

THE
SCRIPTURAL DOCTRINE

OF

FUTURE PUNISHMENT VINDICATED,

IN A

DISCOURSE

FROM THESE WORDS,

“ *And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into Life eternal.*”
Math. XXV, & 46th.

TO WHICH

ARE PREFIXED SOME PREFATORY STRICTURES ON
THE LATELY AVOWED RELIGIOUS PRINCIPLES OF
JOSEPH PRIESTLEY, L. L. D. F. R. S. &c. &c.
PARTICULARLY

IN A DISCOURSE DELIVERED BY HIM IN THE CHURCH
OF THE UNIVERSALIENS, IN PHILADELPHIA, AND
PUBLISHED IN 1796.—ENTITLED “UNITARIANISM
EXPLAINED AND DEFENDED” &c. &c.

BY SAMUEL KNOX, M. A. MINISTER OF THE GOS-
PEL, AT BLADENSBURGH, MARYLAND.

“ *But there were false prophets also among the peo-
ple, even as there shall be false teachers among you,
who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even
denying the Lord that bought them.*”

II Ep. of Peter Chap. II v. 1.

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Prefatory Strictures &c.

THE publication of the Discourse, to which these Strictures are prefixed, on the subject of future punishment, has been chiefly owing to a Discourse of Doctor Priestley's, which was lately handed me by a friend, under the title of "Unitarianism explained and defended," and delivered in the Church of the Universalists at Philadelphia, some time in 1796.

The religious sentiments of Doctor Priestley, especially on the subject of Unitarianism, have been for several years known to many both of the learned and unlearned part of the Christian world. That the Doctor, then, should be so solicitous about explaining his religious opinions to the people of the United States, lest they should be misinterpreted, I must confess appears to me rather an ingenious manner of disseminating them, than that any just

ground of fear exists for such misinterpretation.

At least, I think, it argues a greater presumption of the ignorance, in this respect, of sincere enquirers, in these States, into the present state of Christianity, than the truth will warrant.

When the long received Doctrines of the Gospel, agreeable to the principles of the most reformed churches, are attacked by men of Doctor Priestley's talents and eminence in the learned world, they have a very superior advantage in the promulgation, and also in the establishment of their peculiar opinions.

In the polemical contest such men engage with the most conspicuous advantage; while their antagonists are necessitated to wield their unequal weapons in the humble vale of obscurity, with scarcely a hope of ever reaching either the notice of their opponent; or those who should be most interested in the issue of the controversy.

Indeed such is the advantage, in this respect, which men possess, who have attained the summit, either of philosophical or political fame, that, I think, nothing short of absolute certainty; or divine inspiration should influence them to take the advantage or opportunity which such a situation must afford, for attempting to subvert almost, generally received doctrines—doctrines, too, which have had the happiest effects in the religious reformation and instruction of the most virtuous, as well as the most enlightened part of the Christian World.

Doctor Priestley has indeed, attempted to apologise for the republication of his religious sentiments in this country, by informing us, that he has had better opportunities of information on theological subjects than we have had. If the Doctor had so expressed himself concerning literary or philosophical subjects, few might be disposed to refuse due credit either to the truth; or the modesty of the apology. But, surely if the records of divine revelation be the true, and the only true standard or test of religious truth, we have all that is possibly attainable for our information on those subjects, that are most controverted, as well as he..

We may not, indeed, have had an opportunity of consulting all the various versions of the Scriptures to be met with in some of the public Libraries in Europe, in the original languages; or such a variety of voluminous interpretations or commentaries, ancient and modern, on each particular text. We have, however, all that is necessary. We have the most authentic originals; And also the most approved translations from those originals, and if in that state the scriptures be not calculated for our religious instruction in truth and righteousness, then are they not that transcript of the divine Will, the only end and design of which could be, the reformation of those to whom God was pleased to communicate them. Indeed if any Doctor can persuade us that we have not the opportunity or the means of religious knowledge,

while at the same time we hold in our hands the records of divine truth, then may our religion be whatever such a Rabbi pleases to make it. He has only to point out the way which his superior opportunities have discovered, and it is embraced with all the implicit faith and obedience claimed by the Mitred Pontiff; or the Mahometan Mufti.

Were it true that Doctor Priestley or any other philosopher, could investigate the truth of any religious doctrine as they would a chemical experiment in a laboratory, some claim might, then, be laid to superior attention and regard. But the success of many of their experiments in enquiring into the occult qualities of material objects; into some of the mysterious operations of nature, might teach philosophers a little modesty in their reasonings on, and researches after, the knowledge of Him, who is the great incomprehensible first cause of all things.

It would appear, however; that whether some of those gentlemen, apply their enquiries either to the natural or spiritual world.—Both must be equally subject to the comprehension of their learned researches. So successful have their investigations been, when directed to the world of nature, that God and Religion, even the most sublime truths he has revealed, must, also with equal obviousness be brought within the capacity of their rational powers. To speak to such gentlemen of a religious mystery is to offer an insult to their superior

understandings. With all due deference, however, to their philosophical, unitarian understandings, they may allow us to observe that, Paul hesitated not to declare that, "Great is the mystery of Godliness, God manifested in the flesh."

According to Doctor Priestley's principles, however, there was no mystery in the case. And this, I suppose, is one of those corruptions, for which, as it accords not with Unitarianism, the Doctor would have even Paul stand corrected.

I presume not, by these few strictures; or by the discourse to which they are prefatory, to enter the polemical lists with such a champion as Doctor Priestley. But I may be allowed to say that men as respectable for theological learning and abilities; and also in zeal in searching after religious knowledge as the Doctor, have advocated those doctrines, which he hath presumed to despise, and rank in absurdity with transubstantiation.

The labours of those men are still in our possession, and may render any farther vindication, especially from a very inferior pen, superfluous, neither does it yet appear to any but Unitarians, that the Doctor with all his learned researches into the earliest opinions of the Christian world, hath introduced any new light on those points, so as to invalidate either their arguments; or that scriptural authority on which they are founded.

The doctrines of the Trinity and atonement,

no man of an enlightened mind ought even to name with that of transubstantiation. The former are in no respect derogatory to the glory and honour of the Divine Being, so being they are not represented in a false point of view. But the latter being not only superior; but contrary, to reason, and also in the highest degree, degrading to the dignity of the Supreme Being, is not only an insult to that dignity; but also to every external sense and intellectual idea in the human constitution.

