

CHAPTER II.

OF GOD AND OF THE HOLY TRINITY

SECTION I.—There is but one only living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute, working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will, for his own glory, most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek him; and withal most just and terrible in his judgments; hating all sin; and who will by no means clear the guilty.

SECTION II.—God hath all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of himself; and is alone in and unto himself all-sufficient, not standing in need of any creatures which he hath made, nor deriving any glory from them, but only manifesting his own glory in, by, unto, and upon them; he is the alone foundation of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom, are all things; and hath most sovereign dominion over them, to do by them, for them, or upon them, whatsoever himself pleaseth. In his sight all things are open and manifest; his knowledge is infinite, infallible, and independent upon the creature; so as nothing is to him contingent or uncertain. He is most holy in all his counsels, in all his works, and in all his commands. To him is due from angels and men, and every other creature, whatsoever worship, service, or obedience he is pleased to require of them.

EXPOSITION

We are here taught,—First, That there is but one God. Secondly, That he is the only living and true God. Thirdly, That he is a most pure spirit. Fourthly, That he is possessed of all possible perfections.

1. The assertion, that there is but one God, does not mean that there is but one divine person, for it is afterwards stated, that "in the unity of the Godhead there are three persons;" but it means that the Divine Being is numerically one in nature or essence. This is affirmed in opposition to the Polytheism of heathen nations, and to the heresy of the Tritheists, who hold that there are three distinct Godheads, or that one Godhead is divided into three distinct parts. The

unity of the Divine Being might be discovered by the light of nature, for the same process of reasoning which leads to the idea of a God, leads also to the conclusion, that there can be no more Gods than one. There can be but one first cause, one self-existent, independent, omnipotent, infinite, and Supreme Being; it is a contradiction to suppose otherwise. Hence, though the rude unthinking multitude among the Pagans adored gods many, and lords many, yet the wiser of their philosophers had their one supreme god; and their poets sung of one sovereign deity, whom they called the Father of gods and men. It is unquestionable, however, that the heathen world received a multiplicity of gods, and the philosophers contented themselves with empty speculations about the nature of the Deity; and, instead of instructing the vulgar in the unity of God, confirmed them in their error, by practically complying with the customs of their country. But divine revelation has firmly established the doctrine of God's unity. Jehovah solemnly declares, "I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me."—Deut. xxxii. 39. "Before me there was no god formed, neither shall there be after me."—Isa. xliii. 10. The inspired writers of the Old Testament have said of him, "The Lord he is God; there is none else besides him" (Deut. iv. 35); and, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord."—Deut. vi. 4. Jesus adds his testimony to this great truth; he told the scribe that came to question him about his religion, "The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord;" and he spoke with high approbation of the answer returned to this, in which "the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he."—Mark xii. 29, 32. The Apostle Paul often inculcates the same truth: "We know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one."—1. Cor. viii. 4. "There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."—1. Tim. ii. 5.

2. It is asserted, that this God is the only living and true God. The name of God is, indeed, given in Scripture to various other beings, on account of some resemblance which, in some particular respect, they bear to God. Angels are called gods, on account of the excellence of their nature.—Ps. xcvi. 7. Magistrates are called gods, because, in the execution of their office, they act in God's name, and because we are bound to obey them.—Exod. xxii. 28. Moses was a god to Pharaoh, and Aaron was his prophet, because Aaron received the divine messages, which he carried to Pharaoh immediately from Moses; whereas other prophets received their messages to the people immediately from God himself.—Exod. vii. 1. Idols are called gods, because idolaters account them gods, and honour them as such. And Satan is called the god of this world, because he rules over the greater part of the world, and they are his servants, and do his works.—2 Cor. iv. 4. But, "though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, yet to us there is but one God," who is the only living and true God. He is styled the lowly God, in order to distinguish him from idols, which are altogether destitute of life. The opposition between the living God and dead idols the Psalmist states and illustrates in a manner

the most convincing.—Ps. cxv. 3-7. He is styled the true God, in opposition to imaginary and fictitious gods. The heathen, besides worshipping dead idols, worshipped also living creatures.—Dent. xxxii. 17. These were only gods in their vain imagination, not in reality. They were called gods, but they were not gods by nature.—Gal. iv. 8. Between the true God and all rival gods there is an infinite disparity.

