PART SECOND.

A History of the change which has taken place in the Author’s sentiments; with the manner in which, and the means by which it was at length effected.

IN *January,* 1774, two of my parishioners, a man and his wife, lay at the point of death. I had heard of the circumstance, but, according to my gene­ral custom, not being sent for, I took no notice of it; till one evening, the woman being now dead, and the man dying, I heard that my neighbour Mr Newton had been several times to visit them. Immediately my conscience reproached me with being shamefully negligent, in sitting at home within a few doors of dying persons, my general hearers, and never going to visit them. Directly it occurred to me, that, whatever contempt I might have for Mr N’s doctrines, I must acknowledge his practice to be more consistent with the ministerial character, than my own. He must have more zeal and love for souls than I had, or he would not have walked so far to visit, and supply my lack of care to those, who, as far as I was concerned, might have been left to perish in their sins.

This reflection affected me so much, that without delay, and very earnestly, yea, with tears, I besought the Lord to forgive my past neglect: and I re­solved thenceforth to be more attentive to this duty; which resolution, though at first formed in ignorant dependence on my own strength, I have, by divine grace, been enabled hitherto to keep. I went immediately to visit the survivor: and the affecting sight of one person already dead, and an­other expiring, in the same chamber, served more deeply to impress my serious convictions: so that from that time I have constantly visited the sick of my parishes as far as I have had opportunity; and have endeavoured, to the best of my knowledge, to perform that essential part of a parish-minis­ter’s duty.

Some time after this, a friend recommended to my perusal the conclusion of Bishop Burnet’s “*History of his own Time,*”especially that part which respects the clergy. It had the intended effect: I was considerably in­structed and impressed by it; I was convinced that my entrance into the ministry, had been the result of very wrong motives, was preceded by a very unsuitable preparation, and accompanied with very improper conduct. Some uneasiness was also excited in my mind concerning my neglect of the im­portant duties of that high calling: and, though I was enslaved by sin, and too much engaged in other studies, and in love with this present world, to relinquish my flattering pursuit of reputation and preferment, and change the course of my life, studies, and employments; yet, by intervals, I expe­rienced desires and purposes, at some future period, of devoting myself wholly to the work of the ministry, in the manner to which he exhorts the clergy.

All these things increased the clamorous remonstrances of my conscience; and at this time I lived without any secret religion, because without some reformation in my conduct, as a man and a minister, I did not dare to pray. My convictions would no longer be silenced or appeased; and they became so intolerably troublesome, that I resolved to make one more effort towards amendment. In good earnest, and not totally without seeking the assistance of the Lord by prayer, I now attempted to break the chains with which Satan had hitherto held my soul in bondage; and it pleased the Lord that I should obtain some considerable advantages. Part of my grosser defilements I was enabled to relinquish, and to enter upon a *form of devotion. Formal* enough indeed it was in some respects; for I neither knew that Mediator through whom, nor that Spirit by whom, prayers are offered with acceptance unto the Father: yet, though utterly in the dark as to the true and living Way to the throne of grace, I am persuaded there were even then seasons when I was enabled to rise above a mere form, and to offer petitions so far *spiritual,* as to be accepted and answered.

I was now somewhat reformed in my outward conduct: “but the renew­ing in the spirit of my mind,” if begun, was scarcely discernible. As my life was externally less wicked and ungodly, my heart grew more proud; the idol *self* was the object of my adoration and obeisance; my worldly ad­vancement was more eagerly sought than ever; some flattering prospects seemed to open, and I resolved to improve my advantages to the uttermost. At the same time everything tended to increase my good opinion of my­self; I was treated with kindness and friendship by persons, from whom I had no reason to expect it; my preaching was well received, my acquaint­ance seemed to be courted, and my foolish heart verily believed that all this and much more was due to my superior worth: while conscience, which, by its mortifying accusations, had been useful to preserve some sense of un­worthiness in my mind, was now silenced, or seemed to authorize that pride which it had checked before. And having the disadvantage of conversing in general with persons who either favoured my sentiments, or who from good manners, or because they saw it would be in vain, did not contradict me; I concluded that my scheme of doctrine was the exact standard of truth, and that by my superior abilities I was capable of confuting or convincing all who were otherwise minded. In this view of the matter, I felt an eager de­sire of entering into a religious controversy, especially with a *Calvinist:* for many resided in the neighbourhood, and I heard various reports concerning their tenets.

It was at this time that my correspondence with Mr Newton commenced. At a visitation, *May 1775,* we exchanged a few words on a controverted sub­ject, in the room among the clergy, which I believe drew many eyes upon us. At that time he prudently declined the discourse; but a day or two after he sent me a short note with a little book for my perusal. This was the very thing I wanted: and I gladly embraced the opportunity which, ac­cording to my wishes, seemed now to offer; God knoweth, with no incon­siderable expectations that my arguments would prove irresistibly convincing, and that I should have the honour of rescuing a well-meaning person from his enthusiastical delusions.

I had indeed by this time conceived a very favourable opinion of him, and a sort of respect for him; being acquainted with the character he sustained even among some persons, who expressed a disapprobation of his doctrines. They were forward to commend him as a benevolent, disinterested, inoffensive person, and a laborious minister. But, on the other hand, I looked upon his religious sentiments as rank fanaticism; and entertained a very contemptible opinion of his abilities, natural and acquired. Once I had had the curiosity to hear him preach; and, not understanding his sermon, I made a very great jest of it, where I could do it without giving offence. I had also read one of his publications; but, for the same reason, I thought the greater part of it whimsical, paradoxical, and unintelligible.

Concealing, therefore, the true motives of my conduct under the offer of friendship, and a professed desire to know the truth, (which, amidst all my self-sufficiency and prejudice, I trust the Lord had even then given me;) with the greatest affectation of candour, and of a mind open to conviction, I wrote him a long letter; purposing to draw from him such an avowal and explanation of his sentiments, as might introduce a controversial discussion of our religious differences.

The event by no means answered my expectation. He returned a very friendly and long answer to my letter; in which he carefully avoided the mention of those doctrines which he knew would offend me. He declared that he believed me to be one who feared God, and was under the teaching of his Holy Spirit; that he gladly accepted my offer of friendship, and was no ways inclined to dictate to me; but that, leaving me to the guidance of the Lord, he would be glad, as occasion served, from time to time, to bear testimony to the truths of the gospel, and to communicate his sentiments to me on any subject, with all the confidence of friendship.

In this manner our correspondence began; and it was continued, in the interchange of nine or ten letters, till *December* the same year. Through­out I held my purpose, and he his. I made use of every endeavour to draw him into controversy, and filled my letters with definitions, inquiries, argu­ments, objections, and consequences, requiring explicit answers. He, on the other hand, shunned everything controversial as much as possible, and filled his letters with the most useful and least offensive instructions; except that now and then he dropped hints concerning the necessity, the true nature, and the efficacy of faith, and the manner in which it was to be sought and obtained; and concerning some other matters, suited, as he judged, to help me forward in my inquiry after truth. But they much offended my preju­dices, afforded me matter of disputation, and at that time were of little use to me.

This, however, is certain, that through the whole of the correspondence, I disputed, with all the arguments I could devise, against almost everything which he advanced, and was very much nettled at many things that he as­serted. I read a great part of his letters, and some books which he sent me, with much indifference and contempt. I construed his declining controversy into an acknowledgement of weakness, and triumphed in many companies as having confuted his arguments. And, finally, when I could not obtain my end, at my instance the correspondence was dropped.

His letters and my answers are now by me; and on a careful perusal of them, compared with all I can recollect concerning this matter, I givethis as a faithful account of the correspondence. His letters will, I hope, shortly be made public, being such as promise greater advantage to others, than, through my proud contentious spirit, I experienced from them. Mine de­serve only to be forgotten, except as they are useful to me to remind me what I was, and to mortify my pride; as they illustrate my friend’s patience and candour in so long bearing with my ignorance and arrogance; and notwithstanding my unteachable quarrelsome temper, continuing his bene­volent labours for my good; and especially as they remind me of the good­ness of God, who, though he abominates and resists the proud, yet knows how to bring down the stout heart, not only by the iron rod of his wrath, but by the golden sceptre of his grace.

Thus our correspondence and acquaintance, for the present, were almost wholly broken off; for a long time we seldom met, and then only interchanged afew words on general topics of conversation. Yet he all along persevered in telling me, to my no small offence, that I should accede one day to his religious principles; that he had stood on my ground, and that I should stand on his: and he constantly informed his friends, that, though slowly, I was surely feeling my way to the knowledge of the truth. So clearly could he discern the dawnings of grace in my soul, amidst all the darkness of depraved nature and my obstinate rebellion to the will of God!

This expectation was principally grounded on my conduct in the follow­ing circumstances:—Immediately after the commencement of our correspon­dence, *in May* 1775, whilst my thoughts were much engrossed by some hopes of preferment; on Sunday, during the time of divine service, when the Psalm was named, I opened the Prayer-Book to turn to it; but *(accidentally* shall I say, or *providentially?)* Iopened upon the articles of religion; and the eighth, respecting the authority and warrant of the *Athanasian* creed, im­mediately engaged my attention. My disbelief of the doctrine of a Trinity of *co-equal persons in the unity of the Godhead,* and my pretensions to candour, had both combined to excite my hatred to this creed; for which reasons I had been accustomed to speak of it with contempt, and to neglect reading it officially. No sooner, therefore, did I read the words, “That it was to be thoroughly received, and believed; for that it might be proved by most cer­tain warrants of holy Scripture,” than my mind was greatly impressed and affected. The matter of subscription immediately occurred to my thoughts; and from that moment I conceived such scruples about it, that, till my view of the whole system of gospel-doctrine was entirely changed, they remained insuperable.

