seventh day. (*Gen. ij. 2.*) *God ended the work which he had made, and rested on the seventh day; therefore he blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it.* But other learned men of that nation denied that the sabbath is the chief commandment; giving this reason: because it must give place to *the work* of circumcision, and to *the work* of sacrificing. A child who is eight days old must be circumcised, though his eighth day shall happen on the sabbath; and the morning and evening sacrifice must be slain, and offered even on the sabbaths. Therefore these said, circumcision is the great law of all;

all ; it being the sacrament, or sign, of the covenant between God and our nation. Him that is not circumcised, God doth not consider as an israelite, but as a pagan or heathen ; as is plainly intimated in the texts that speak of circumcision. Lastly, some of their divines thought that the law of sacrifices must take place of all laws : for, not to sacrifice, was not to worship God ; sacrificing being the only worship then appointed. And their sacrifices were the expiations, or atonements, for their sins, ordained and accepted by God. So that, not to sacrifice, was to stand guilty, before God, of all their sins. They were liable to his judgments, on account of their sins, till the atonement was made by the daily sacrifice.

These were their opinions, and the principal reasons of them. The jew, in our text, either not well satisfied with any of these answers ; or, it may be, so well persuaded of one of them, that he imagined nothing could be said against it ; put the question to our saviour : *Master, says he, I would know which of all the commandments is the chief ?* To this our saviour immediately answers ; I will tell thee : The first, or principal, commandment, thou shalt find it at Deut. vi. 4, 5. *Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord ; and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and soul, and might.* As who should say,  
the

the chief commandment is, that a man *believe and profess the unity of God*; and that we *love him*, with all our might, or soul. I have told thee, continues our saviour, which is the first great commandment; I will add what thou hast not asked, Which is the second, or next great law? Thou hast it at Lev. xix. 18. *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*. The jewish doctor was amazed at this answer by our saviour. He granted, presently, that it was true and certain in both parts of it. It is true, says he, that there is one God, and none other but he; and to love him with all the soul and strength, and one's neighbour as one's self; this is more and better than all sacrifices, the which are commonly supposed to be the chief commandment.

But their discourse still goes on. I am well satisfied, says the jew, which is the first great law, and which is the next to it: but whereas the second of these commandments says, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*; it may be a question, Who is my neighbour, whom I am to love (saith the commandment) as myself? Are my neighbours those of the vicinage, the next dwellers to me? or are they my whole town? or all those of the same country with me; even all jews? or are they my relations? For there are all these opinions of doctors on that text. Hear, says our saviour, what happened not long since in these parts,



parts, and it will serve for an answer to thy question. A jew was travelling from Jerusalem to Jericho; in his way, a company of robbers came up to him; they took from him his money, and even his clothes; and having wounded him dangerously, left him for dead. Shortly comes that way a levite, and, but little after him, a priest; both these, seeing a naked body, covered with blood, kept at a distance, and passed on. In the mean time, the wounded man lay as dead; and, while he so lay, there came by also a samaritan. The samaritans, you know, are of another nation, and different religion, from us jews: for all that, he made no difficulty of coming to, and viewing the wounded jew. He imagined there might be life still left in him: and therefore, first covering him with a part of his own garments, he began to cleanse and dress his wounds. Upon this, the signs of life soon appeared, the wounded man revived, and by help of this charitable stranger was brought to an inn. But, alas! what shall he do? wounded, naked, and without money, he was still in a forlorn, hopeless condition. The samaritan, aware that he had done nothing yet, if he did not go forward, calls for the landlord; or host. Friend, says he, I know not this man; but you know me: therefore, take care of him in all respects, his diet, clothes, and health; when I return, I will satisfy for all. To bind this promise and bargain,

take

take these two denarii in way of earnest, before these witnesses. Now, says our saviour, thou that askest, Who is my neighbour? let me see whether thou canst not answer it of thyself? Was it the levite, or the priest, or was it the samaritan, that deserved to be accounted and called the neighbour? The jew was again overcome, and therefore replies, in the words of our present text: *He was the neighbour that shewed mercy.* Was he so? says our saviour again: *Then go, and do thou (ὁμοίως) in like manner; do so; do as thou hast said.* My meaning is, reckon him to be thy neighbour, whom thou hast but now confessed to be, in truth, the neighbour; even the man who is a doer of good. Though he should be, or she be, a samaritan, of a foreign nation, of a false religion; yet, if he is a lover of men, one that does good to others, account him thy neighbour, whom thou art to love as thyself.