It is certainly unworthy of the candour of Doctor Priestley, considered either as a divine or a philosopher, to say “there is the same foundation in the scriptures for the Doctrine of Transubstantiation, as for that of the Trinity.” It is true, Christ hath said that “His flesh is *meat*, indeed, and his blood *drink* indeed”—and that this is expressed also in the same figurative stile by some of his Apostles. But it is also declared by Christ that “He was a *Door*; that he was a *Vine*, and his Disciples the *Bran-ches*—that he was a *Shepherd* and they his *Sheep*, his little *Flock*.” Now who is it that may not see that these, as well as, what he says of his *broken body* and *shed blood*, are all equally figurative expressions? Whereas with regard to his being the Son of God—the second person of the divine essence, and entitled to the same homage with God, there is no figure, all is plain argument; simple declaration—expressed, too, in opposition to those, who like Doctor Priestley, thought him only man; while they said

that he made himself equal with God.

Besides, the words on which the absurdity of transubstantiation is founded, occur only in one instance; or on one occasion. But were it not inconsistent with the studied brevity of these strictures, I could fill pages with scripture passages apparently divested of all figure, and introduced on many various occasions in support of the doctrines, which Christians have denominated; the Trinity; and atonement for sin by the Death of Christ.

Absurd, however, and inconsistent as the Doctor would represent a belief in those doctrines to be; yet in his preface to that discourse to which I have alluded, he hesitates not to say that, those who believe in them, absurd as they are; and those who do not are, notwithstanding, agreed in all that is "*really fundamental.*" in Religion! And yet the Doctor, afterwards, in his Discourse says, that, "It is time to cry aloud and spare not" in opposition to such absurd doctrines. Now if such doctrines be not, *really fundamental,*" why should the good Doctor be so zealous to "cry aloud and spare not?"

But, if to "cry aloud and spare not," be the Doctor's way of recommending peace and union among all the different denominations of Christians, in these states, seeing we disagree not in what is "*really fundamental,*" I hope his abilities are adequate to the vindication of such expressions from any appearance of absurdity or inconsistency.

But the Doctor must surely allow us the same right to be zealous in our religious faith, as he would be in his. In the exercise of this right, then, might not we, in our turn “Cry aloud and spare not,” that, any man, without other means of divine knowledge; any evidence of supernatural powers; or even superior authority to what we possess, should attempt to discredit the generally received doctrines which Christians in these states, think they have, at least, as good authority for, as he has for the contrary—that he should represent us as idolaters with whom he and his Unitarian friends could not, in conscience associate in the solemn services of devotion.

Before, Doctor Priestley, especially considered as a stranger, in whom modesty either in religious or political opinions, is no unbecoming quality, ventured so far in arraigning our religious faith, like *Paul*, at Athens, to whom he compares himself, and, consequently, us to the idolatrous Athenians, he ought to have given some divine demonstration as *Paul* hath done, that he is not mistaken; but that he has been commissioned from heaven to deliver us from idolatry and superstition. While we want, however, this foundation of confidence in his opinions, the Doctor may indeed “Cry aloud and spare not” against us for our unbelief; but surely cannot think it inconsistent that we reply in the same tone.

His account of Unitarian charity would also require a little vindication. He says that, all

denominations of Christians may consistently join in their worship; but that it is impossible that Unitarians can associate in worship with them, without a consciousness of idolatry.

Now, what other principle of charity than this could we expect from a Jew, Mahometan; or an Infidel! Would not all of these, also, say that, we might join in their worship; but that without idolatry, they could not in ours? This remark on Unitarian charity might appear superfluous; or perhaps, invidious, only that the Doctor has been so earnest in inculcating that distinguished virtue to others; and that, too, when, as he says, "We agree in all that is really fundamental."

But what appears still somewhat more irreconcilable to this last charitable-like declaration of the Doctor is, that he says the most important doctrines of our religious faith, "*are vile excrescences,*" which must be cut off, if we would save the tree." This done, he further observes that, "the evidences of revealed religion will challenge the closest investigation." This assertion of the Doctor's, I confess, I do not fully understand. It is, surely, no argument against the authenticity of revealed religion—that men sometimes interpret it erroneously. Now, even supposing that with regard to all those doctrines, to which he alludes, we are in an error, surely the Doctor does not mean to say that it lessens the authority of revealed religion. I humbly apprehend its divine testimony remains equally unshaken either

by the Doctor's interpretations; not by ours.

The honour and worship which in this revealed religion, we are commanded expressly, to pay unto Christ, the Doctor labours to make out to be idolatry—as much as if we worshipped Moses, Abraham, the Virgin Mary; or I might add, Doctor Priestley, especially, if his religious principles be well founded.

But it is not a just representation of our worship, to insinuate that we worship more than one God—For, if agreeable to the command of the gospel, we offer divine honours to Christ, the Son of God, it is in the firm belief that he together with the Father and the Holy Spirit constitute *one* supreme object of adoration. This unity, however in our present stage of existence, we pretend not to explain; nor are we ashamed to own it to be far superior to our comprehension. Our foundation for believing it, is, because God by Christ and his apostles hath declared it—and while at the same time, we conceive that there is but one, and only one object of religious adoration, in such worship, even supposing we err, it is not an error, as the Doctor would represent it, “injurious to God;” or to his honour any more than that of the Unitarian, who in the most solemn acts of Devotion might form inadequate ideas of God. That all, yea even Unitarians, not excepting the pious Doctor himself, and that in their most solemn services, conceive imperfectly and unworthily of the incomprehensible object of religious worship, I hope will not

be denied—-even, then, on the supposition that we err, as already observed, on the grounds we have for such error, we trust that, by the searcher of hearts, it shall not be pronounced *Idolatry*; nor *we Idolaters*—but assigned to the same common lot of imperfection which Unitarians as well as we must acknowledge in all our conceptions of an infinite God.

I find that the Doctor, in the exhortatory preface to the discourse I have alluded to, speaks of the administration of *Baptism* and the *Lord's Supper*. I confess I know not the formula of an Unitarian Baptism. But if it be as Christ hath commanded, “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost,” it does not appear very consonant to the doctrine from which, by their title, Unitarians would distinguish themselves from other Christians.

If Doctor Priestley's opinions concerning Christ as an object of adoration be just; and could all the Christian World be as enlightened by means of his instruction, on that subject, as he thinks he has enlightened himself, it must be allowed that, he would be the author of more good to the cause of true religion than ever Jesus Christ hath yet been.