It is wisely said by the son of *Sirach,* “My Son, if thou come to serve the Lord, prepare thy soul for temptation.” I had twice before subscribed these articles, with the same religious sentiments which I now entertained. But, conscience being asleep, and the service of the Lord no part of my concern, I considered subscription as a matter of course, a necessary form, and very little troubled myself about it. But now, though I was greatly influenced by pride, ambition, and the love of the world, yet my heart was sincerely to­wards the Lord, and I dared not to venture on a known sin, deliberately, for the sake of temporal interest. *Subscription to articles which I did not be­lieve, paid as a price for church-preferment, I began to look upon as an impious lie, a heinous guilt, that could never truly be repented of without throwing back the wages of iniquity.* The more I pondered it, the more strenuously my con­science protested against it. At length, after a violent conflict between in­terest and conscience, I made known to my patron my scruples and my de­termination not to subscribe: thus my views of preferment were deliberately given up, and with an increasing family I was left, as far as mere human prudence could discern, with little other prospect than that of poverty and distress. My objections to the articles were, as I now see, groundless: much self-sufficiency, undue warmth of temper, and obstinacy, were betrayed in the management of this affair, for which I ought to be humbled: but my adherence to the dictates of my conscience, and holding fast my integrity in such trying circumstances, I never did, and I trust never shall, repent.

No sooner was my determination known, than I was severely censured by many of my friends. They all, I am sensible, did it from kindness, and they used arguments of various kinds, none of which were suited to produce con­viction. But, though I was confirmed in my resolution, by the reasonings used to induce me to alter it, they at length were made instrumental in bring­ing me to this important determination:*—not so to believe what any man said, as to take it upon his authority; but to search the word of God with this single intention, to discover whether the articles of the Church of England in general, and this creed in particular, were or were not, agreeable to the Scriptures.* I had studied them in some measure before, for the sake of becoming acquainted with the original languages, and in order thence to bring detached texts to support my own system; and I had a tolerable acquaintance with the his­torical and preceptive parts of them: but I had not searched this precious repository of divine knowledge, with the *express design of discovering the truth in controverted matters of doctrine.* I had very rarely been troubled with suspicions that I was or might be mistaken: and I now rather thought of becoming better qualified, upon Scriptural grounds, to defend my determi­nation, than of being led to any change of sentiments.

However, I set about the inquiry; and the first passage, as I remember, which made me suspect that I might be wrong, was James i. 5. “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him.” On considering these words with some attention, I became conscious, that, though I had thought myself wise, yet assuredly I had obtained none of my wisdom in this manner; for I had never offered one prayer to that effect during the whole course of my life. I also perceived that this text contained a suitable direction, and an en­couraging promise, in my present inquiry; and from this time, in my poor manner, I began to ask God to give me this promised wisdom.

Shortly after, I meditated on, and preached from John vii. 16, 17. “doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me; if any man will do his will, he shallknow of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.” I was surprised that I had not before attended to such remarkable words. I dis­covered that they contained a direction and a promise, calculated to serve as a clue in extricating the sincere inquirer after truth, from that labyrinth of controversy in which, at his first setting out, he is likely to be bewildered. And though my mind was too much leavened with the pride of reasoning, to reap that benefit from this precious text which it is capable of affording to the soul that is humbly willing to be taught of God, yet, being conscious that I was disposed to risk everything in doing what I thought his will, I was encouraged with the assurance, that if I were under a mistake, I should sometime discover it.

I was further led to suspect that I might possibly be wrong, because I had not hitherto sought the truth in the proper manner, by attending to Pro­verbs iii. 5, 6. “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own understanding: in all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.” I could not but know that I had not hitherto *trusted in the Lord with all my heart,* nor *acknowledged him in all my ways,* nor *depended on his directions in all my paths;* but that, in my religious speculations, *I had leaned wholly on my own understanding.*

But, though these and some other passages made for the present agreat impression upon me, and influenced me to make it a part of my daily prayers, that I might be directed to a right understanding of the word of God; yet my pride and addictedness to controversy had, as some desperate disease, in­fected my whole soul, and was not to be cured all at once.—I was very far indeed from being a little child, sitting humbly and simply at the Lord’s feet, to learn from him the very first rudiments of divine knowledge. I had yet no abiding suspicion, that all which I had heretofore accounted wisdom was foolishness, and must be unlearned and counted loss, before I could attain to the excellency of the true knowledge of Jesus Christ : for though I began to allow it probable that in some few matters I might have been in an error, yet I still was confident that in the main my scheme of doctrine was true. When I was pressed with objections and arguments against any of my sentiments, and when doubts began to arise in my mind; to put off the uneasiness occasioned by them, my constant practice was, to recollect as far as I could, all the reasonings and interpretations of Scripture on the other side of the question; and when this failed of affording satisfaction, I had recourse to controversial writings. This drew me aside from the pure word of God, rendered me more remiss and formal in prayer, and furnished me with defensive armour against my convictions, with fuel for my passions, and food for my pride and self-sufficiency.

At this time Locke’s, “*Reasonableness of Christianity,”* with his “*Vindications”* of it, became my favourite pieces of divinity. I studied this and many other of Mr Locke’s works, with great attention and a sort of bigoted fondness; taking him almost implicitly for my master, adopting his conclu­sions, borrowing many of his arguments, and imbibing a dislike to such per­sons as would not agree with me in my partiality for him. This was of great disservice to me; as, instead of getting forward in my inquiry after truth, I thence collected more ingenious and specious arguments, with which to de­fend my mistakes.**[[1]](#footnote-1)**

But one book which I read at this time, because mentioned with approba­tion by Mr Locke, wasof singular use to me: this was Bishop Burnet’s “*Pastoral Care.*”I found little in it that offended my prejudices, and many things which came home to my conscience respecting my ministerial obliga­tions. I shall lay before the reader a few short extracts, which were most affecting to my own mind. Having mentioned the question proposed to those who are about to be ordained Deacons, “Do you trust that you are inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon you this office and ministry, to serve God for the promoting of his glory, and the edifying of his people?” he adds, (page 111,) “Certainly the answer that is made to this ought to be well considered: for if any one says,” “I trust so,” “that yet knows nothing of any such motion, and can give no account of it, he lies to the Holy Ghost, and makes his first approach to the altar with a lie in his mouth, and that not to men, but to God.” And again, (page 112,) “Shall not he (God) reckon with those who dare to run without his mission, pretending *that they trust they have it,* when perhaps they understand not the importance of it; nay, and perhaps some laugh at it, as an enthusiastical question, who will yet go through with the office! They come to Christ for the loaves, they hope to live by the altar and the gospel, how little soever they serve at the one, or preach the other; therefore they will say anything that is necessary for qualifying them to this, whether true or false.”

Again, (page 122,) having interwoven a great part of the excellent office of the ordination of priests into his argument, concerning the importance and weight of the work of the ministry; he adds, “Upon the whole matter, either this is all a piece of gross and impudent pageantry, dressed up in grave and lofty expressions, to strike upon the weaker part of mankind, and to furnish the rest with matter to their profane and impious scorn; or it must be confessed that priests come under the most formal and express engage­ments to constant and diligent labour, that can be possibly contrived or set forth in words.” He concludes this subject, of the ordination-offices, by exhorting all candidates for orders to read them frequently and attentively, during the time of their preparation; that they may be aware before-hand of the obligations they are about so solemnly to enter into, and to peruse them at least four times in a year, even after their ordination, to keep in their minds a continual remembrance of their important engagements. How necessary this counsel is, every minister, or candidate for the ministry, must determine for himself; for my part, I had never once read through the office when I was ordained, and was in a great measure a stranger to the obligations I was about to enter into, till the very period; nor did I ever afterwards at­tend to it till this advice put me upon it. The shameful negligence and ex­treme absurdity of my conduct in this respect are too glaring, not to be per­ceived with self-application, by everyone who has been guilty of a similar omission. I would therefore only just mention, that hearty earnest prayer to God, for his guidance, help, and blessing, may be suitably recommended, as a proper attendant on such a perusal of our obligations.

Again, (page 147,) he thus speaks of a wicked clergyman: “His whole life has been a course of hypocrisy in the strictest sense of the word, which is the acting of a part, and the counterfeiting another person. His sins have in them all possible aggravations: they are against knowledge, and against vows, and contrary to his character: they carry in them a deliberate con­tempt of all the truths and obligations of religion; and if he perishes, he doth not perish alone, but carries a shoal down with him, either of those who have perished in ignorance through his neglect, or of those who have been hardened in their sins through his ill example!”—Again, (page 183,) having copiously discoursed on the studies befitting ministers, especially the study of the Scriptures, he adds, “But to give all these their full effect, a priest that is much in his study, ought to employ a great part of his time in secret and fervent prayer, for the direction and blessing of God in his labours, for the constant assistance of his Holy Spirit, and for a lively sense of divine matters; that so he may feel the impressions of them grow deep and strong upon his thoughts; this, and this only, will make him go on with his workwithout wearying, and be always rejoicing in it.”

But the chief benefit which accrued to me from the perusal was this:—I was excited by it to an attentive consideration of those passages of Scrip­ture, that state the obligations and duties of a minister, which hitherto I had not observed, or to which I had very *loosely* attended. In particular, (it is yet fresh in my memory,) I was greatly affected with considering the charge of precious souls committed to me, and the awful account one day to be ren­dered of them, in meditating on Ezekiel xxxiii. 7-9. “So thou, O Son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of *Israel:* therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me. When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man! thou shalt surely die: If thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his ini­quity, but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way, to turn from it: if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul.” For I was fully convinced with Bishop Burnet, that every minister is as much concerned in this solemn warning, as the prophet himself. Acts xx. 17-35, was another portion of Scripture, which, by means of this book, was brought home to my conscience; especially verses 26, 27, 28, which serve as an illustration of the preceding Scripture: “Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men: for I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.”

In short, I was put upon the attentive and repeated perusal of the *Epistles* to *Timothy* and *Titus,* as containing the sum of a minister’s duty in all ages. I searched out, and carefully considered every text I could find in the whole Scripture, which referred to this argument. I was greatly impressed by 1 Cor. ix. 16. “For necessity is laid upon me, yea, woe is me if I preach not the gospel.” Nor was I less struck with Coloss. iv. 17. “Say to *Archippus*, take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it.” This was brought to my conscience with power, as if the apostle had in person spoken the words *to me.* But especially I was both instructed and encouraged by meditating upon 1 Peter v. 2-4. “Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by con­straint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being examples to the flock: and when the chief shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.”