This determination, or conclusion, by our saviour, was very contrary to the humour and practice of those times: for both the jews and the samaritans not only did not account of one another as neighbours, whom they should love as themselves, but they even hated and persecuted each the other. The jew would have no dealings with the samaritans; and the samaritan would not receive, or sell, even necessary provisions to the jews. (John iv. 9.) *Then said the woman of Samaria,*  
*How*

*How is it, that thou, being a jew, askest drink of me, who am of Samaria? For the jews have no dealings with the samaritans.* Again, (Luke ix. 52.) *Jesus sent messengers before him, who came to a village of the samaritans; but they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem; that is, The faces of Jesus and his company being toward Jerusalem, therefore the samaritans, supposing he was a jew, would not receive him into their inns.* So much can a bad example do, when it grows to be common; it will persuade men even against their honest and just profit: the very victuallers on a road shall deny entertainment to passengers of another religion, if example has made it customary to do despite to such persons.

The cause of so great aversion and displeasure between the samaritans and jews, was (as has been already hinted) difference of religion. The samaritans owned only the first five books of holy scripture, namely, the books written by Moses. As to the prophets, the books of Solomon, the psalms of David, Job, the books of Kings and Chronicles, Nehemiah, Ezra, Ruth, Esther: these they received not as *divine books*. There is no doubt that, in these matters, the samaritans were to blame, and were in the wrong; the jews had the advantage in all points that were controverted between them and the samaritans. Nay, farther,  
the

the samaritans mistook, even about the object of worship, GOD. Their notions or apprehensions of God seem to have been confused and uncertain. They are the words of our saviour, (John iv. 22.) *Ye* (ye samaritans) *know not what ye worship*; *we* (we jews) *know what we worship*. The error, then, of the samaritans, consisted not only in refusing divers books, belonging to the old Testament; but their conceptions or opinions concerning God were not clear, nor true. Ye know not, says our saviour, what ye worship; that is, ye know not God: some knowledge ye have of him, but ye know him not rightly: it is an obscure, confused, and, for the most part of it, a mistaken knowledge that ye have of him.

Of this nation, and of this religion, was the person whom our text so much commends. This is he of whom our saviour says here, he was the true neighbour; the person whom the law of God intends when it says, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*. He was not a jew; that is, he was not of the *true church* of God. He owned but a small part of holy scripture, disowning the far greater part of the divine word. His knowledge of the object of worship, of God, was so imperfect, and uncertain, and confused, that our saviour himself pronounces, the men of that religion know not God. But, with all these infelicities, he was a doer of good, a lover of men;

adorned with beneficent, charitable principles : not carried away by the common and general example, whether of the samaritans or jews, to hate others merely for their religion ; open-handed and well-affected to men, as men. Such a one, says our saviour in this text, is to be accounted a neighbour ; he belongs to that charge and law of God, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*. A levite or a priest, though he is the minister of God, most high, may less deserve the benefit of that law : he may not have so good a claim to it, as a man of a far country, and another religion ; the good man, the doer of good, is that person who only can challenge it as his right, to be loved as ourselves.

Give me leave to make these few short remarks hereupon.

1. Our most blessed saviour prefers here the samaritan before the levite and the priest ; the doer of good, before the man of right faith, or true opinions. The reason is, a man's faith, his right sect or way of religion, why, it is a desirable thing, a valuable felicity ; but it does good to nobody, but the person himself. If I hold the true religion in all respects, so as not to mistake so much as in one point ; What is the world, what is my neighbour, the better for my great and exact knowledge and skill ? But if, like the samaritan in this text, I am a lover of men, a doer of good,  
open-



open-handed; or, if I cannot do so, yet open-hearted; a great many others, one time or other, shall be the better for this. We cannot reasonably wonder that God esteems a virtue which is useful to many, before a right faith, or true knowledge, which are not a common and general good, as the doing of good is.