But if the world could be so indebted to him, and sure I am that it is not for want of much zeal and assiduity in the Doctor if they be not, then, on this hypothesis, the formula of an Unitarian Baptism should be in the name of the Father, the Son Joseph Priestley, and the

Holy Ghost ! Such is the blasphemous tendency to which this fair statement of Unitarianism, as far as it respects Baptism, would certainly tend. Let the candour of Doctor Priestley himself point out in what respect the construction is forced ; or inconsistent with Unitarian principles.

If Jesus Christ be no more than a Creature commissioned to instruct mankind ; and especially to deliver them from the slavish darkness of Idolatrous superstition ; and that men, even those who believed in, and acknowledged him as such, should, notwithstanding, instead of being delivered from Idolatry by him, still continue in the idolatrous homage of their reformer ; says but little either for him ; or the success of the commission with which he was so divinely invested. So little, that he who would reform men from this delusion, as is surely the Doctor's aim, must, should he happen to succeed, be better entitled to the second place in the ascription of glory, in the sacred services and ordinances of the Christian Religion, than he to whom it is addressed.

Now, would not the Doctor have us believe that such only hath been the general consequence of the doctrines taught by Christ and his Apostles, as they have been explained by the different Christian churches ? Would he not persuade us that idolatry has been the most general effect of that light, with which Christ has enlightened the world for a period of now nearly two thousand years ? And, consequently,

that would men, calling themselves Christians, be convinced by his light, and his reasoning on the subject, they should be delivered from the grossest idolatry. If this be not making himself of more importance in the cause of true religion than ever Jesus Christ together with all his Apostles, have yet been agreeable to his principles, let the impartial judge.

But blessed be God ! We have not so learned Christ ; we have a more sure word of testimony. For, if the scriptures be not calculated to deceive, but instruct us, as we most firmly believe they are, and that in doctrines superior to human investigation, we are by them commanded to “ Honour the Son, even as we honour the Father.” By them, too, we are instructed that “ At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven ; and things in earth, and things under the earth.”

Now, would any Unitarian presume to say that any such homage should be paid to, even on the most unbounded success, any of their Apostles, in the propagation of their principles? And yet if their principles be true, he whose labours among them would be crowned with such success, would, certainly, have a better title to such respect than Jesus of Nazareth. But the scriptures also instruct us that Thomas the Disciple, in the very act of his returning faith—acknowledged him “ His Lord and his God.” It is evident also from the history of our Lord’s life, that even the unbelieving Jews, considered him, in his doctrine and instruction,

as making himself equal with **God**. In some instances it would appear that this was their only reason for disbelieving him. Now does it appear from our Lord's conduct and replies to them, that he confirmed this character of himself; or that he, who was the great instructor of mankind, even on Unitarian principles, endeavored to remove with abhorrence, as he surely ought to have done, this charge against him and his doctrine had it really been groundless? **Unitarians** believe it was groundless,—**Hear, then our Lord's own reasoning on this subject, in the 22d chapter of the gospel by Matthew from the 41st verse to the end of the chapter.**

“While the **Pharisees** were gathered together, **Jesus** asked them, saying, what think ye of **Christ**? **Whose Son** is he? They, viz. the **Unitarians**, say unto him, the son of **David**. He saith unto them, how then doth **David** in spirit call him **Lord**, saying, The **Lord** said unto my **Lord**, sit thou on my right hand till I make thine enemies thy foot-stool? If **David** then call him **Lord**, how is he his **Son**?”

Would to **God** **Unitarians** would reflect whether they may not be found such enemies! It is, however, manifest that **Christ** here, instead of instructing them to avoid any idolatrous homage paid to him; on the contrary becomes the advocate of his own divinity. Indeed on all other occasions of the like nature we find his conduct and doctrines confirming the command “That all men should ho-

nour the Son, even as they honour the Father.”

It is true Dr. Priestley's talents, in support of his own hypothesis, can reconcile even those & still more pointed passages of scriptural authority, to the principles of Unitarianism. By his learned researches into the records of antiquity, he may indeed amuse us with what he calls the 'corruptions of Christianity; But unsophisticated genuine common sense either in the original; or in our translation can view them in no other light, or sense than they have been viewed in all ages by the generality of Christians; and more especially by the Apostles of Christ, who are, surely, on this subject, better entitled to our confidence and regard than even Doctor Priestley with all his learned researches.

To me, at least, it suggests no little suspicion of weakness of argument in behalf of any religious opinions; when I find, as in some of the works of Doctor Priestley, suspicions introduced of interpolation or false translation, of such portions of scripture as appear most repugnant to the theological principles which have been adopted in opposition to their authority.

But it is, I think, evident from the writings of the Doctor, that though we find him the avowed advocate of revealed religion, yet he hesitates not, as often as it suits his purpose to make it bend to the more exalted shrine of human reason—and occasionally to represent it as of dubious and deceitful authority. The pains he has taken either to do away the force or un-

determine the authenticity of those scriptural passages that oppose his favourite theological system, are, in some measure, demonstrative of this observation.

In particular, at the close of the discourse, already alluded to, where in order to crown *his religious system of rational opinions*, he espou- ses also the predominant doctrine of the Uni- versalists, with regard to the duration of future punishment, the Doctor the declared champion in defence of revealed religion says that "He does not lay much stress on particular texts of scripture in that case." Consequently, he thinks it possible that Christ himself, the great instructor of mankind, might be mistaken in this respect—that no confidence should be placed; no particular stress laid on his declarati- ons on this head—That it was a subject that did not belong to him—That he was either in- capable of; or deficient in considering it in its full extent,—In, short, that Dr. Priestley, by his learned researches, and other opportunities of information, is better instructed on that subject, and better entitled to credit than Jesus Christ!

This may serve to shew us the humility of philosophising Christians; and to what it is that Unitarians would wish to reduce the character of the Son of God; the Saviour of the world.

Poor, poor human nature! aided as thou art in this instance, by all the light of philoso- phy and profound literature, how blind, pre-

Insightfully blind appearest thou, when daring to exalt thy weak, imperfect, and short-sighted reasonings on the ruins of the oracles of truth?

Such sentiments, and so expressed; and let the Doctor's own words speak for themselves, are degrading even to an Unitarian's ideas of the Saviour of the world; the enlightener of mankind, commissioned from heaven for that express purpose.

The doctrine of universal salvation or happiness, in which, in that discourse, the Doctor professes himself a believer, I consider as founded on much the same authority with all his other religious opinions, in which he so widely differs from the general body of professing Christians, in these states, namely, that authority which is constituted by rendering imperfect human reason the *Test* of Divine Revelation, rather than Divine Revelation the *Test* of imperfect human reason.