I hope the reader will excuse my prolixity in speaking on this subject, be­cause in itself it is very important: and though I obtained no new views of gospel-truth from *The Pastoral Care,* yet I received such a deep conviction of the difficulty and importance of that work, in which I had thoughtlessly engaged, and of the imminent danger to which my soul would be exposed, should I neglect to devote myself wholly to it; as laid the foundation of all my subsequent conduct and change of sentiments. I was, indeed, guilty of very criminal procrastination, after I had been thus convinced; and, being engaged more than I ought in other matters, I for sometime postponed and neglected complying with the dictates of my conscience. But I never lost sight of the instruction I had received, nor ever enjoyed any comfortable re­flection, till, having broken off all other engagements, I had given myself up to those studies and duties which pertain to the work of the ministry. And I have cause to bless God, that this book ever came in my way.

Still, however, my self-confidence was very little abated, and I had made no progress in acquiring the knowledge of the truth. I next read *Tillotson’s* sermons and *Jortin’s* works: and, my time being otherwise engaged, I for a while gave into the indolent custom of transcribing their discourses with some alterations, to preach to my people. This precluded free meditation on the word of God, and led me to take up my opinions on trust. My preach­ing was in general that smooth palatable mixture of law and gospel, which corrupts both by representing the gospel as a *mitigated law,* and as accepting *sincere* instead of *perfect obedience.—*Thissystem, by flattering pride and pre­judice, and soothing the conscience, pleases the careless sinner and self-righ­teous formalist, but does real good to none; and is in fact a specious and unsuspected kind of Antinomianism.

About this time I foolishly engaged in a course of diversion and visiting, more than I had done since my ordination; this unfitted me for secret prayer and close meditation, and rendered the Scriptures, and other religious studies, insipid and irksome to me, a never-failing consequence of every vain com­pliance with the world. For a season, therefore, my ardour was damped, my anxiety banished, and my inquiries retarded. I was not, however, per­mitted entirely to drop my religious pursuits: generally I made it a rule to read something in the Scriptures every day, and to perform a task of daily devotion; but in both I was very formal and lifeless.

Yet not long after, I was engaged in earnest meditation on our Lord’s dis­course with *Nicodemus* (John iii.) I felt an anxious desire to understand this interesting portion of Scripture; especially to know what it was to be “born again,” or “born of the Spirit,” which in five verses our Saviour has three times declared absolutely necessary to salvation. I was convinced it was ab­surd to suppose that such strong expressions implied no more than baptism with water. *Tillotson’s* controversial sermons on this subject afforded me no satisfaction. Some great and total change I supposed to be intended, not only in the behaviour, but also in the heart. But not having clearly ex­perienced that change, I could not understand in what it consisted. How­ever, having offered some poor prayers for divine teaching, I undertook to preach upon it: but I talked very darkly, employed a considerable part of my time in declaiming against visionaries and enthusiasts, and reaped very little benefit from it. Yet I was so well satisfied with my performance, that, in the course of my correspondence with Mr N. I sent him these sermons for his perusal; and he, in return, sent me some of his own upon the same subject. But, though sincerely desirous to understand our Lord’s meaning in this important point, I was too proud to be taught by *him:* I cast my eye therefore carelessly over some of them, and returned the manuscript, with­out closely attending to anything contained in it.

Nothing material occurred after this, till the next spring, 1776; when I was induced, by what I had learned from Bishop Burnet, to establish a lec­ture once a-week in one of my parishes, for expounding the Scriptures. This brought many passages, which I had not before observed, under attentive consideration; and afforded my reflecting mind abundance of employment, in attempting to reconcile them with each other, and with my scheme of doctrine.

Little progress however had been made, when, *May* 1776, I heard a dig­nified clergyman in a visitation sermon, recommend Mr Soame Jennings’ “*View of the internal Evidence of the Christian Religion.”* In consequence of this recommendation I perused it, and not without profit. The truth and importance of the gospel revelation appeared, with convincing evidence, to my understanding, and came with efficacy to my heart by reading this book. I received from it more distinct heart-affecting views of the design of God in this revelation of himself, than I had before; and I was put upon much serious reflection and earnest prayer to be led to, or established in the truth, concerning the nature and reality of the atonement by the death of Christ: for hitherto I had been, in this respect, a *Socinian,* or very little better.

But to counterbalance this advantage, Dr Clarke’s “*Scripture-doctrine of the Trinity,”* and the controversy which ensued upon its publication, became a favourite part of my study. The *Arian* scheme is so inconsistent with rea­son, that when reflecting men, in order to avoid those *mysterious,* and, as they imagine, *unreasonable* conclusions, which, according to the true mean­ing of words, the Scriptures contain, have become *Arians,* it is wonderful they do not, for the same cause, embrace the *Socinian* system. This is the natu­ral progress of unhumbled reason; from *Arianism* to *Socinianism;* from *Socinianism* to *Deism;* and thence to *Atheism.* Many and awful have been the examples of reasoning and learned men, who, under the name of *Philo­sophers,* arrogating to themselves the prerogative of superior discernment, have manifested the propriety with which they claimed this pre-eminence, by treading this down-hill road, almost, if not quite, to the very bottom.

But when a man has fallen so low as *Socinianism,* not merely for want of information, or by blindly and implicitly adopting the sentiments of other men, but by leaning to his own understanding, and preferring the conclusions of his own reason to the infallible dictates of the Holy Ghost; it is not com­mon for him to return gradually, by the retrograde path, first to *Arianism,* and then to the received doctrine of the Trinity. Yet this was my case.—Dr Clarke appeared to me so undeniably to establish his argument by ex­press scriptural evidences, and so plausibly to defend his system on both sides, and to back his cause with so many seeming authorities, that I found myself unable any longer to maintain my *Socinian* principles, and was con­strained to relinquish them as untenable: at the same time I was not aware of the flaw in his reasoning, and the unavoidable consequence of his middle doctrine; namely, “that the Son and Holy Spirit, however exalted or dig­nified with names and titles, must either be *mere creatures,* or that otherwise there must be three Gods.” Not perceiving this, and my newly acquired reverence for Scripture, and my old self-confidence and fondness for reason­ing being, by this conciliating scheme, both humoured, I cordially acceded to his sentiments, and for a long time could not endure any other doctrine.

Nothing further of any consequence occurred till about December 1776, when carelessly taking up Mr Law’s “*Serious Call,*”a book I had hitherto treated with contempt, I had no sooner opened it, than I was struck with the originality of the work, and the spirit and force of argument with which it is written. I mean merely as to his management of the subjects he treats of: for there are many things in it that I am very far from approving; and it certainly contains as little *gospel,* as any religious work I am acquainted with. But though a very uncomfortable book to a person who is brought under a serious concern for his soul, and deep convictions of sin, it is very useful to prepare the way, to show the need we have of a Saviour, and to en­force the practice of that holy diligence in the use of means, which the im­portant interests of eternity reasonably demand. This was its use to me. By the perusal of it, I was convinced that I was guilty of great remissness and negligence; that the duties of secret devotion called for far more of my time and attention than had been hitherto allotted to them; and that, if I hoped to save my own soul, and the souls of those that heard me, I must in this respect greatly alter my conduct, and increase my diligence in seek­ing and serving the Lord. From that time I began to study in what man­ner my devotions might be rendered more fervent and pertinent; I tran­scribed and committed to memory, scriptural petitions: I employed some time in reading manuals of devotion; made attempts to compose prayers myself, and became more *frequent* and *earnest,* and, I trust, more *spiritual,* than heretofore, in my secret addresses to the Majesty of heaven.

About this time, after many delays, I complied with the admonitions of my conscience, and disengaged myself from all other employments, with a solemn resolution to leave all my temporal concerns in the hands of the Lord, and entirely to devote myself to the work of the ministry. Being thus be­come master of all my time, I dropped every other study, and turned the whole current of my reflections and inquiries, into another channel; and for several years I scarcely opened a book which treated of anything besides religion.

The first step I took after this disengagement, was to keep *common-place books;* one I had for noting down remarkable passages out of other authors; and another for collecting into one view, every text I could meet with in Scripture respecting the most important and controverted doctrines of the gospel. Though I held this but a short time, (for when my engagements multiplied, I dropt it,) yet I found it very useful in bringing me acquainted with many passages of the word of God, to which I had not hitherto much attended; and it prepared the way for writing my sermons on doctrinal sub­jects, with the scriptural testimonies concerning the point in hand, in one view before me.

In *January* 1777, Imet with a very high commendation of Mr Hooker’s writings, in which the honourable appellation of *Judicious* was bestowed upon him. This excited my curiosity to read his works, which accordingly I did with great profit. In his “*Discourse on Justification,”* (Edit. 1682. p. 496), I met with the following remarkable passage, which, as well for its excellency as for the effect it had upon my religious views, I shall, though rather long, transcribe. “If our hands did never offer violence to our brethren, a bloody thought doth prove us murderers before him [God.] If we had never opened our mouth to utter any scandalous, offensive, or hurtful word, the cry of our secret cogitations is heard in the ears of God. If we did not commit the sins which, daily and hourly, in deed, word, or thoughts, we do commit, yet in the good things which we do, how many defects are there intermingled God, in that which is done, respecteth the mind and intention of the doer. Cut off then all those things wherein we have regarded our own glory; those things which men do to please men, and to satisfy our own liking; those things which we do by any respect, not sincerely, and purely for the love of God; and a small score will serve for the number of our righteous deeds. Let the holiest and best thing we do be now considered:—we are never better affected unto God than when we pray: yet when we pray, how are our affections many times distracted! how little reverence do we show unto the grand Majesty of God unto whom we speak! how little remorse of our own miseries! how little taste of the sweet influence of his tender mer­cies do we feel! Are we not as unwilling many times to begin, and as glad to make an end, as if in saying, “Call upon me,” he had set us a very bur­densome task? It may seem somewhat extreme which I will speak; there­fore let every one judge of it, even as his own heart shall tell him, and no otherwise. I will but only make a demand: if God should yield unto us, not as unto *Abraham,* if fifty, forty, thirty, twenty, yea, or if ten good per­sons could be found in a city, for their sakes the city should not be de­stroyed; but, and if he should make us an offer thus large:—Search all the generations of men, since the fall of our father *Adam;* find one man that hath done one action which hath passed from him pure, without any stain or blemish at all; and for that one man’s action only, neither men nor angels shall feel the torments which are prepared for both: Do you think that this ransom to deliver men and angels could be found to be among the sons of men? The best things which we do, have somewhat in them to be par­doned; how then can we do anything meritorious, or worthy to be re­warded? Indeed, God doth liberally promise whatsoever appertaineth to a blessed life, to as many as sincerely keep his law, though they be riot ex­actly able to keep it. Wherefore we acknowledge a dutiful necessity of do­ing well, but the meritorious dignity of doing well, we utterly renounce. We see how far we are from the perfect righteousness of the law; the little fruit which we have in holiness, it is, God knoweth, corrupt and unsound we put no confidence at all in it; we challenge nothing in the world for it; we dare not call God to reckoning, as if we had him in our debt-books. Our continual suit to him is, and must be, to bear with our infirmities, and par­don our offences.”