3. It is asserted that this God is a most pure Spirit,—that is, he is an incorporeal, immaterial, invisible, and immortal Being, without bodily parts or passions. “No man hath seen God at any time:” He “dwelleth in light, which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen nor can see.” He is described as “invisible, incorruptible, and immortal.” The Confession affirms that God is a pure Spirit, according to the Scriptures, and in opposition to an ancient sect of heretics, who, understanding everything spoken of God in a literal sense, held that God has bodily parts and a human form. These heretics are called Anthropomorphites; a name compounded of two Greek words,—the one signifying human, and the other, shape or form. That corporeal parts and bodily members,—such as eyes, ears, hands, and face, are ascribed to God in the Scriptures is certain; but such language is used in accommodation to our capacities, and must be understood in a way suitable to a pure spirit. Were the great God to speak of his essence and perfections as he is in himself, instead of being informed, we would be confounded. He, therefore, employs human properties and actions as emblems of his own spiritual perfections and acts. We become acquainted with persons and things by seeing them or hearing of them; and to intimate the perfect knowledge which God has of his creatures, eyes and ears are ascribed to him. It is chiefly by our hands that we exert our bodily strength; and hands are ascribed to God to denote his irresistible power. We look with an air of complacency and satisfaction on those whom we love; and God’s face denotes the manifestation of his favour. In the same manner must we explain the several passions that are ascribed to God,—such as anger, fury, jealousy, revenge, bowels of mercy, &c. “Passion produces a vehemence of action; so when there is, in the providences of God, such a vehemence as, according to the manner of men, would import a passion, then that passion is ascribed to God. When he punishes men for sin, he is said to be angry; when he does that by severe and redoubled strokes, he is said to be full of fury and revenge; when he punishes for idolatry, or any dishonour done to himself, he is said to be jealous; when he changes the course of his proceedings, he is said to repent; when his dispensations of providence are very gentle, and his judgments come slowly from him, he is said to have bowels. And thus all the varieties of providence come to be expressed by all that variety of passions which, among men, might give occasion to such a variety of proceeding.”

4. It is asserted that this God is possessed of all possible perfections. The perfections of God are called his attributes, because they are ascribed to him as the essential properties of his nature. These attributes are variously, though imperfectly distinguished, in our ways of thinking about them. They have been

called natural and moral, incommunicable and communicable attributes,—the latter is the most common distinction. Those attributes are called incommunicable, of which there is not the least resemblance to be found among creatures; and those are called communicable, of which there is some faint, though very imperfect resemblance to be found among creatures. Without attempting to class the divine perfections under these two heads, we shall arrange the several parts of the description of God contained in the two sections now before us under the following particulars:—

1. God is infinite. To be infinite, according to the literal signification of the word, is to be unbounded,—unlimited. As applied to the other attributes of God, this term denotes their absolute perfection. He is infinite in his wisdom, power; holiness, &c. As these perfections must be considered afterwards, we only notice, at present, that God is infinite in his being, or essence. From this results his incomprehensibility, or that super-eminent perfection which can be comprehended by none but himself. A perfect knowledge of God is competent to none but himself, whose understanding is infinite. "Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?" Job xi. 7. His infinity, as applied to his being, also includes his immensity and his omnipresence. Betwixt these a distinction may be drawn. His omnipresence has a relation to creatures actually existing, with every one of which he is intimately present; but his immensity extends infinitely beyond the boundaries of all created substance. God fills all places at once—heaven, and earth, and hell—with his essential presence. "Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places, that I shall not see him? Saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord."—Jer. xxiii. 23, 24.

2. God is self-existent and independent. He has all life, glory, and blessedness, in and of himself. His existence is necessary and underived; for his name is, "I am that I am."—Exod. iii. 14. His glory and blessedness are likewise underived. His glory necessarily results from, or rather consists in, the absolute perfection of his own nature, and his blessedness is all summed up in the possession and enjoyment of his own infinite excellencies. Being thus all-sufficient in and unto himself, he must be independent of any other being. He stands not in need of any creatures which he has made, nor can he derive any glory from them. Every other being receives its all from him, but he receives no advantage from any. "For his pleasure all things are and were created; but none can be profitable to God, as he that is wise may be profitable to himself; nor is it any gain to him that they make their ways perfect."—Rev. it. 11; Job xxii. 2, 3.