By Doctor Priestley, and all the friends of his theological system, human reason is exalted to be the only standard of religious truth, hence it is that they are for discarding whatever is superior to the comprehension or decision of this tribunal of their own erecting, and every where proclaim themselves the advocates of *rational religion*. Now, though we agree with them in this respect, so far as to believe that God, in revealing to us the truths of the gospel, hath graciously attended to the imperfection of our present state; and addressed his revealed will both to the reason and consciences.

of men, who are called upon to exercise them in all that concerns their duty to God and to one another; yet we also believe that it is no disparagement even to the highest attainable perfection of those faculties that we cannot, in the present stage of existence, fully comprehend the nature of the *Divine Essence*; all the gracious operations of its goodness for our redemption; or its future disposal of us throughout an eternal world. With regard to these as important objects of faith, we consider the revealed declarations of heaven, and not our own imperfect reason, as the only test or standard.

On any other presumption, it is evident that as the reason of man is as various in its capacity of judging even of common subjects, as are the different degrees of mental improvement in the human race; it, consequently, cannot be trusted to as the test of the most sublime, divine truths. Let Unitarians inform us to whose reason it is that we are to appeal on such subjects. Are they sure that their reason is adequate to the comprehension of God essentially; or even the motives and nature of all his conduct? If they be not, can it then be inconsistent in us to believe that we consider the truth of these subjects as, in no respect, affected by the opinions of men, whose reason and understandings, even in the highest state of natural improvement, are too various, fluctuating and uncertain, too subject to error ignorance and delusion; to weakness, insufficiency and

imperfection, to be made a standard to try the truth of what God has revealed concerning himself; or the counsels of his will.

The doctrine of universal happiness; or the non-eternity of future punishment I consider as peculiarly alarming and dangerous to the interests of virtue and religion; and, consequently, to the welfare of society, more especially in an age prone to moral degeneracy, libertinism and infidelity.

No consideration, however, should afford sufficient ground for discountenancing that, or any other doctrine, did there appear any real scriptural authority for its truth and support. But, it is equally as impossible for God to be unjust, as for his word to authorize any doctrine prejudicial to the interests of human happiness.

Have we not good ground for this observation, when even Doctor Priestley is obliged in advocating that doctrine to say, "He would not lay much stress on particular texts of scripture," that expressly contradicted it?

May we not ask what are to become, at last, of the despised scriptures of truth when men, men, too, such as Doctor Priestley, their avowed advocate, are brought to say, "they would not lay much stress on particular texts of scripture"—when they are directly repugnant to their own favourite hypothesis?

I cannot help declaring that, there appears to me more consistency in the deistical ravings of the Apostate Paine, than in such expressions,

from a declared friend to, and defender of the authenticity of the sacred scriptures; an avowed advocate of revealed religion. Such treatment of them must, to every unprejudiced mind appear like cutting a friend's throat with the one hand; and caressing him with the other.

This, indeed, appears to furnish us with good ground for believing that the Doctor believes in so much of the scriptures as are not in opposition to his *rational system* of Theology— But with regard to those that are, “*No stress is to be laid upon them.*”

But, though Doctor Priestley may be disposed to lay little stress on those particular texts, that expressly assert the eternity of future punishment; yet I cannot help being of the opinion that, the authors of them were a little better acquainted with the subject than he is, until he can afford us more convincing evidence of his capacity of looking into futurity than he hath yet done. Indeed, I cannot see how the Doctor himself, with consistency, can be of a different opinion.

He has, indeed, in a feeling manner, expressed the distresses of relative affection, on the supposition of a parent or child being consigned to eternal misery. But is not this what such must sometimes submit to in the execution of impartial justice, even in this world? In the just infliction of penalty do not the laws of men, tear asunder, and that forever, in as far as the happiness of this life is concerned, the tenderest bonds of parental and filial affection?

“If in this life, then, this be agreeable to what God approves, and even commands, what authority have we for supposing that the impartial administration of justice by God in a future world is to be frustrated by the sympathies of relative affection, or that those affections will in that state operate as they do in the present life?

Would it not have been as consistent with the Doctor’s feelings as a parent; and with his professions as a Christian to have weighed well, the consequences of a doctrine; or as I should rather say, an opinion that, evidently, tends to liberate licentiously disposed youth from the awful threatening of God’s law; that almost to annihilation, lessens the dread of future penalty; and raises the hopes of the most vicious and abandoned to those rewards which God hath promised only to the virtuous and Godly?

Such an opinion is indeed peculiarly soothing to the ears of such as cannot be brought strictly to conform to the dictates of piety and religion. It attracts to its support every votary of vice; every victim of folly and dissipation—every hardened sinner, too long habituated in iniquity to repent, and too proud ever to acknowledge, in this life, any change of manners; any renovation of heart or conduct. But is it the more true on this account; or is this not rather a most convincing argument of its delusive falsehood and alarming consequence?

As a philosopher; and as a philanthropist I revere Doctor Priestley, and the productions of

his pen—I have also the charity to assign his religious publications to his zeal in promoting the instruction and improvement of the human species. With his religious Creed, however, I could, by no means acquiesce. Since I have been first able to form any judgement of religious opinions, which has been for more than twenty years, I have had various opportunities in different parts of the Christian world of observing the effects of particular systems of religious faith, I have known many who became converts to the religious opinions avowed by Doctor Priestley; which he long since published in Europe; and has lately republished, and endeavoured to propagate in this country, and without prejudice, I think, I can declare, that in as far as my observation has extended, instead of such converts having thereby become more practically pious, more devout and religious; on the contrary they became sceptical not only in principle, but practice—and less zealous in the discharge of every sacred ordinance inculcated in the Gospel. More than in one instance have I observed the humble penitent, who renounced all confidence in his own righteousness; and trusted to that *atonement* which the Doctor pronounces absurd, laughed at, not for his principle but his *piety* by the enlightened convert to Unitarianism, who, at the same time, founded his acceptance with God on the sincerity or perfection of his own obedience to the divine law.

From the apprehension that these few strictures, may already appear too prolix, when considered as merely introductory to the following discourse, I conclude them by observing that however high some may have reason to rate their powers of reason and understanding, yet surely to know God and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent, essentially, far transcends the utmost limits of those powers. On this subject, then, least of all does it become even the most exalted understanding to be wise above what is written. All other revealed doctrines may be made to come within the reach of our rational faculties; but this, in our present state, we can never fully comprehend. It is not then proper to place it on a level with any other religious truth which God hath revealed for our instruction.