I know well there are divers such worldlings as have no relish for such discourses as these. They reckon, they have no need of any body, and that they are cunning enough never to lack other men's help. But so also all those have thought, who have most needed the assistance of others; those, for instance, who have become the subjects of briefs, letters of recommendation, and other forms of begging. All these, or most of them, said in their day of prosperity, "I shall never be moved: thou, Lord, of thy goodness, hast made my mountain to stand strong." Hear me, son of this world; Mayest not thou, like the man of this text, fall among thieves? May not they, (the thieves,) rob thee, wound thee, and leave thee for dead? Certainly this may happen to you, and so may a hundred other, as unexpected, unlooked-for accidents; so that were there no Samaritans, none that cared at any time for any but themselves, the uncertain world we live in would be a dangerous place; and the worldling might as soon find it such as any other man. They will

say, such accidents fall out so seldom, that we need not to change our ordinary course, for fear of such things. But in very deed they happen oftener, and to worldlings, than they have good consideration enough to think of and lay to heart. Alas, it is almost every day, and in every place, that we fall among thieves, that rob us, and that almost quite strip us, if also they do not wound us. Not seldom, the times are thieves to us; other-while the wife, or prodigal children. A knavish kindred, false servants, grinding masters, a litigious or envious neighbourhood, sometimes rob us, and send us away naked, or next to naked, even bare and necessitous. The rich themselves too often experience the straits to which these sorts of thieves do reduce men; they make the rich to be poor in the midst of the greatest abundance and plenty: so that certainly it were to be wished there were more Samaritans, more well-conditioned, well-disposed, and open-hearted persons.

2. Again, I take notice; it is not indeed in every one's power to do as this Samaritan, to relieve the poor or distressed in their wants, or to encourage the worthy and deserving in their excellent endeavours. But though few of us have the Samaritan's purse, all may and should have his spirit. We can all of us countenance and be of party with the well-deserving; and the poor we can all of us help by our counsel, favour, good looks,

looks, and good words. There is no commandment of God but all persons may earn the recompence that belongs to it; for all of us can perform it; either in act, or by approving, applauding, and favouring it. I make the deed of this Samaritan, nay, all the best deeds of all other public-spirited, well-disposed men, to be mine; if, wanting their wealth, or their opportunities, *I esteem their persons for their actions, the men for what they do, or have done.* As, on the contrary, but too many do make the lust, debaucheries, and other vices, of their friends, or strangers, to be their own; in that they love or esteem the persons on those very accounts. You shall hear them telling with great pleasure, with many approving smiles, the wicked or lewd deeds of some others; especially when the wickedness has a mixture either of wit, or seeming bravery and courage. The first beginnings of excellent virtue, of whatsoever kind, are (usually) in our approbation of those kind of actions: when we have used some time to make them ours by our good-liking and esteem of them, we grow such ourselves, before we are well aware of it: I mean, grow such in spirit, in inclination; though opportunity or ability of acting accordingly may be wanting.

The inclination, the spirit, is accepted by God, no less than the act or performance. This is the peculiar advantage of God's service; it is not

found in the service of any other whomsoever ; that the inclination of the mind goes for the act itself, and that God recompences the well-disposed, as the well-doer. In short, this is our privilege and our comfort, as christians ; we may all be samaritans, without the purse of the samaritan, or his opportunities.

3. Not the levite, not the priest, says our saviour here, but the samaritan, the doer of good, is that neighbour, whom by God's law thou art to love as thyself. It is true, the samaritan is of another religion ; he is so overseen, as not to own some books that are genuine parts of holy scripture : nay, he has great mistakes about the very object of worship, about the very person of God ; his conceptions of God are so confused and uncertain, that he worships he knows not (well) what. For all that, I say to thee, seeing he is an useful man, full of good works, thou art to love him as thyself ; his strange country, or his mistaken religion, notwithstanding. Nobody will deny, that this is our saviour's plain meaning in this text, and the context. But if so, why is it the practice of so many, to be disaffected to the very best persons, for their (supposed) errors in religion ? How dare we to contravene, go against, the undeniable charge given to us all in this plain text ? The man, say you, is a samaritan ; in our judgment he is mistaken in some points of religion ;  
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it may be about the very object of worship; the nature and the properties of God. I pray, christians, think of it, that it is our saviour who supposes that the person is indeed a samaritan: he tells us plainly he is of a different religion from the true church, and even that he worships he knows not what: yet, after all, the same saviour says, decrees, this is thy neighbour, whom thou art to love as thyself; because, says he, he is a doer of good, open-hearted, well-conditioned. I will have thee (says that teacher, *whom we are to hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto us*) to embrace this samaritan; to think him worthy of more love than the orthodox levite or priest, found in the faith.