I had no sooner read this passage, than I acquired such an insight into the strictness and spirituality of the divine law, and the perfection which a just and holy God, according to that law, cannot but require in all the ser­vices of his reasonable creatures; that I clearly perceived my very best duties, on which my main dependence had hitherto been placed, to be merely specious sins; and my whole life appeared to be one continued series of transgression. I now understood the apostle’s meaning, when he affirms, that “By the works of the law can no flesh be justified before God. All my difficulties in this matter vanished; all my distinctions and reasonings about the meaning of the words *law* and *justification,* with all my borrowed criticisms upon them, failed me at once. I could no longer be thus amused; for I was convinced, beyond the possibility of a doubt, that all men were so notoriously transgressors of every law of God, that no man could possibly be justified in his sight by his obedience to any of the divine commandments. I was sensible that if God should call me into judgment before him, according to the strictness of his perfect law, for the best duty I ever performed, and for nothing else, I must be condemned as a transgressor; for when weighed in these exact balances, it would be found wanting. Thus I was effectually convinced, that if ever I were saved, it must be in some way of unmerited mercy and grace, though I did not clearly understand in what way, till long after. Immediately, therefore, I took for my next text Gal. iii. 22. “But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise, by faith of Jesus Christ, might be given to them that believe.” And I preached from it according to Hooker’s doctrine; expressing, as strongly as I could, the defilements of our best actions, and our need of mercy in everything we do; in order the more evidently to show that “salvation is of grace, through faith;—not of works, lest any man should boast.”

I had not, however, as yet attained to a knowledge of the fulness of that fountain, whence all these polluted streams flow forth so plentifully into our lives and conversation.—Neither was I then able to receive the following nervous passage concerning justification: (Hooker, page 495); “The righteousness wherein we must be found, if we will be justified, is not our own; therefore we cannot be justified by any inherent quality. Christ hath merited righteousness for as many as are found in him. In him God findeth us, if we be faithful; for by faith we are incorporated into Christ. Then, although in ourselves we be altogether sinful and unrighteous, yet even the man which is impious in himself, full of iniquity, full of sin; him, being found in Christ through faith, and having his sin remitted through repen­tance, him God beholdeth with a gracious eye, putteth away his sin by not imputing it; taketh quite away the punishment due thereunto by pardoning it; and accepteth him in Jesus Christ as perfectly righteous, as if he had fulfilled all that was commanded in the law. Shall I say, *more* perfectly righteous than if himself had fulfilled the whole law? I must take heed what I say; but the apostle saith, “*God made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”* Such we are in the sight of God the Father, as is the very Son of God himself. Let it be counted folly, or frenzy, or fury, whatsoever, it is our comfort, and our wisdom; we care for no knowledge in the world but this, that man hath sinned, and God hath suffered; that God hath made himself the Son of man, and that men are made the righteousness of God.”

Equally determinate and expressive are these words (page 500): “As for such as hold, with the Church of Rome, that we cannot be saved by Christ alone without works, they do, not only by a circle of consequence, but di­rectly, deny the foundation of faith; they hold it not, no not so much as by a thread.” If the *Judicious Hooker’s* judgment may in this important con­cern be depended upon, (and I suppose it will not easily be proved erroneous,) I fear the foundation of faith is held by only a small part of that Church which has honoured her champion with this distinction.

Pages 508 and 509, he thus defends his doctrine against the objections of the *Papists,* (for at that time none but the *Papists* openly objected to it.) “It is a childish cavil wherewith, in the matter of justification, our adver­saries do so greatly please themselves, exclaiming that we tread all Christian virtues under our feet, and require nothing of Christians but faith; because we teach that faith alone justifieth. Whereas, by this speech, we never meant to exclude either hope, or charity, from being always joined, as in­separable mates with faith in the man that is justified; or works from being added, as necessary duties, required at the hands of every justified man: but to show that faith is the only hand which putteth on Christ unto justification; and Christ the only garment, which, being so put on, covereth the shame of our defiled natures, hideth the imperfections of our works, preserveth us blameless in the sight of God; before whom, otherwise, the weak­ness of our faith were cause sufficient to make us culpable; yea, to shut us out from the kingdom of heaven, where nothing that is not absolute can enter.”

Had I at this time met with such passages in the writings of the *Dissenters,* or in any of those modern publications which, under the brand of *Methodistical,* are condemned without reading, or perused with invincible prejudice, I should not have thought them worth regard, but should have rejected them as wild enthusiasm. But I knew that Hooker was deemed perfectly orthodox, and a standard-writer, by the prelates of the church in his own days. I learned from his dispute with Mr Travers, that he was put upon his defence, for making concessions in this matter to the Church of Rome, which the zealous *Protestants* did not think warrantable; and that he was judged by the more rigid, too lax in his doctrine, by none too rigid. I had never heard it insinuated that he was tinctured with enthusiasm; and the solidity of his judgment, and the acuteness of his reasoning faculties, need no voucher to the attentive reader. His opinion, therefore, carried great weight with it; made me suspect the truth of my former sentiments; and put me upon serious inquiries and deep meditation on this subject, accom­panied with earnest prayers for the teaching and direction of the Lord on this important point. The result was, that after many objections and doubts, and much examination of the word of God, in a few months I began to ac­cede to Mr Hooker’s sentiments. And at the present, my opinion, in this respect, as far as I know, coincides with these passages of this eminent au­thor, and is supported and vindicated by the same arguments: he, therefore, who would prove our doctrine of *justification by faith alone* to be an error, will do well to answer in the first place these quotations from Mr Hooker.

Indeed, as far as I can understand him, there is scarcely any doctrine which, with no inconsiderable offence, I now preach, that is not evidently contained in his writings as in my sermons. Witness particularly his “*Ser­mon of the certainty and perpetuity of faith in the elect;”* in which the doctrine of the final perseverance of true believers, is expressly taught and scrip­turally maintained: and he closes it with this noble triumph of full assu­rance, as resulting from that comfortable doctrine in the hearts of confirmed and experienced Christians: “I know in whom I have believed;” “I am not ignorant whose precious blood has been shed for me; I have a Shepherd full of kindness, full of care, and full of power: unto him I commit myself. His own finger hath engraven this sentence on the tables of my heart.” “*Satan hath desired to winnow thee as wheat, but I have prayed that thy faith fail not.”* “Therefore the assurance of my hope I will labour to keep as a jewel unto the end, and by labour, through the gracious mediation of his prayer, shall keep it.” (page 532.)—With such words in my mouth, and such assurance in my heart, I wish to live, and hope to die.

The insertion of these quotations from this old author will, I hope, need no apology. Many have not his works, and these extracts are worthy of their perusal; others, from these specimens, may be prevailed with to read, what perhaps hath hitherto been an unnoticed book in their studies. Es­pecially I recommend to those who admire him as the champion of the ex­ternal order and discipline of the church, and who willingly allow him the honour of being distinguished by the epithet *Judicious,* that they would at­tentively read, and impartially consider his doctrine. This would put an effectual stop to those declamations that, either ignorantly or maliciously, are made against the very doctrines, as novel inventions, which have just now been explained and defended in Mr Hooker’s own words. For my part, though I acknowledge that he advances many things I should be unwilling to subscribe, yet I heartily bless God that at this time I read him: the first material alteration that took place in my views of the gospel, being in con­sequence of it.

One more quotation I shall make, and so take my leave of him. Addres­sing himself (in his 2nd “*Sermon on part of St Jude’s Epistle,*”)to the pas­tors who are appointed to feed the chosen in Israel, he says (page 552,) “If there be any feeling of Christ, any drop of heavenly dew, or any spark of God’s good Spirit within you, stir it up; be careful to build and edify, first yourselves, and then your flocks in this most holy faith. I *say, first yourselves;* for he who will set the hearts of other men on fire with the love of Christ, must himself burn with love. It is want of faith in ourselves, my brethren, which makes us retchless (careless) in building others. We for­sake the Lord’s inheritance, and feed it not. What is the reason of this? Our own desires are settled where they should not be. We ourselves are like those women who have a longing to eat coals, and lime, and filth: we are fed, some with honour, some with ease, some with wealth: the gospel waxeth loathsome and unpleasant in our taste: how should we then have a care to feed others with that, which we cannot fancy ourselves? If faith wax cold and slender in the heart of the prophet, it will soon perish from the ears of the people.” It is not needful to add any reflections upon this pas­sage, every one will readily make them for himself: we are however re­minded of *Solomon’s* words, (Eccl. i. 9, 10.) “There is no new thing under the sun; is there anything whereof it may be said, See, this is new? It hath been already of old time which was before us. (Eccl. iii. 15.) That which hath been, is now; and that which is to be, hath already been.”

To my shame be it spoken, though I had twice subscribed the *Articles,* which allow the book of *Homilies* to be sound and wholesome doctrine, I had never yet seen them, and understood not what that doctrine was. But being at length engaged in a serious inquiry after truth, and *Hooker’s* works having given me a more favourable opinion of these old authors, I was in­clined to examine them, and I read part of the book with some degree of attention. And though many things seemed hard sayings, that I could not receive; yet others were made very useful to me, especially concerning jus­tification. In short, I perceived that the very doctrine which I had hitherto despised as Methodistical, was indisputably the standard-doctrine of the es­tablished Church, when the homilies were composed; and consequently that it is so still; for they have lost none of their authority, (however fallen into disrepute,) with those who subscribe the thirty-nine articles. This weakened my prejudice, though it did not prove the doctrine true.