Concerning it, justly may it be said that “Here we live by faith and not by sight.” “That, here we see but in part; but when that which is perfect is come, that which we saw but in part shall be done away.” And, finally, that our progressive improvement in this divine knowledge may constitute a principal portion of our enjoyment in the world of spirits. When we shall “See no more darkly as in a glass; but as it were face to face”—And when all our knowledge and enquiries after truth, however dictated by imperfection, prejudice, or partiality here, shall then appear in their true light before him who “is the way, the truth and the life.”

A
DISCOURSE
ON THE
DURATION
OF THE
FUTURE PUNISHMENT
OF THE
WICKED.

“ And these shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into Life eternal.”
Math. XXV, & 46th.

FROM this declaration of our blessed Saviour, it is the design of the following Discourse to shew that, the eternal punishment of sin is founded on scriptural authority; and also consistent with the divine perfections.

It must be allowed that on all subjects which treat of the divine perfections, especially in reconciling to them facts or events, of which men, in this imperfect, shortsighted state of humanity, can form no certain, no just notions except such as are warranted by divine revelation, all our reasoning must participate of a degree of imperfection proportioned to the dis-

tance which the object of our investigation lies beyond our reach.

All the perfections or attributes of God are infinite ; and it ought to be no ground of dissatisfaction to us, that it hath not seemed good unto his divine wisdom to make known unto us, how his conduct to men, either in this or a future world, is in every respect consistent with his infinite nature and perfections. Indeed this is a knowledge to which we are, in our present state, incapable of attaining. It would, therefore appear to be our duty not to enquire farther into his ways and conduct than we are warranted by his revealed will ; or at most by that analogy which may exist between his government of the natural, and that of the spiritual world. Any farther investigation seems above our sphere ; and can only end in mere hypothesis, and conjecture.

§. The Divine Being, for ought we know, may have many motives for his manner of governing and disposing of the inhabitants of this world, which he hath not thought proper or necessary to communicate to us. As little know we how far other orders of being, though in worlds remote from ours, may be concerned in what relates either to our temporal or eternal condition ; and consequently whether what we consider as most just or perfect to us as a part, might be best suited to the whole of God's rational offspring.

These few introductory remarks may more especially be applied to those, who, in direct

opposition to the words of the text, and many concurring declarations of the sacred records, have presumed to deny the eternity of the future punishment of the wicked. Such assert that, it is inconsistent with the infinite justice and goodness of the Deity, that a temporal state of sin should be punished by an eternal penalty. But, the pious exclamation of the patient Job, "Shall man be more just than God; shall a man be more pure than his maker!" May be well applied to such mistaken advocates of the divine perfections.

This may appear, not only, from God being the moral governor of the world; and the nature of that punishment he has thought proper to denounce against the obstinate and impenitent transgressors of his laws; but also even from the execution of justice among men, agreeable to his express commands.

In this world we consider it as perfectly just that the murderer should be subjected not only to mortal pain; but also to an eternal forfeiture of all the comforts and blessings of this life. Now, this certainly, is an everlasting punishment, actually inflicted, in as far as relates to this world. Shall, then, an eternal punishment in a future world, by a justly incensed God, for the breach of his most holy laws, be considered as inconsistent with divine justice and goodness? "Shall man be more just than God?" Is it rational to argue that God, the supreme Lord and governor of the world, should see his laws violated; his au-

thority treated not only with neglect, but contempt, without inflicting a punishment, not proportionably greater, his sovereign majesty considered, than what is acknowledged due to the criminal condemned at the bar of his fellow-creatures ?

But to this it may be replied that the murderer, forever cut off a fellow being from this life and its comforts, and that it was only consistent with the strictest justice that the like evil should be retaliated on him——Whereas, the transgression of the sinner could in no respect injure the Deity ; and consequently should not incur a similar punishment in a future existence. This reply, however, can have little weight, since we can form no adequate idea in what light God may consider the impenitent transgression of his laws ; and that an offence against ; or an injury done to, them, may be the same as done to, or against, himself.

It would only tend to the false conclusion, that a breach of one of the commands of the second table of his law, was greater or more heinous than a breach of the first—or, in other words, our bodily trespass against man, as deserving a more severe and lasting punishment, than our spiritual transgression against the living *God*.

In opposition to the eternal duration of future punishment, it is argued by some writers, and especially by Doctor Priestley, in a Discourse published by him, since his arrival in this country, that “All the crimes of finite

creatures being of course finite cannot in equity deserve infinite punishment." Thus men take it upon them in express contradiction to the words of the text; to that revelation in which, at the same time, they profess to believe, to pronounce in what manner an incomprehensible, infinite God should dispose of the impenitent transgressors of his laws.

But how does it appear that man is indeed a *finite being* with regard to a state of sin and transgression? In this sense, I presume, he is not. But that in his spiritual existence, his sin and rebellion against God still continue; and, consequently, incur a continuance of the same punishment. Otherwise, should not such writers inform us, when it is that, in this respect, he becomes a finite creature; when it is that his change, his reformation commences so as to lay any well founded claim to a change of conduct in the Deity towards him? Without this the opinion of his not having incurred an infinite, or eternal penalty on account of his being only a finite criminal is certainly founded on a false hypothesis.

The eternal punishment of sin, of unrepented of vice and guilt must appear consistent with the divine perfections, whether we consider such a state as obnoxious to them individually; or to the whole divine nature. He is an infinite God; and his infinite justice and power make a state of sin, a state of open rebellion against those perfections; against his authority and government. It sets itself in direct op-

position to all that is called God ; and constitutes that which is perfectly irreconcilable to his divine nature and perfections. No human, no finite expiation can atone for the guilt of sin ; for the offended majesty ; the insulted justice and righteousness of heaven. Agreeable to the scriptures, and our faith, in the garden of Gethsemane ; and on mount Calvary were exhibited immortal testimonies of the sacrifice that was offered for even those, who, freed from the curse pronounced against the transgressors of God's holy laws, shall enter into everlasting life. If, then, infinite justice required no less a price than, the sufferings and death, the inestimable blood of his own son who drank to the dregs the cup of bitterness for our sakes, with what face, on what ground of hope shall the finally impenitent look for redemption, after having refused so many gracious calls and invitations to partake of the pardoning mercy of God ?