But here, what say some men? What, embrace a samaritan, a heretic, a man of false religion? We have learned better things, and that from holy scripture, from the word of God itself. (Titus iii. 10.) “A man that is an heretic, after the first and second admonition, reject;” that is, cast him off, have nothing to do with him, avoid him as a pest. It is too common, among the contending parties of christians, to take scripture words and names; and, having put them on the wrong person or subject, to conclude presently, we have confuted, and shamed them. A heretic, says the apostle, reject him, cast him off. Right! but then let us mean by heretics what he means.

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He means factious persons, whether they be of a right or a wrong opinion in religion. To say it in few words, heresy is bigotry or faction ; and heretic is a bigot, a factious or turbulent person, whether such person happens to be right or wrong in his opinions. *Hereses sunt placita vehementius defensa*, says a most learned critic : “ Heresy is  
 “ any opinion, whether in philosophy, religion,  
 “ or politics, for which men contend too earnestly  
 “ and fiercely.” It is not then the truth or falsehood of any opinion that makes it to be heresy, and the person that holds it a heretic ; it is the stir, clamour, and bustle made about it by any, that makes the opinion heresy, and the man a heretic : concerning such men the apostle directs well, *reject them* ; after having admonished them once and again of their dangerous warmth, avoid them, have no more to do with them. But as for others who are mistaken, (that is, we think they are mistaken in their doctrines,) the charge concerning them is, not *reject them*, or avoid them. On the contrary, we are cautioned *not to judge them*, not to *condemn them* ; and for this reason, because they erring conscientiously, *God receives them, God accepts them, God will uphold them*. (Rom. xiv. 4:) “ Who art thou that  
 “ judgest (ἀλλότριον ὀνέκτην,) *the servant of ano-*  
 “ *ther?* To his own master, to God, he must  
 “ stand or fall ; yea, *he shall be holden up.*” He  
 had

had said in the foregoing verse, (προσελάβετο αὐτὸν ὁ Θεός,) *God hath accepted him, or God hath received him.*

In short, they say, a *heretic* is to be rejected. I answer, yes, every *bigot*, every turbulent person, every fire-brand, of whatsoever sect or persuasion. But for heretics, that are commonly so miscalled, (that is, persons erring in doctrine,) it will but ill become us to *reject them*, when the holy scriptures assure us in express terms *God accepts them.*

4. Lastly, As the divine wisdom and goodness has made it to be our duty, to love the doer of good as ourselves; so, in dispensing his last sentence, and the everlasting recompences, himself will consider, not what the opinions of men have been, but what good they have done to other men. When our saviour describes that general judgment in which all men shall receive their last and irrevocable doom, shall be adjudged by God, either to happiness or misery: he assures us, the reason of both these shall be grounded, by the most holy judge, on our forwardness and frequency in doing good to others, or (on the contrary) our neglect thereof. The manner and reasons of that judgment are very particularly stated in the gospel by St. Matthew, (chap. xxv.) to this effect or sense: When the son of man is descended from the highest heavens, *in the glory of the Father*; which is to say, waited  
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on by a glistering, triumphant train of angels and seraphims ; they will present to him *the throne of glory*, the tribunal or judgment-seat of the whole world. So soon as he is seated thereon, the earth and sea giving up their dead, there will *be gathered before him all nations* ; the men of all countries, of all ages, since the first creation of things ; of all conditions, states, or degrees ; and especially of all religions. Never before and never again will there be such an assembly ; the first parents of all mankind, the particular progenitors (or patriarchs) of the several nations, all the great personages, whether for dignity, wisdom, wealth, wit, arts, or success, that have ever been. All these mingled with the promiscuous, plebeian crowd, and, not less than they, under the most mortifying doubts and fears, what shall become of them. The judge, unmoved, declares, in the first place, that all their former distinctions are now to cease ; he will consider them but only as sheep or goats, as good or bad. All your other differences, says he, were intended only as trials, or as opportunities ; trials what you would deserve, or opportunities of doing well or doing ill. They were only to prepare you for this day, and this judgment ; to make you capable subjects of God's everlasting love, and the beatitudes consequent thereon ; or else objects of justice, for your neglects of duty, and abuses of the power, wealth, and