About this time a new and unexpected effect was produced by my preach­ing. I had hitherto been satisfied to see people regularly frequent the church, listen attentively to what was discoursed, and lead moral decent lives. The way in which I had been led was so smooth, and the progress I had made so gradual; I had lately experienced so little *distressing* concern for my own soul, and had so little acquaintance with persons conversant in these matters; that while I declared the strictness, spirituality, and sanc­tion of the law of God in an alarming manner, it never occurred to me that my hearers might not proceed in the same easy gradual way. But I had scarcely begun this new method of preaching, when application was made to me by persons in great distress about their souls; for, their consciences being awakened to a sense of their lost condition by nature and practice, they were anxious in inquiring what they must do to be saved. I knew not well what to say to them, my views being greatly clouded, and my senti­ments concerning justification very much perplexed: but being willing to give them the best counsel I could, I exhorted them in a general way to be­lieve in the Lord Jesus Christ; though I was incapable of instructing them either concerning the true nature of faith, or in what manner they were to seek it. However, I better understood my own meaning, when I advised them to the study of the Scriptures, accompanied with prayer to God to be enabled rightly to understand them, and when I inculcated amendment of life. In this manner the Lard slowly brought them forward: and though, for want of a better instructor, they were a considerable time before they arrived at establishment in the faith; yet some of them, having their minds less leavened with prejudice and the pride of reasoning, were more apt scholars in the school of Christ than I was, and got the start of me in the knowledge both of doctrine and duty; and in their turns became, without intending it, in some respects monitors to me, and I derived important ad­vantage from them.

This singular circumstance, of being an instrument in bringing others earnestly and successfully to inquire after salvation, while I so little understood the true Gospel of Jesus Christ, very much increased my perplexity. I be­came doubly earnest to know the truth, lest I should mislead those who con­fided their precious souls to me as their spiritual instructor. This added to my diligence in reading and meditating on the word of God; and made me more fervent in prayer to be guided to the knowledge of the truth. And under every difficulty, I constantly had recourse unto the Lord, to preserve me from ignorance and error, and to enable me to distinguish between the doctrines of his word, and the inventions and traditions of men.

About this time I established a weekly Lecture for expounding the Scrip­tures in my other parish, by which I obtained further acquaintance with the various parts of the word of God. It was my general practice, in penning these Lectures, to search out all the texts referred to in the margin of the Bible, with such as I could recollect upon the subject, and to make use of them in explaining each other. This method enabled me to store my me­mory with the language of Scripture; and made way for a greater exactness in discussing doctrinal subjects, than I had hitherto been acquainted with.

In the course of the winter, 1777, I was engaged in deep meditation upon Luke xi. 9-13, concerning the Holy Spirit being given in answer to prayer. And at length, having made a collection of all the Scriptures I could meet with, which related to that important doctrine, diligently comparing them together, and meditating upon them, and earnestly beseeching the Lord to fulfil the promise to my soul, I wrote two sermons upon the subject:—one from Luke xi. 13. “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him.” The other from James i. 16, 17. “Do not err, my beloved brethren, every good gift, and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights.” By this, my views of a Chris­tian’s privileges and duties in this respect, were much enlarged, and my re­quests were made known unto the Lord in a more full, exact, and believing manner, than before. Though I still remained very ignorant in many im­portant matters respecting the person, offices, and work of the Holy Spirit, yet I had discovered more of what was promised concerning him, and there­fore knew better what to ask.

My obligations to Bishop Beveridge must here be acknowledged. When I first began to peruse his sermons, I conceived a mean opinion of him; and it was some time before I could prevail with myself to examine any further into his writings: but being now more advanced in my inquiry after truth, those singularities which at first offended me became tolerable, and I began to relish the simplicity, spirituality, love of Christ, and affection for souls, which eminently shine forth in many parts of his works. Indeed, I received considerable instruction from him; but especially his sermon on the real sa­tisfaction made by the death of Christ for the sins of believers, was the blessed means of clearing up my views, and confirming my faith, respecting that fun­damental doctrine of Christianity. On *Good Friday,* 1777, I preached a ser­mon upon that subject, from Isaiah liii. 6. “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord hath laid [“ hath caused to meet on him the iniquities of us all.”] I endeavoured to prove, (what has ever since been the sole foundation of all my hopes,) that Christ indeed bore the sins of all who should ever truly believe, in all their guilt, condemnation, and deserved punishment, in his own body on the tree. I explicitly avowed my belief, that Christ, as our Surety and Bondsman, stood in our law-place, to answer all our obligations, and to satisfy divine justice and the demands of the law for our offences: and I publicly renounced, as erroneous and grievous perversions of Scripture, all my former explana­tions and interpretations of these subjects.

This was the first doctrine in which I was clearly and fully brought to ac­knowledge the truth; though I had, with no little earnestness, for two years been inquiring about it:—to so astonishing a degree was my blinded under­standing filled with prejudice against the doctrines of the word of God! Hitherto they had been foolishness to me; but now, under the divine teach­ing, I began, though *very dimly,* to discern the wisdom of God in them.

I say *dimly;* for I was still under many and great mistakes, and very ig­norant in many important points. I knew sin to be the transgression of the divine law; but I did not perceive its odious deformity, as deliberate re­bellion against God’s sovereign authority, and an express contradiction to his holy nature; as charging God foolishly, with the want of either wisdom or goodness, in laying such restraints upon the inclinations of his creatures; and as tending to overturn all subordination in the universe, and to intro­duce anarchy, confusion, and misery into the whole creation. I had dis­covered that my best *actions* were defiled; but I understood not that this was the effect of a depraved nature, and a polluted heart. The doctrine of Original Sin, as the fruitful root of these multiplied evils, was as yet no part of my creed. Inconsistently, I wasan *Arian,* or a *Clarkist,* in my senti­ments concerning the person of Christ and the divinity of the Holy Ghost. Some faint conception I had formed of the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in the soul: the beginnings of it I little understood: and I continued to entertain an implacable enmity to the doctrine of election, and the truths more intimately connected with it. But my faith was now fixed upon a cru­cified Saviour, (though I dishonoured his person and denied his Deity), and I had a sincere desire of being devoted to the Lord. He therefore in mercy accepted his own work in my heart, and pardoned all that was mine; and at length extricated me from that labyrinth of perplexities and inconsistencies in which I was entangled.

About this time, in the course of my lectures, our Lord’s discourse with *Nicodemus* came again under my consideration. Notwithstanding much meditation and many prayers, I could not satisfy my mind about it. I was convinced some internal change must be implied in the expressions “born again,” and “born of the Spirit;” and, according to what I had expe­rienced, I endeavoured to explain it; but I was still very confused in my views of that important subject, and had many doubts whether I were right or wrong in what I advanced.

Hitherto, excepting Leland “*On the Deistical Writers,*”I had not read any book written by a *Dissenter,* with the least degree of candour and at­tention; but at this crisis I met with the first volume of Dr Evans’ sermons, entitled, “*The Christian Temper.*”I was induced to read it by the re­commendation of a friend; but, (such wasmy proud foolish heart!) I opened it with great prejudice, because I understood that the author was a *Dissenter.* However, this book came with a blessing: for by perusing it, I at length perceived that fallen man, both body and soul, is indeed carnal and sold under sin; that by nature, in every man living, the reasonable and immortal part is destitute of *spirituality,* immersed in matter, and, by a dis­honourable and miserable prostitution, given up “to make provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lust thereof;” and, that man must be renewed in the spi­rit of his mind, new created unto good works, born of the Spirit of God, made partaker of a new and divine nature, before he can possibly be made meet for, or admitted into the kingdom of God. In a very little time all my difficulties about this matter vanished, and the truth became so exceed­ingly plain and evident, that, until I had made the experiment, I could scarcely be persuaded, but that every person who heard it rightly explained, must assent to it. This doctrine I have ever since invariably preached, with good effect, I trust, “in opening the eyes of sinners, and turning them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.” Acts xxvi. 28.

When I had made this little progress in seeking the truth, my acquain­tance with Mr Newton was resumed. From the conclusion of our corres­pondence in *December* 1775, till *April* 1777,it had been almost wholly dropped. To speak plainly, I did not care for his company; I did not mean to make any use of him as an instructor; and I was unwilling the world should think us in any way connected. But under discouraging cir­cumstances, I had occasion to call upon him; and his discourse so comforted and edified me, that my heart, being by his means relieved from its burden, became susceptible of affection for him. From that time I was inwardly pleased to have him for my friend, though not as now rejoiced to *call* him so. I had, however, even at that time, no thoughts of learning doctrinal truth from him, and was ashamed to be detected in his company: but I sometimes stole away to spend an hour with him. About the same period, I once heard him preach; but still it was foolishness to me, his sermon being prin­cipally upon the believer’s experience, in some particulars with which I was unacquainted: so that though I loved and valued him, I considered him as a person misled by enthusiastical notions, and strenuously insisted that *we* should never think alike, till we met in heaven.

All along in the progress of this inquiry, I grew more and more con­cerned about my character. I saw myself continually verging nearer and nearer to that scheme of doctrine which the world calls *Methodism;* nor could I help it without doing violence to my convictions. I had indeed set out with the *avowed,* and I trust *sincere,* resolution of seeking the truth as impartially as possible; and of embracing it wherever I might find it, with­out respect to interest, reputation, or any worldly consideration whatever. I had taken patiently, and sustained comfortably, the loss of my opening prospect of preferment, I trust mainly from the supports of grace, and the consciousness of having acted with integrity; yet I am not sure but my de­ceitful heart might also derive some support from a vain imagination that my character would be no loser. Ambitious thirst after the praise of men was much more my peculiar corruption than covetousness; and I had been in no ordinary degree proud of my natural understanding. I had been ac­customed to hear the people called *Methodists* mentioned with contempt, as ignorant and deluded, as fools, and sometimes as madmen; and that with no small degree of complacency and self-preference, I too had despised them as weak enthusiasts. But I now began to be apprehensive that the tables were about to be turned upon me. If I professed and taught these doctrines, I must no longer be considered as a man of sober understanding, but as one of those persons whose heads, being naturally weak, had been turned by religious studies; and who, having fallen under the power of en­thusiasm, had become no better than fools or madmen.