To render man entirely inexcusable ; to do away every ground of complaint against the justice of God, he enjoys the light of nature ; the light of reason ; and above all of divine Revelation ; and that during an existence which divine wisdom hath thought sufficient for his preparation for the world of spirits. Those inestimable privileges, together with the present constitution of the world ; but especially the state of human nature render it more than probable that this state as changeable is preparatory to another which shall be unchange-

able.—For, “It is appointed unto all men once to die, and after that the judgment.” The justice of God is, therefore, thus vindicated in having given man due warning of what his everlasting condition must be. The prize of salvation is set before him; and must be won in this life, or lost forever. Thus the natural constitution of the world, and the constitution of man as a mortal, and also as a moral and accountable agent, become, in some degree, advocates for the eternity of future punishment being consistent with the divine perfections.

But those arguments are, in a very high degree strengthened by the consideration, that altho’ Revelation instructs us that, the penalty inflicted on unrepented of sin shall be eternal; yet we have also the same sacred authority for believing that it shall be proportioned to the nature, situation and condition of the wicked, and those privileges or talents which, in this life they may either have abused; or not enjoyed with the most distinguished marks of the divine favour and regard. This is evident from Luke’s gospel, twelfth chapter, 47th and 48th verses in the parable of the servants who were to be beaten with stripes proportioned to their respective degrees of delinquency.

But though the justice of God be thus clearly manifest in proportioning the degree of the penalty to be inflicted on the impenitent sinner to the measure of their guilt; yet it is also by considering the odious nature of vice or sin, in the sight of an infinitely pure and holy God,

that we may see his perfections fully vindicated in its eternal punishment.

Sin, even in its most extenuated state, as already observed, violates God's most righteous laws and authority : It denies or contemns his government, and usurps self-government in its stead. It despises divine wisdom, as if it had erred in making laws ; or knew not what is fit and good for us better than we do ourselves. It rejects all God's offers of mercy and goodness ; and adopts that which is as contrary to his nature as light is to darkness ; health unto sickness ; or life unto death. It gives the lie to all the promises and threatenings of the gospel ; it carries on perpetual war against the moral governor of the world ; the king of heaven ; and promotes, enlarges and establishes the empire of Satan and dominion of vice. In a word, to unite the catalogue of its most condemning enormities in one hideous view. It " Crucifies Christ afresh ;" tears open the bleeding wounds of the Son of God ; and re-exposes him to all the shame of " the accursed tree."

Can, then, that soul which is habituated in such a state of enmity against God and his Christ, after the period allotted to repentance is past ; and even after having received its final doom and sentence from its redeemer and judge, be afterwards admitted to the blessed felicity of the righteous? Or, shall it be considered as unjust in God to resign it over a perpetual subject of that kingdom of guilt and darkness whose

interest, while in the body, it was its sole delight to encourage? Neither experience, reason, or revelation reply in the affirmative.

If in temporal affairs, in the civil government of human society, it be considered just that, the traitor against his country, and its most invaluable interests be punished with the forfeiture of that which no human power can ever restore; how much more consistent is it with divine justice and goodness that the rebel against heaven; against the written and revealed laws of his God should undergo the forfeiture, yea even the eternal forfeiture of those rewards which throughout his earthly existence, without contrition or repentance, he presumptuously despised?

This reasoning would have weight, even on the supposition that, in a future existence, there were a probability of repentance or amendment; but its validity becomes undeniable when we consider that in the whole volume of divine inspiration there is not the smallest ground on which we can rest so presumptuous an opinion. If *eternal life* be the glorious reward promised to the righteous; and every means used to allure and persuade men to its acceptance; does it not seem proper and reasonable that a conduct marked not only with contempt of this great reward; but also aggravated by obstinate habits of vicious transgression, be counterbalanced by the threatened penalty of eternal death?

It would, indeed, appear both just and necessary that the threatening should be enforced

by a penalty as grievous as the reward for complying with the terms of the promise eternal life has been alluring. This contract appears to be attended to even in the phraseology of the words of the text “these shall go away into *everlasting* punishment; but the righteous into *life eternal*.”

No doctrine in divine revelation seems more clearly expressed and exhibited than that of rewards and punishments, and the divine wisdom displayed in this doctrine for the good of society, none surely, can presume to deny. Reason, alone, appears sufficient to inform us that, as God is the moral governor of the world; and that whatever is most pure holy and perfect belongs unto him in every relation, it cannot, by any means, be suitable to his dignity, that such an evil as vice or unrepented of guilt should pass unpunished—such rebellion against God; such obstinate and persevering opposition to all that is good, without such execution of the divine judgment as might best demonstrate his justice; and vindicate from contempt his laws and authority.

Equally rational is it to conclude that in a system so perfect as the divine government must be, that, any violation of it should be pardoned or punished only on such terms, as were best calculated to attain the ends of the institution. Now it is certain that the ends of punishment under this divine institution must be the impartial administration of perfect justice; the vindication, also, of the laws and truth of the

lawgiver—to support his dignity and honour; and to prevent, both now and hereafter, the same offenders from that repetition of offence, violation and injury, which impunity might encourage. In a word, in all respects, to maintain, as inviolate as possible, the authority of the governor and the interests of the society over which he presides.

Those ends duly weighed may lead to some idea of the necessity of the eternal punishment of the wicked. Though all our reasoning, however, should fall short of its object in this enquiry; yet it is certain that revelation is clear and decisive on this subject. We might even appeal, for a confirmation of its truth, to the constitution of the human mind. Do not the heart and conscience of man uniformly acquiesce in the anticipation of future rewards and punishments in consequence of virtuous or vicious conduct? These undeniably exhibit in every man's breast, at least in every christian's, the most convincing internal evidence that everlasting punishment and eternal life are brought to light by the gospel. How, otherwise could the soul, once illuminated by this saving faith, approve on a well-grounded hope; or condemn without one cheering ray of divine consolation? Were this otherwise, could it be calculated to make any impression of contrition or remorse on the wicked and abandoned, but too much disposed to perseverance in an impenitent state of vice and impiety?

But, along with those inward monitors, it has also pleased God to make known unto men his laws, with express promises and threatenings for obedience and disobedience. It is hence that he appears in the character of man's moral governor; and man, consequently, becomes bound to him his supreme lawgiver, as a fit subject for obtaining the rewards; or incurring the penalties under this divine constitution. But, the law, as an apostle observes, has been "a school-master to bring men unto Christ, who is the end of the law for righteousness unto every one that believeth." "The law was given by Moses; but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." Hence our blessed Saviour in his doctrine, immediately previous to the words on which I have founded these arguments, hath declared that those who loved, received and relied on him for salvation should inherit "*eternal life*;" but on the contrary, those who rejected, or denied him any entertainment should go away into "*everlasting punishment*."