and talents, that were trusted to your management. This is no sooner said, than ministring angels separate, the one from the other ; in the language there used, they divide the sheep from the goats ; persons that have been innocent and useful, from the wily and harmful. Then follows the sacred irreverfible fentence : you that have fed the hungry, clothed the naked, relieved the prifons and fick families ; in fhort, you that *have fhown mercy* by exercifing any fort or kind of beneficence, are to *inherit everlafting mercy*, even the joys and kingdom that fo well correspond to fuch aétions and ways. But you on the other hand of me, that have done all things contrary, it is the will of God that you depart forthwith into that punifhment, by fire, which God, all-wife and all-powerful, has thought you worthy of ; and will fo far fupport you, as to enable you to fuffer it.

This is the purport and fubftance of that famous portion of holy fcripture. I cannot ftand now to make any other reflection upon it, than this, for which I alledged it : that when the men of all nations, which includes (and implies) the men of all faiths, fhall be judged by our faviour, he will give fentence, he will make them miferable, or happy, on the foot of their good or bad deeds ; their deeds of charity or other beneficence ; without any refpect to their opinions, to the doctrines  
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they believed, or thought they had cause to deny or to doubt of.

In answer to this context, I have heard some men say: It is true, indeed, our saviour mentions there, only the doing good to others, as the cause of salvation; but it is certain, from a great many other texts, that justice or righteousness is also a necessary condition of salvation, and no less necessary than charity or beneficence, or doing good to others, is. Therefore, whereas our saviour (there) instances in beneficence, without speaking either of justice, or of a right faith: it was because beneficence is the principal, not because it is the only, condition of men's salvation. But I pray let us not so interpret scripture, as to destroy it. Our saviour says expressly, in that context, he will judge the men of all faiths, by their beneficence. Yes, say these (skilful and faithful) interpreters, he will judge them by their beneficence, and by their faiths. Plainly, this is not to interpret the divine word, but to add to it what and as we please.

But they say, other texts make justice a condition of salvation; therefore, beneficence cannot be the only ground of that sentence, which the judge of the world will at last pronounce. His sentence will be grounded on men's beneficence, on their justice, and right faith. A very little  
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heed would have prevented this objection; and the mistake that is tacked to it. For justice is included in beneficence, as a lesser number is in a greater: he that will do me good, will be sure to do me right; he that bestows on me what is his, will not defraud me of what is mine. In short, the beneficent person is always just: as a greater number always includes the lesser, beneficence always comprehends and implies justice. Our saviour, aware of this, did not think it necessary to make (there) express mention of justice; but only of beneficence, which (always and necessarily) implies and includes it. But, if a right faith had also been a necessary condition of salvation, it must have been expressly named; because it is not at all, in any degree, implied in beneficence, which is there proposed as the condition of salvation.

I have not said any thing, of all that has been said, with a design to depreciate, or lessen the esteem or value of a right faith. As it is a duty to be conscientious; to *try the spirits*; to *prove the doctrines, whether they be of God*; so we must needs grant, it is matter of (just) praise, with all good and wise men, and of acceptance with God, if our faith be right, as well as our works good. It is lawful, however, to compare even jewels,

relative worth; to examine not only what they are in themselves, but what is their value, in a comparison with one another. We may say the pearl is better than crystal, the sapphire than the cornelian, the diamond than the amethyst. And, in like manner, especially it being after our favour, we may affirm, that well-doing is preferable to the most dextrous or lucky thinking; it is better to be a good man, or a doer of good, than to be a learned or orthodox man.

I may err, and yet be saved: in the dark and intricate walks of controversy I may make false steps, without being (at all) the more out of my way to blessedness. But, if I am not a Samaritan, a doer of good, either in fact or in inclination and spirit, I neither have a right to be loved by my neighbour, nor to be accepted by God. No, not though I be a son of the church, by an orthodox faith and doctrine; or even a father in the church, a priest or levite.