This was the sharpest trial I passed through: for I had not yet learned, that “when we are reproached for the name of Christ, happy are we.” Nor did I remember, with due consideration of the reasons assignable for so ex­traordinary a circumstance, that the apostles were “fools for Christ’s sake;” were deemed “beside themselves;” and went “through evil report and good report, as deceivers, and yet true;” that they were “everywhere spoken against,” as “the men that turned the world upside down;” were treated as “vain babblers,” and “accounted the filth of the world, and the offscouring of all things.” I did not consider that Jesus himself, the “bright­ness of the Father’s glory,” the “Word and Wisdom of God,” who “went about doing good,” and “spake as never man spake,” was not only rejected, but despised as not worth hearing, as “one that had a devil,” as in league with the devil, as “a blasphemer,” “a *Samaritan,” “*a madman,” yea, “a devil.” I read, indeed, but my understanding was not yet opened to understand such plain Scriptures as these: “If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, *therefore* the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you: The servant is not greater than his Lord; if they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you.” (John xv. 19, 28.) “The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his Lord. If they have called the Master of the house *Beelzebub,* how much more shall they call them of the household?” (Matth. x. 24, 25.) “Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you *falsely* for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven; for so persecuted they the prophets that were before you.” (Matth. v. 11, 12.) Not being aware of these consequences when my resolution was first formed, I was as one who has begun to build with­out counting the cost; and was greatly disturbed when I saw the favourite idol of my proud heart, my character, in such imminent danger.

It must be supposed that this apprehension would make me cautious what doctrines I admitted into my creed; and, unwilling to be convinced that those things were true and important, the profession of which was sure to bring infamy on my character; and that even after the fullest conviction, I should thus be rendered very careful in what manner I preached them. In general, however, though the conflict was sharp, I was enabled to be faith­ful. The words “Necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is me if I preach not the gospel,” were commonly upon my mind when I penned my sermon, and when I entered the pulpit: and though, when a bold declaration of what I believed to be the truth, with an offensive application of it to the con­sciences of my hearers, drew opposition and calumny upon me, I have se­cretly resolved to be more circumspect the next time; yet, when that time came, my heart and conscience being both engaged, I dared not to conceal one tittle of what appeared to me to be true, and to promise usefulness. But while, with perturbation of mind, and with many disquieting apprehen­sions, I declared the message with which I supposed myself to be entrusted; to screen myself from the charge of *Methodism,* and to soften the offence, I was frequently throwing out slighting expressions, and bringing the charge of enthusiasm against those who preached such doctrines as I was not yet convinced of. On the other hand, my concern about my character quick­ened me very much in prayer, and increased my diligence in searching the Scriptures, that I might be sure I was not, at this expense, preaching “cun­ningly devised fables,” instead of feeding the souls committed to my care with the unadulterated milk of evangelical truth.

In this state of mind, which is more easily understood by experience than description, I met with Mr Venn’s *Essay on the prophecy of Zecharias,* (Luke i. 67-79.) I was no stranger to the character he bore in the eyes of the world, and did not begin to read this book with great alacrity or expecta­tion: however, the interesting subjects treated of engaged my attention, and I read it with great seriousness, and some degree of impartiality. I disap­proved indeed of many things; but the truth and importance of others brought conviction both to my understanding and conscience: especially, I found a word in season, respecting my foolish and wicked shame and attention to character, in inquiring after divine truth, and in the performance of the im­portant duties of a gospel-minister. These solemn words in particular came home to my heart: “If the spirit of the world, pride, carelessness respect­ing the soul, and neglect of Christ, be not hateful to God and destructive to men, the gospel (with reverence I speak it) is an imposition. Do you abhor that thought as blasphemy? Abhor as much a fawning upon Christ from year to year in your closet, calling him there your Lord and God, and then coming out to consult the world how far they will allow you to obey his plain commands, without saying you are a *Methodist.* Cease rather to profess any allegiance to Christ, than treat him, under professions of duty, with such contempt. “I would,” said he to the Church of *Laodicea,* “thou Wert cold or hot;” but “because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.” (Page 85.)

I should as easily be convinced that there was no Holy Ghost, as that he was not present with my soul when I read this passage, and the whole of what Mr Venn has written upon the subject. It came to my heart with such evidence, conviction, and demonstration, that it lifted me up above the world, and produced that victory which faith alone can give, and that liberty which uniformly attends the presence of the Spirit of the Lord. I became at once ashamed of my base ingratitude and foolish fears, and was filled with such consolation and rejoicing, even in the prospect of sacrificing my character, and running the risk of infamy and contempt, as made me entirely satisfied on that head: and, some few seasons of unbelief excepted, I have never since been much troubled about being called an *Enthusiast* or a *Methodist.*

But while I was thus delivered from the dread of unmerited reproaches, I continued as much as ever afraid of *real enthusiasm;* nay, I became continu­ally more and more averse to everything which can justly bear that name: so that the nearer I verged to what I had ignorantly supposed to be enthu­siastical, the more apprehensive I was, lest my earnestness in such interest­ing inquiries, and the warmth of my natural spirits, thus occasionally in­creased, should put me off my guard, and betray me into delusions and mis­takes. From this danger I could however obtain no security, but by keep­ing close to the study of the word of God; and by being earnest and par­ticular in praying to be preserved from error, and to be enabled to distinguish between the pure revelations of the Holy Spirit contained in Scripture, and the inventions of men, the imaginations of my own heart, or the delusions of the spirit of lies.

The Doctrine of a Trinity of co-equal persons in the Unity of the God­head had been hitherto no part of my creed. I had long been accus­tomed to despise this great mystery of godliness. I had first quarrelled with the articles of the established Church about this doctrine: I had been very decided and open in my declarations against it; and my unhumbled reason still retained many objections to it. But about *June* 1777, I began to be troubled with doubts about my own sentiments, and to suspect the truth of Dr Clarke’s hypothesis. I had just read Mr Lindsey’s *Apology* and *Sequel.—*BeforeI saw these tracts, I had even ridiculed those who thought of confuting him on the *orthodox scheme,* and was not without thoughts of maintaining Dr Clarke’s system against him. But when I understood that he claimed Dr Clarke as a *Socinian,* I was extremely surprised, and, in conse­quence, was led again to a more serious and anxious consideration of the sub­ject. Yet, the more I studied, the more I was dissatisfied. Many things now first occurred to me as strong objections against my own sentiments; and, be­ing thus perplexed, and unable to form a scheme for myself, I easily perceived that I was not qualified to dispute with another person. My pride and my convictions struggled hard for the victory: I was very unwilling to become a *Trinitarian in the strict sense of the word,* though, in *my own sense,* I had for some time pretended to be one; and yet the more I considered it, the more I was dissatisfied with all other systems. My esteem for Mr Newton was also now very much increased; and though I had hitherto concealed this part of my sentiments from him, yet I knew his to be very different. I was not indeed willing to be taught by him in other matters: yet, in this re­spect, finding his opinion the same which in all former ages of the Church hath been accounted orthodox, while that which I held had always been branded as heretical; my fears of a mistake were thus exceedingly increased. In this perplexity I applied to the Lord, and frequently besought him to lead me to a settled conclusion what was the truth in this important subject. After much meditation, together with a careful examination of all the Scriptures which I then understood to relate to it, accompanied with earnest prayer for divine teaching, I was at length constrained to renounce, as utterly indefensible, all my former sentiments, and to accede to that doctrine which I had so long despised. I saw, and I could no longer help seeing, that the offices and works, attributed in Scripture to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, are such as none but the infinite God could perform: that it is a contradiction to believe the *real,* and consequently *infinite,* satisfac­tion to divine justice made by the death of Christ, without believing him to be “very God of very God:” nor could the Holy Ghost give spiritual life, and dwell in the hearts of all believers at the same time, to adapt his work of convincing, enlightening, teaching, strengthening, sanctifying, and com­forting to the several cases of every individual, were he not the omniscient, omnipresent, infinite God. Being likewise certain, from reason as well as from Scripture, that there is not, and cannot be more Gods than one; I was driven from my reasonings, and constrained to submit my understanding to divine revelation; and, allowing that the incomprehensible God alone can fully know the unsearchable mysteries of his own divine nature, and the manner of his own existence, to adopt the doctrine of a “Trinity in Unity,” among other reasons of still greater moment, in order to preserve consistency in my own scheme. It was, however, a considerable time before I was disentangled from my embarrassments on this subject.

Hitherto my prejudices against Mr Hervey, as a writer upon doctrinal sub­jects, had been very strong. I thought him a very pious man, and I had read with pleasure some parts of his *Meditations;* yet, looking on him as an en­thusiast, I had no curiosity to read any other of his writings. But, about *July,* 1777,I providentially met with his *Theron and Aspasio;* and, opening the book, I was much pleased with the first passage on which I cast my eye. This engaged me to read the whole with uncommon attention: nor did I, in twice perusing it, meet with anything contrary to my own senti­ments, without immediately beseeching the Lord to guide me to the truth; I trust the Lord heard and answered these prayers; for, though I could not but dissent from him (as I still do) in some few things; yet I was both instructed and convinced by his arguments and illustrations in everything relative to our fallen, guilty, lost, and helplessly miserable state by nature; and the way and manner in which the believer is accounted, and accepted as righteous, in the presence of a just, holy, and heart-searching, a faithful and unchangeable God: especially his animated description and application of the stag-chase, cleared up this important matter to my mind, more than anything I had hitherto met with upon the subject.

I had now acceded to most of the doctrines which at present I believe and preach; except the doctrine of personal election, and those tenets which im­mediately depend on it, and are connected with it. These were still fool­ishness to me: and, so late as *August,* 1777,I told my friend Mr N. that I was sure I never should be of his sentiments on that head. To this he an­swered, that if I never mentioned this subject, he never should, as we were now agreed in all he judged absolutely needful; but, that he had not the least doubt of my very shortly becoming a *Calvinist,* as I should presently discover my system of doctrine to be otherwise incomplete, and inconsistent with itself. Indeed, I had by this time so repeatedly discovered myself to be mistaken where I had been very confident, that I began to suspect my­self in everything, in which I entertained sentiments different from those with whom I conversed. This, however, did not influence me to take their opinions upon trust: but it disposed me more particularly and attentively to consider them; and in every perplexity to have recourse to the Lord, to be preserved from error, and guided to the truth.

About the same time also, I began to have more frequent applications made to me by persons under deep concern for their souls. My heart was much interested in this new employment; as I was greatly concerned to see their pressing anxieties, and to hear their doubts, difficulties, and objections against themselves: and, being sincerely desirous to give them good instruc­tion, and to lead them on to establishment and comfort, I felt my deficiency, and seemed to have no ground to go on, nor any counsel to give them, but what, instead of relieving them, led them into greater perplexity. In this case, I earnestly besought the Lord to teach me what word in season to speak unto them.