It may be here remarked that the words Eternal and Everlasting, in the original, are expressed by the very same term; which much more emphatically and pointedly than our translation, indicates that, the duration of the punishment shall be perfectly equal to that of the reward.

Those who, presumptuously, oppose themselves to this doctrine, would persuade us that he many passages in scripture, expressive of the eternity

of future punishment, are figurative; and only hyperbolically express a limited duration. There is, however, no good authority for this opinion. In the sacred scriptures, as well as other writings, terms expressive of objects in nature are frequently used in a figurative manner; or turned from their original or natural use and meaning, more clearly, forcibly or lively to express some quality of body or of mind; some spiritual idea or abstract truth. But in the present instance, instead of the terms *eternal* and *everlasting* being figurative, metaphorical or even hyperbolic, they are in scripture illustrated emphatically by such figures or metaphors as might most expressively shew that they literally and simply implied an eternity of duration. Hence the penalty pronounced in the words of the text is in scripture figuratively expressed by “the *worm* that *never* dies;”—“the *fire* that *never* is quenched;” and “the *smoke* of torments ascending *forever* and ever.”

Thus proved from divine revelation, this doctrine cannot, surely, be inconsistent with the divine perfections. Neither is it more inconsistent with the mercy and goodness of God than his justice and power. The gracious manifestation of his will, clearly, exhibits in what period; as well as in what channel his sovereign mercy shall ever flow. “There is no work, no device, no knowledge, no wisdom in the grave.” If, then, we be thus instructed, and thus warned, by the divine word, that his goodness and mercy have in this life

been displayed in all that can promote our eternal interest, is it not highly presumptuous in us to extend them to that state out of which there is no ground of hope ever to be redeemed ; where our only employment can be that of blasphemy and sin—to which no repentance is promised ; but in which accumulating iniquity and guilt must be justly entitled to punishment ever renewed ; to the compound penalty increased, and ever increasing by the continued spiritual transgression of the laws of God ? Must not the mercy, of heaven, in consistence even with its most benign influence, be ever shut against those who, from choice ; from persevering impenitence, and, above all, from the last condemning sentence of their impartial judge have been assigned to that state, in which they ever most delighted, enmity to God and his religion ?

Any ideas we should presume to form of the mercy of God ; or of any of his other attributes, not expressly declared in divine revelation, can only arise from those evident marks or traces of them which are discernible in the works of creation and providence ; or from an analogy formed between these, and those similitudes of them which appear among men. Would it, then, be considered as unmerciful in an earthly judge or supreme magistrate who should publish pardon to the most atrocious, and guilty criminals, immediately on their conforming to those laws, which they had wantonly violated, within a certain limit.

ed space, well suited to their situation and circumstances; but that, otherwise, his compassion should never afterwards be extended towards them? And would not at all allow that the wilful obstinacy of such criminals in not only rejecting; but even despising such a merciful and gracious invitation justly merited a forfeiture of life; and an eternal separation, in this world, from all they held most dear? If we thus, then, acquiesce in justifying the mercy of an earthly judge, and an injured community, how much more ought we to acknowledge the most grievous penalty due to sin, yea even an everlasting punishment, as consistent with the long suffering patience and tender mercy of a justly incensed God? "If the righteous scarcely be saved," who shall charge it to want of mercy in the Deity, that the finally impenitent are forever shut out from all claim to his compassionate regard?

The infinite greatness of the divine perfections contributes to the strength of the argument in favour of the eternity of future punishment. Even in this world, notwithstanding the personal equality of men by nature, an offence done to an equal is not considered as entitled to the same punishment as an offence of the very same magnitude to a magistrate; the constituted representative of the authority and dignity of the community. The one is often passed unnoticed, while the other with justice and propriety would subject the offender to the forfeiture of property; or even of life, ac-

according to the enormity of the trespass. Now if we apply this to offences against the infinite majesty of heaven, who can take upon him to commensurate the adequate penalty?

When he who, "bore our iniquities;" and was "wounded for our transgressions," endured it, voluntarily, in our behalf, it was of a very short duration in proportion to eternity, because our help was laid on a divine sufferer; on "One mighty and able to save to the uttermost;" but, when the vindictive wrath of heaven shall be kindled against the ungodly; when "God shall become a consuming fire to the workers of iniquity," is it irrational to conclude that the objects thereof could only be able to endure such a penalty by its lengthened diminution being extended throughout their eternal existence?

To deny this doctrine appears not to vindicate with the greatest efficacy, as some falsely maintain, the redemption of Jesus. It is obvious from his own divine expressions, that all, whose "Names are written in the book of life," shall receive, on the solemn day of general retribution; that welcome declaration "Come ye blessed of my father inherit the kingdom &c." And that on the wicked shall be pronounced that awfully dreadful sentence, "Depart ye cursed I know you not."—An undeniable proof that they must be forever excluded from all hope of pardon and reconciliation. Otherwise, consistent with that unchangeable truth, justice and goodness which constitute the di-

vine character, any expected mitigation would have been intimated in their sentence.

An earthly judge may prevaricate; or, for very good reasons, may denounce a sentence much more dreadful than its intended execution; but who shall charge such conduct to the supreme judge of heaven and of earth, with whom there can be no ground for mental reservation; with whom there is “No variation or shadow of turning?”

Any supposition contrary to this would tend not only to destroy the whole œconomy of redemption; but also that of God’s moral government of the world. It would suggest the idea of another future redemption, still more efficacious than that which, in time, hath been so graciously manifested to our world. It would, at least, instead of applying the greatest benefit or efficacy of Christ’s redemption to the believing world, finally render it more efficacious and salutary to unbelievers—an absurdity which appears next to blasphemy; and one would think, needs only to be mentioned to overturn all that can ever be advanced in favour of such a presumption. Our Saviour hath said, that “except a man be born again he cannot enter into the kingdom of God;” but where is the scripture that warrants us to look for regeneration in the society of the Arch-Rebel against heaven, his angels and condemned spirits? Where in the figurative and sub-time language of Milton they must forever dwell in,

“ Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace
 “ And rest can never dwell, hope never comes
 “ That comes to all ; but torture without end
 “ Still urges; and a fiery deluge, fed
 “ With ever burning sulphur, unconfum’d.”