Thus, as well and fully as the time (allowed to these exercises) would permit, I have represented to you what encouragements God has proposed to well-doing, particularly to beneficence. I should now present you with one of the fairest examples thereof, that this age or any former could boast of, in an account and character of our deceased brother and friend, Mr. THOMAS FIR-

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MIN ; but that part of the respect that we owe to his memory, being performed to him by some others who knew him longer, and therefore can draw him more exactly, I will conclude with the doxology that is so just and so due.

*To the King eternal, immortal, invisible, God only wise, be honour and glory, for ever and ever. (1 Tim. i. 17.)*

THE END.

...but that part of the subject that we owe  
to the economy, I am inclined to think is some  
other who knew him longer, and therefore can  
know him more exactly, I will conclude with the  
hypothesis that is as just and so due.

(1) The first part of the paper discusses the importance of the study of the history of the United States.



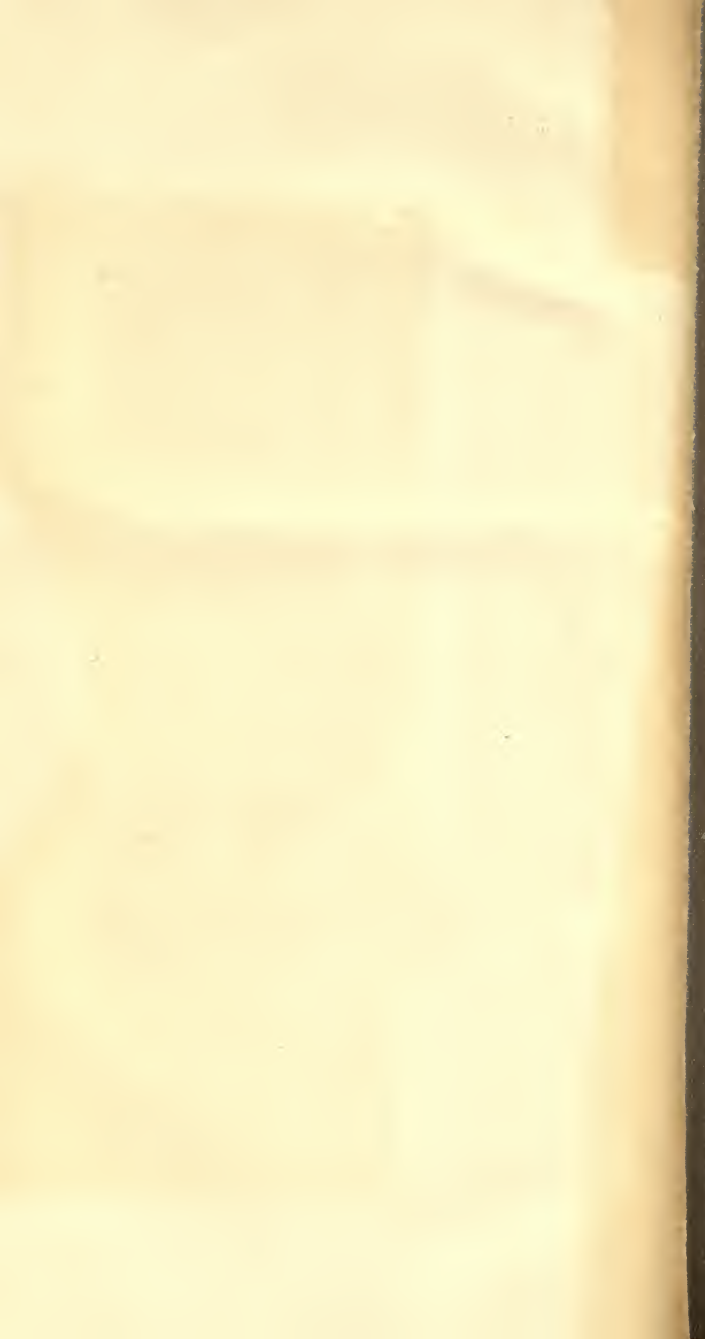














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