3. God is the fountain of all being. As he has life in and of himself, so he is the author of that life which is in every living creature. "In him we live, and move, and have our being." All the life of the vegetative, animal, and rational world, the life of grace here, and the life of glory hereafter, are of him, and derived from him. "With him is the fountain of life,"—of all sorts of life. "Of him, and through him, and to him, are all things."—Rom. xi. 36. From this it

follows, that God has most sovereign dominion over all his creatures, to do by them, for them, or upon them; whatsoever himself pleaseth. He, who is the first cause of all things, must also be the last end. As he gave being to all creatures, so he must have an absolute right to rule over them, and to dispose of them for the ends of his own glory. Hence we are told, that "his kingdom ruleth over all," and that "he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?"—Ps. ciii. 19; Dan. iv. 35. But God has not only a right to exercise sovereign dominion over his creatures, he has also an indisputable claim to their service and obedience. This claim is likewise founded upon his giving them their being. They are not their own, but the Lord's; him, therefore, they are bound to serve. Hence the Confession, with great propriety, affirms, that to God "is due from angels and men, and every other creature, whatsoever worship, service, or obedience, he is pleased to require of them."

4. God is eternal. The word eternal is sometimes used, both in Scripture and in common language, in a restricted sense, for a long time, or for a period whose termination is to us unknown. Sometimes it denotes a duration which, though not without beginning, is without end. Thus angels and the souls of men are eternal; for though they had a beginning, they will have no end. But eternity, in the strict and proper sense of the word, signifies a duration without beginning, without end, and without succession; and in this sense it is peculiar to the great God. The supposition that there was a period at which God began to be, is equally repugnant to reason and to revelation. He that created all things must have existed before any of them began to be; and his existence being underived, he can never cease to exist. The Scripture plainly declares that he is without beginning: "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God."—Ps. xc. 2. It no less plainly declares that he is without end: "The Lord shall endure for ever."—Ps. ix. 7. That he is without succession is no less explicitly declared: "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."—2 Pet. iii. 8. There is one passage in which an unbeginning, unending, and unsuccessive duration, is ascribed to God—Ps. cii. 25_27. One of his glorious titles is, "The high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity;" and he is styled, "The everlasting God,—the Father of eternity,—the First and the Last."

5. God is immutable. "With him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." To this important truth reason and revelation give their united testimony. His immutability necessarily results from his absolute perfection. If he were to change, it must be either to the better or to the worse. He cannot change to the better, for that would imply past imperfection; he cannot change to the worse, for then he would cease to be perfect. He must, therefore, remain invariably the same. To the absolute immutability of God the Scripture gives numerous testimonies.—Numb. xxiii. 19; Ps. xxxiii. 11; Mal. iii. 6.

God is unchangeable in his being. "I am that I am," is the name by which he made himself known to Moses, a name which conveys the idea not only of self-existence and independence, but also of immutability. He is unchangeable in his glory. Though the manifestation of his glory may vary, yet he is, and ever was, infinitely glorious in himself; for his essential glory is neither capable of increase nor susceptible of divination. He is unchangeable in his blessedness; for as it consists in the enjoyment of himself, so it can neither be increased nor diminished by anything that creatures can do for or against him.—Job xxxv. 5-7. He is unchangeable in his purposes and counsels. He proclaims with divine majesty, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it."—Isa. xlvi. 10, 11. He is unchangeable in his covenant, love, and promises to his people.—Isa. liv. 10. When, therefore, we read in Scripture of God's repenting, we must understand such language of an alteration of the outward dispensations of his providence. We are by no means to attribute to him any change of mind; for, in this respect, it is impossible for God to change. "He is in one mind, and who can turn him?"—Job xxiii. 13.

6. God is all-knowing. In his sight all things are open and manifest. He has a perfect knowledge of himself, and he only knows himself perfectly. He knows all things besides himself, whether they be past, present, or to come, in our way of measuring them by time. He knows all creatures, from the greatest to the least; he knows all the actions of his creatures, whether secret or open; all their words, thoughts, and intentions. Hence the Scripture declares, "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good."—Prov. xv. 3. "He is acquainted with all our ways, there is not a word in our tongue but he knoweth it altogether, and he understandeth our thought afar off."—Ps. cxxxix. 2-4. "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world."—Acts xv. 18. Yea, he knows the most contingent events: the actions of free agents, and all events concerned in them, were always known with certainty to him; so that, though they be contingent in their own nature, or ever so uncertain as to us, yet, in reality, nothing is to him contingent or uncertain. We cannot doubt this, when we consider the numerous prophecies, relating to things of this kind, that have received a most exact and circumstantial accomplishment, many ages after the prophecies were announced. It may be remarked, that God knows things, not by information, nor by reasoning and deduction, nor by succession of ideas, but by a single intuitive glance; and he knows them comprehensively, and infallibly.

7. God is most free and most absolute. "He worketh all things after the counsel of his own will."—Eph. i. 11. His will is infinitely free, and "he doth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth." He has an absolute right to do whatsoever he pleaseth, and "none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?"—Dan. iv. 36.