While I was thus circumstanced, I read Witsius’ *Economy of the Covenants,* and observed what use he made of the doctrine of election for this very pur­pose. This convinced me that the doctrine, *if true,* would afford that ground of encouragement which the people wanted. They had been awakened from ignorant formality, open ungodliness and vice, or entire carelessness about religion, to an earnest and anxious inquiry after salvation; they appeared truly penitent, and real believers, and heartily desirous of cleaving unto the Lord; and they wanted some security that they should not, through the deceitfulness of their hearts, their weakness, the entanglements of the world, and the temptations of Satan, fall back again into their former course of sin. This, if genuine, was the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit: and if wrought in consequence of the determinate purpose and foreknowledge of God respecting them, it would follow, from the entire and undeserved freeness of this first gift bestowed on them, when neither desiring nor seeking it, but while in a state of enmity and rebellion against God, and neglect of his service, and from his unchangeableness in his purpose, and faithfulness to his promises, that he would assuredly carry on and complete the good work of his grace, and keep them by his power, as in a castle, through faith unto salvation.

Having now discovered one use of this doctrine, which before I objected to as useless and pernicious, I was led to consider how the other objections which I had been accustomed to urge against it, might be answered. It is true, I now began to consider it as a mystery, not to be comprehended, nor yet too curiously to be searched into by man’s natural reason; but humbly received by faith, just as far as it is plainly revealed in God’s unerring word. I was therefore constrained to leave many objections unanswered, or to re­solve them into the incomprehensible nature of God, whose judgments and counsels are, as the great deep, unfathomable; and into the sovereignty of God, who doeth what he will with his own, and gives no account of any of his matters, let who will presume to find fault; and into his declarations, that his thoughts and ways are as far above our thoughts and ways, as the heavens are above the earth. Here I left the matter, conscious, at length, that such knowledge was too high for me: and that, if God had said it, it was not my place to cavil against it. I acknowledge this way of proceeding is not very satisfactory to man’s proud curiosity, who would be as God, and know all that God knows; and who even dares to dispute with him! and there are times when I can hardly acquiesce in such a solution. But surely it is highly becoming the dependent state and limited understanding of the creature, to submit the decision of all such high points implicitly to the award of the infinitely wise Creator. Indeed, the Christian religion expressly re­quires it of us; for our Lord declares, that “Except we receive the king­dom of God” (riot as disputing philosophers, but) “as a little child, we shall in no wise enter therein.” The day is coming when we shall be able to an­swer all objections. Here “we walk by faith,” “and see in part, through a glass, darkly;” “hereafter we shall see face to face, and know even as we are known.”**[[2]](#footnote-2)**

Leaving therefore all difficulties of a metaphysical nature to be cleared up in that world of light and knowledge, I began to consider the abuses of this doctrine, which I had always looked upon as a very formidable objection against it. But I soon discovered, that though ungodly men, who make profession of religion, will turn the *grace* of God into licentiousness; yet we might so explain and guard these doctrines, that none could thus abuse them, without being conscious of it, and so detecting their own hypocrisy. It still indeed appeared probable to me, that the preaching of them might at first occasion some trouble of mind to a few well-disposed persons: but I con­sidered, that by a cautious declaration, and contrasting them with the gene­ral promises of the Gospel to all who believe, this might in a great measure be prevented; at the worst, a little personal conversation with such persons, would seldom, if ever, fail to satisfy them, and enable them in general to derive encouragement from them: while the unsettling of the minds of such persons as are carelessly living in an unconverted state, is the great end of all our preaching to them; and therefore we need not fear any bad effect of this doctrine in that respect. The great question therefore was, Are these doctrines in the Bible, or not? Hitherto I had wilfully passed over or ne­glected, or endeavoured to put some other construction upon all those parts of Scripture which directly speak of them: but now I began to consider, meditate, and pray over them; and I soon found that I could not support my former interpretations. They *would* teach Predestination, Election, and Final Perseverance, in spite of all my twisting and expounding. It also oc­curred to me, that these doctrines, though now in disgrace, were universally believed and maintained by our venerable reformers; that they were admit­ted, at the beginning of the reformation, into the creeds, catechisms, or ar­ticles, of every one of the *Protestant* churches; that our articles and homilies expressly maintained them; and consequently that a vast number of wise and sober-minded men, who in their days were burning and shining lights, had upon mature deliberation, agreed, not only that they were true, but that they ought to be admitted as useful, or even as necessary articles of faith, by everyone who deemed himself called to take upon him the office of a Christian minister.

In the course of this inquiry, I perceived that my system was incomplete without them. I believed that men, by nature born in sin, the children of wrath, and by wicked works the enemies of God, being in themselves un­godly and without strength, were saved of *free mercy and grace,* without having done anything, more or less, to deserve it, through the Redeemer’s righteousness and atonement, received by faith, the gift and operation of God; as born again, born of God, or new created unto good works, and to the divine image, by the power of the Holy Ghost. It now, therefore, oc­curred to me to inquire, from *what source* these precious blessings, thus freely flowing through the channel of redemption, to poor worthless sinners, could originally spring? And thus my mind was carried back from the considera­tion of the *effects,* to that of the *cause;* and from the promises made to fallen man, to the counsels and purposes of God which induced him to give those promises. I was engaged in frequent meditations on the divine omniscience, unchangeableness, and eternity; and the end which the all-sufficient God had in view in all his works, even the manifestation of the glory of his own perfections; and perceived that redemption itself, as planned by God, to whom were “known all his works from the beginning of the world,” must be the result of his eternal purpose of displaying the glory of his mercy and grace, in harmonious consistency with his most awful justice and holiness; and thus manifesting the inexhaustible resources of his manifold wisdom, in glorifying at once all these attributes which, considered as *perfect,* seem to created understanding irreconcilable to each other. I considered that, un­til the fall of man and his redemption had manifested the attribute of mercy to sinners, it had, as far as we can learn, been unexercised and undisplayed, and consequently unknown to any but God himself, from all eternity; nor could he have the glory of it, but must have been considered as so perfect in justice and holiness, as to be incapable of mercy, had he not chosen some objects on whom to exercise it, and devised some method of displaying it in consistency with his other perfections. Thus I perceived redemption to be the effect of a settled design, formed in God’s eternal counsels, of manifesting himself to his reasonable creatures, complete and full orbed in all con­ceivable perfections. But as all have transgressed the divine law, and as none are disposed of themselves to embrace his humbling and holy Salvation, or even to inquire after it; so I was convinced that the merciful and gracious nature of God, the fountain of goodness, alone moved him to choose any of them as objects of his favourable regard; that his unconstrained will and pleasure are the only assignable causes of his choosing one rather than another; and that in fact the whole work was his own; his wisdom having devised the means; his love and all-sufficiency having, in the person, offices, and work of Christ, made all things ready; his providence directing absolutely to whom the word of invitation shall be sent; and his Holy Spirit alone in­clining and enabling the soul to embrace it by faith. Hence I concluded that God, who knoweth the end from the beginning, and is a Sovereign, and, when none have deserved anything, may do as he will with his own, actually “chose us,” (even every individual believer,) “in Christ, before the foundation of the world, that we *should* be holy, and without blame before him in love; having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ himself, according to the good pleasure of his will: to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.” (Eph. i. 4-6.)

In short, though my objections were many, my anxiety great, and my re­sistance long, yet by the evidence which, both from the word of God and from my own meditation, crowded upon my mind, I was at length constrained to submit; and, God knoweth, with fear and trembling, to allow these for­merly despised doctrines a place in my creed. Accordingly, about *Christmas,* 1777, I began cautiously to establish the truth of them, and to make use of them for the consolation of poor distressed and fearful believers. This was the only use I then knew of them, though I now see their influence on every part of evangelical truth.

However, I would observe that, though I assuredly believe these doc­trines as far as here expressed, (for I am not willing to trace them any higher, by reasonings or consequences, into the unrevealed things of God,) and though I exceedingly need them in my view of religion, both for my own consolation, and security against the consequences of a deceitful heart, an ensnaring world, and a subtle temper, as also for the due exercise of my pastoral office: yet I would not be understood to place the acknowledgment of them upon a level with the belief of the doctrines before spoken of. I can readily conceive the character of a humble, pious, spiritual Christian, who is either an utter stranger to the doctrines in question, or who, through mis­apprehension or fear of consequences, cannot receive them. But I own I find a difficulty in conceiving of a humble, pious, spiritual Christian, who is a stranger to his own utterly lost condition, to the deceitfulness and depravity of his heart, to the *natural* alienation of his affections from God, and to the defilements of his best duties; who trusts, either in whole or in part, *allowedly,* to anything for pardon and justification, except the blood and righteousness of a crucified Saviour, God manifested in the flesh; or who expects to be made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light, in any other way than by being born again, created anew, converted and sanctified by the divine power of the Holy Ghost.

Sometime in *November,* 1777,I was, by a then unknown friend, furnished with a considerable number of books, written in general by the old divines, both of the Church of *England* and of the *Dissenters.* And, to my no small surprise, I found that those doctrines which are now deemed novel inventions, and are called *Methodistical,* are in these books everywhere discoursed of as known and allowed truths; and that the system which, despising to be taught by men, and unacquainted with such authors, I had for near three years together been *hammering* out for myself, with no small labour and anxiety, was to be found ready made to my hand in every book I opened.

I do not wonder that the members of the Church of *England* are generally prejudiced against the writings of *Dissenters;* for I have been so myself to an excessive *degree.* We imbibe this prejudice with the first rudiments of instruction, and are taught by our whole education to consider it as meri­torious: though no doubt it is a prejudice of which every sincere inquirer after truth ought to be afraid, and every pretended inquirer ashamed; for how can we determine on which side truth lies, if we will not examine both sides? Indeed, it is well known to all those who are acquainted with the church-histories of those times, that till the reign of *James I.* there were no controversies between the established Church and the *Puritans,* concerning doctrine;—both parties being in all matters of importance of the same sen­timents: they contended only about discipline and ceremonies, till the intro­duction of *Arminianism* gave occasion to the *Calvinists* being denominated *Doctrinal Puritans.* To this period all our church-writers were *Calvinistic* in doctrine; and even after that time many might be mentioned, who were allowed friends to the Church of *England,* that opposed those innovations, and agreed in doctrine with everything above stated. Let it suffice, out of many, to recommend the works of Bishop Hall, especially his *Contemplations on the Life of Jesus,* a book not easily to be prized too highly; and Dr Reynold’s works. To these no true friend to the Church of *England* can rea­sonably object, and in general, I believe and teach nothing but what they plainly taught before me.