In such a state, even divesting it of all the horror of figurative description, there can, surely, be nothing but guilt and punishment—and till Hell shall be changed to Heaven ; or the truth of God to a lie, so long must the condemned endure the just execution of divine justice for their guilt and impenitence.

But should the presumptuous opposers of this doctrine, still urge that, after this world, the ends for which punishment was instituted must cease, consequently so must the penalty, seeing there will be none to be warned by it ; nor any farther sin to be restrained ; nor any end it can serve, unless it be a castigatory purgatory for those on whom it has been inflicted. To this it may be replied that such reasoning, however specious, is founded merely on hypothesis ; or rather on partial presumption ; and that it should be considered that the end of punishment, as already observed, is not only in order to execute righteous judgment on the creature ; but, also, to defend and vindicate the honour of the Creator and Governor.

It hath pleased God amply to vindicate his own divine justice, in having published to the world, that everlasting punishment was the wages of sin. This we find done in the words of the text, and by him, who according to

the scriptures, shall judge the world. It is also declared that "the wages of sin is death." It then necessarily follows that the truth and justice of God are pledged for the execution of it on all the finally impenitent.

When this world is ended, we are taught to look for "a new Heaven and a new Earth," wherein dwelleth righteousness—and, for ought we know, the eternal punishment of impenitent sinners may be a mean of maintaining or preserving that righteousness, in like manner as the punishment of the devil and his angels of darkness is held out as a warning to us in this life—and, in scripture exhibited as an example for our terror and restraint.

Be this as it may; it is certain that it is presumptuous in us to say, that we are fully acquainted with every use which the supreme governor and judge of the universe may make of the eternity of future punishment. When, therefore, the constitution of God's moral government of the world—the constitution of human nature; and the clear and express declarations of sacred inspiration all conspire to convince us of that inevitable doom being prepared for the ungodly, it is folly, it is blasphemy in us to deny that it shall ever be executed, because we are so blind; or so partial to ourselves, as not to see how it is consistent with the divine perfections; or what rational end it may answer after the dissolution of our present system.

The consistency of such a penalty with the

divine perfections may appear not only from the infinitely pure and holy nature of these perfections ; and from the sacred records of inspiration ; but is also, in some degree, evident even from human reason and experience.

A very superficial knowledge of the world is sufficient to inform us that, none enjoy its prosperity with a higher relish than those who have tasted of the bitter cup of adversity. Who enjoy the blessings of health equal to those who have been restored from a dangerous illness ? Who so sensible of the blessings of freedom as the liberated slave ; the rescued captive ; or the unfettered prisoner ? Who so happy in the approving smiles of a once justly offended parent, as the repenting, returning prodigal ?

It cannot be denied, but on these or similar events, such enjoy a degree of felicity much more exquisite than that of those who have been in possession of an uninterrupted scene of health, freedom and prosperity. Now, if by analogy we may apply this to the doctrine of future rewards and punishments, does it not follow that the happiness of the wicked, on the supposition that they shall be, finally redeemed, must be more exquisite than that of the righteous ? Or, may we not be allowed to observe that, a sense of what they had suffered from the judicial execution of heaven would render their bliss, on being restored, inexpressibly more ecstatic than that of those who never had, in any degree, endured the vials of its vengeful

indignation? If there be any thing in these observations, does it not, then, follow that, any penalty inflicted on the wicked, short of an eternal duration, would eventually place them not only on an equal; but even a superior footing with the righteous; and consequently, contradict whatever revelation teaches us to be most consistent with divine justice, goodness and truth?

Instead of vindicating those adorable perfections, the non-eternity of future punishment gives the lie to that sentence which, God hath declared shall at his dread bar be pronounced on the ungodly—taking the judgment out of his hand to whom it is declared it shall be committed, it erects its tribunal on the baseless foundation of an unwarranted, groundless and selfish imagination; and almost to annihilation weakens the effect of that threatening, which even in all its most awful terrors, and boundless duration, hath been found insufficient to restrain men from vice and impiety. “If the unrighteous forsake not their unrighteousness; nor the wicked their evil way,” even under the impression of the threatening of eternal misery, and separation from God, awfully denounced by him who shall be their impartial judge, how much less might we look for repentance or reformation in such, did but one ray of the hope of a final redemption; and restoration to the joys of the blessed, break over the dreary and dark duration of a limited abode with future torments?

None but those who wish to persevere in a course of guilt and impenitence can have presumption to exclaim against divine justice in the execution of such a penalty; and should they be allowed to speak for themselves, what could they utter but blasphemy? They could not say that their maker and judge wanted authority either to denounce, or execute such a sentence. They could not say that it was too cruel or unmerciful, since they must be conscious of having abused those means which he gave them in order to avoid it; and that they received a sufficient period for warning and admonition. Equal reason have they to be convinced that the evident design of this penalty being made by God, must have flowed from the divine mercy and compassion, in order to deter men from sins to which they had no stronger temptation; or better motives, than the false pleasure and vanities of a fleeting world; and the propensities of their own, habitually, corrupted, and deceitful hearts.

But, the conduct of the impenitent is a proof that, as fully dreadful as this threatening is, it has not been sufficient, even where it was professed to be believed, to deter the ungodly from vice and impiety.

God, out of his tender mercy and compassion, hath expostulated with the wicked and said—who can dwell with everlasting burnings? But the sinner, by his practice, saith, this expostulation I despise. When, therefore, the execution shall be inflicted, how can the im-

penitent say it is inconsistent with the merciful and just judge? Such, surely, cannot exclaim against what has been the consequence of their own choice. Should they presume to say that, God was not in good earnest; or would not execute what he had denounced, would be, only to blaspheme, and to say, in other words, they took God for a liar, a deceiver, an unjust, weak and impotent governor, whose laws and authority, like those of men, were subject to error, injustice, inconsistency and revolution. But, the oracles of heaven authorise us to declare that, as far as the heavens are higher than the earth; as far as the creator is superior to the creature, so far shall all those, who rest on the broken reed of their own presumptuous and deceitful imaginations, in opposition to the express declarations of the most high, be finally disappointed.

From all these considerations, we should, therefore, be led to acquiesce in the firm belief, that this declaration of our blessed Saviour, "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal," is to be understood as it is expressed; is in every respect worthy of the supreme Lord and governor of the universe; and entirely consistent with his divine perfections.

F I N I S .