The *outlines* of my scheme of doctrine were now completed; but I had been so taken up with doctrinal inquiries, that I was still, in a great measure, a stranger to my own heart, and had little experience of the power of the truths I had embraced. The pride of reasoning, and the conceit of superior dis­cernment, had all along accompanied me; and, though somewhat broken, had yet considerable influence. Hitherto, therefore, I had not thought of hearing any person preach; because I did not think anyone, in the circle of my acquaintance, capable of *giving* me such information as I wanted. But, being at length convinced that Mr N. had been right, and that I had been mistaken in the several particulars in which we had differed, it occurred to me that, having preached these doctrines so long, he must understand many things concerning them to which I was a stranger. Now, therefore, though not without much remaining prejudice, and not less in the character of a judge than of a scholar, I condescended to be his hearer, and occasionally to attend his preaching, and that of some other ministers:—and I soon per­ceived the benefit; for from time to time the secrets of my heart were dis­covered to me, far beyond what I had hitherto noticed; and I seldom re­turned from hearing a sermon without having conceived a meaner opinion of myself; without having attained to a further acquaintance with my deficiencies, weaknesses, corruptions and wants; or without being supplied with fresh matter for prayer, and directed to greater watchfulness. I likewise learned the use of experience in preaching, and was convinced that the rea­diest way to reach the hearts and consciences of others, was to speak from my own. In short, I gradually saw more and more my need of instruction, and was at length brought to consider myself as a very novice in religious matters. Thus I began experimentally to perceive our Lord’s meaning, when he says, “Except ye receive the kingdom of God as a little child, ye shall in no wise enter therein.” For though my proud heart is continually re­belling, and would fain build up again the former *Babel* of self-conceit, yet I trust I have from this time, in my settled judgment, aimed and prayed to be enabled to consider myself as a little child, who ought simply to sit at the Master’s feet, to hear his words with profound submission, and wait his teach­ing with earnest desire and patient attention. From this time I have been enabled to consider those persons, in whom knowledge has been ripened by years, experience and observation, as fathers and instructors, to take plea­sure in their company, to value their counsels, and with pleasure to attend their ministry.

Thus, I trust, the old building which I had purposed to repair, was pulled down to the ground, and the foundation of the new building of God laid aright: “Old things passed away, behold all things were become new.” “What things were gain to me, those I have counted loss for Christ.” My boasted reason I have discovered to be a blind guide, until humbled, en­lightened, and sanctified by the Spirit of God: my former wisdom, foolish­ness: and that when I thought I knew much, I knew nothing as I ought to know. Since this period, everything I have experienced, heard, or read, and everything I observe around me, confirms and establishes me in the assured belief of those truths which I have received; nor do I in general any more doubt whether they be from God, than I doubt whether the sun shines, when I see its light, and am warmed with its refreshing beams. I see the powerful effects of them continually among those to whom I preach; I experience the power of them daily in my own soul; and, while by medi­tating on and “glorying in the cross of Christ, I find the world crucified unto me, and I unto the world,”—by preaching Jesus Christ and him cru­cified, I see notoriously immoral persons “taught by the saving grace of God to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world,” being examples to such as before they were a scandal to.

And now, by this change, the consequences of which I so much dreaded, what have I lost, even in respect of this present world?—Indeed, I have lost some degree of favour, and I escape not pity, censure, scorn, and oppo­sition: but the Lord is introducing me to a new and far more desirable ac­quaintance; even to that of those whom the Holy Spirit hath denominated *the excellent of the earth;* nay, the Lord the Spirit condescends to be my Com­forter. In general, I enjoy an established peace of conscience, through the blood of sprinkling, and continual application to the heavenly Advocate; with a sweet content, and “that peace of conscience which passeth all un­derstanding,” in casting all my cares upon him who careth for me and I am not left utterly without experience of that “joy which is unspeakable and full of glory.” These the world could not give me, were I in favour with it; of these it cannot deprive me by its frowns. My desire henceforth, God knoweth, is to live to his glory, and by my whole conduct and conver­sation “to adorn the doctrine of God my Saviour,” and “to spew forth his praises, who hath called me out of darkness into his marvellous light;” to be in some way or other useful to his believing people, and to invite poor sinners who “are walking in a vain show, and disquieting themselves in vain,” to “taste and see how gracious the Lord is, and how blessed they are who put their trust in him.—”

“Now would I tell to sinners round,
“What a dear Saviour I have found,
“Would point to his redeeming blood,
“ And cry, Behold the way to God!”

Thus hath the Lord led me, a poor blind sinner, in a way that I knew not;—“he hath made darkness light before me, crooked things straight,” and hard things easy, and hath brought me to a place of which I little thought when I set out; and having done these things for me, I believe, yea, I am undoubtedly sure, he will never leave me nor forsake me. To him be the glory of his undeserved and long-resisted grace: to me be the shame, not only of all my other sins, but also of my proud and perverse opposition to his purposes of love towards me. But all this was permitted, that my high spirit and proud heart being at length humbled and subdued, “I might re­member, and be confounded, and never open my mouth anymore, because of my shame, now that the Lord is pacified to me for all that I have done.”

And now, as in the presence of the heart-searching Judge, I have given, without one wilful misrepresentation, addition, or material omission, an his­tory of the great things God hath done for my soul; or if that suit not the reader’s view of it, a history of that change which hath recently taken place in my religious sentiments and conduct, to the surprise of some, and perhaps the displeasure of others, among my former friends. The doctrines I have embraced are indeed charged with being destructive of moral practice, and tending to licentiousness: but though I know that my best righteousness’ are as filthy rags, yet I trust I may return thanks to God, that by his grace he hath so upheld me since this change took place, that I have not been permitted to disgrace the cause in which I have embarked, by any immoral conduct: “My rejoicing,” in this respect, “is this, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God I have my conversation in the world.” I can confidently avow, that the belief of these doctrines hath a quite contrary effect upon me. I most earnestly desire, aim, endeavour, and pray to be enabled to love God, and keep his commandments, without partiality and without hypocrisy; and so to demean myself as by “well-doing, to put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.” That I fall so very far short in everything, is not the effect of my new doctrines, but of my old depraved nature and deceitful heart.—“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me!”

1. After having spoken so freely of Mr Locke’s divinity, which I once so highly esteemed; it seems but just to acknowledge the vast obligation, which the whole religious world is under to that great man for his “Letters concerning Toleration,” and his answers to those who wrote against them. The grounds of religious liberty, and the reason why everyone should be left to his own choice, to worship God ac­cording to his conscience, were, perhaps, never *generally* understood since the foundation of the world, till by these publications Mr Locke unanswerably made them manifest. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. \* The doctrine of *personal election to eternal life,* when properly stated, lies open to no objection, which may not likewise, with equal plausibility, be urged against the conduct of God in placing one na­tion in a more favourable condition than another, especially as to religious advantages;—without the previous good or bad behaviour of either of them, or any *discernible reasons for the preference.* In both cases we may say, *Unmerited favour* to one person or people, is no *injustice to others;* and the infinitely wise God hath many reasons for his determinations, which we cannot discern, and which he deigns not to make known to us.

If sinners *deserve* the punishment inflicted on them, it cannot be *unjust* in the great Governor of the world to *pre-determine* their condemnation to it. The contrariety to justice and goodness, if there be any, must certainly be found in the Lord’s actual dealings with his creatures, and not in his pre-determinations thus to deal with them. It could not be inconsistent with any of the divine attributes, for the Lord from all eternity to decree to act consistently with all of them. The clamours excited against predestination, if carefully scrutinized, are generally found to be against the thing decreed, and not against the circumstance of its having been decreed from eternity. The sovereignty of God, when duly considered, appears to be nothing more than infinite perfection determining and accomplishing everything in the very best manner possible; and infallibly performing the counsels of everlasting knowledge and wisdom, justice, truth, and love; notwithstanding all the plans and designs of innumerable voluntary rational agents which might seem incompatible with them: nay, performing those counsels even by means of these voluntary agents, in perfect consistency with their free agency and unaccountableness; but in a manner which we are utterly incapable of comprehending.

We should scarcely object to this infinitely wise and holy sovereignty of God, however absolute, did we not, from consciousness of guilt and carnal enmity of heart, suspect that it might probably be found at variance with our happiness: and, I apprehend, should any man be fully persuaded that God had decreed his eternal happiness, however groundless that persuasion might be, he would find his aversion to the doctrine of election exceedingly abated by it. I have often observed that some persons, who declaim most vehemently against the Calvinistic doctrine of divine decrees, seem perfectly reconciled to predestination, when persuaded that God hath eternally decreed the salvation of all men! On the other hand, no consciously impenitent sinner is cordially reconciled to the general declarations of Scripture, concerning the everlasting misery of all impenitent sinners, whatever he may think about personal election.

In fact, the grand difficulty in the whole of the divine conduct, equally embarrasses every system of Christianity, and every scheme of Deism, except men deny that God is the Creator and Governor of the world. For wickedness and misery actually exist and abound; the fact is undeniable: the Almighty God could have prevented this; and we should have thought that infinite love would have preserved the creation from all evils of every description. Yet infinite Wisdom saw good to permit them to enter, and amazingly to prevail! Till this difficulty be completely solved, let none object to truths plainly revealed in Scripture, on account of similar difficulties. But let us remember, that our narrow capacities, and scanty information, do not qualify us to judge concerning what it becomes the infinite God to determine and to do; and let us adopt the language of the apostle on this subject.—“Oh! the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him are all things to whom be glory for ever. Amen!” Rom. xi. 33-36.

As for the objections made to these doctrines, as inconsistent with free agency, accountableness, commands, invitations, calls to repentance, faith and holiness, and diligence in the use of the means, they universally and altogether arise from misrepresentation and misapprehension of the subject.—See the Author’s Sermon on Election and Final Perseverance, &c. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)