8. God is infinitely wise. The wisdom of God is that perfection of his nature by which he directs all things to their proper end—the end for which he

gave them being; and this is his own glory: for as he is the most excellent Being, nothing can be so excellent an end as his own glory. How admirably is the wisdom of God displayed in creation! Whether we look upward to the heavens, or downward to the earth; whether we survey the mineral, the vegetable, or the animal world, can we forbear to exclaim with the devout Psalmist, "O Lord, how manifold are thy works! In wisdom thou hast made them all."—Ps. civ. 24. When we consider the vast variety of creatures and things which God has produced from the same original matter, the fitness of everything for its intended purpose, the subservience of one thing to another, and the conspiring of all to a common end—how conspicuous is his wisdom! Nor is the wisdom of God less apparent in the government of the world, especially in ejecting the most grand and glorious designs by weak and feeble means, and even by the bad dispositions of men—"making even the wrath of man to praise him, and restraining the remainder thereof." "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!"—Rom. xi. 33. But this perfection of God shines forth with the brightest lustre in the method of redemption by Jesus Christ. Nothing less than wisdom truly divine could have devised a plan whereby "mercy and truth should meet together, and righteousness and peace should embrace each other." Here is "the hidden wisdom of God." Here "he has abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence;" and hence the publication of this contrivance is spoken of as a discovery of "the manifold wisdom of God."—Eph. iii. 10.

9. God is infinitely powerful, or almighty. The power of God is that perfection whereby he is able to effect all things that do not imply a contradiction, either to his own perfections, or to the nature of things themselves. "With God nothing shall be impossible," said the angel to the Virgin Mary. "With God all things are possible," said Jesus to his disciples. How great must be that power which produced the beautiful fabric of the universe out of nothing! "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth" "For he spoke, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast."—Ps. xxxiii. 6, 9. His power is still exerted in the preservation of the world; for he upholds all creatures in their being and operations by the word of his power. It appears conspicuously in the moral government of the world—especially in restraining wicked men from their purposes; for "he stilleth the noise of the waves, and the raging of the people." But it is most eminently displayed in the work of redemption by Jesus Christ; in the formation of his human nature in the womb of the Virgin; in supporting his human nature under that load of wrath which was due to us for our transgressions; and in raising him from the dead. It is also displayed in the production of that wonderful change which takes place in the conversion of a sinner, which in Scripture is termed a new creation; in the preservation of believers in a state of grace; in enabling them to resist and overcome strong temptations, to perform arduous duties, and to bear heavy trials with patience and joyfulness;

and it will be signally manifested in raising up their bodies, glorious and immortal, at the last day.

It may be observed, that although there are some things which God cannot do, yet this implies no imperfection in his power. He cannot do what involves a contradiction; for instance, he cannot make a thing to be, and not to be, at the same time; he cannot do what is repugnant to his nature, or his essential perfections; he cannot deny himself—he cannot lie—he cannot look upon sin—he cannot sleep, or suffer, or cease to exist. This, however, argues no defect of power, but arises from his absolute perfection.

10. God is infinitely holy. The holiness of God is the perfect rectitude of his nature, whereby he is absolutely free from all moral impurity, and, in all that he does, acts like himself, and for the advancement of his own honour; delighting in what accords with, and abhorring what is contrary to his nature and will. Holiness is, as it were, the lustre and glory of all the divine perfections; hence God is styled "glorious in holiness." It is that perfection which those exalted spirits, who are best acquainted with the glories of the divine nature, dwell most upon in their songs of praise; hence, the seraphim cry one to another, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts."—Isa. vi. 3. God himself puts peculiar honour upon his holiness; for he singles it out as that attribute by which he swears that he will accomplish whatever he hath spoken.—Ps. lxxxix. 35. The holiness of God is manifest from the original condition of all rational creatures; for, when formed by him, they were perfectly holy. It has been awfully displayed in the judgments which God has executed upon sinners. The expulsion of the rebel angels from heaven,—the exclusion of man from paradise, as soon as he became a sinner,—the destruction of the old world by water,—the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah; these, and innumerable other instances, the Scripture records of God's awful displeasure against sin. But nothing affords such a striking demonstration of God's hatred of sin as the sufferings and death of his own Son. God must be of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, since, when our guilt was transferred to his own Son, he spared him not. Could he have overlooked sin in any case, he would certainly have done it in the case of his dear Son. But, though he was the object of his Father's ineffable delight, and though he was personally innocent, yet, when he stood charged with the sins of his people, he could not be excused from suffering and dying. "It pleased the Lord to bruise him, he hath put him to grief."—Isa. liii. 10.

11. God is infinitely just. The justice of God is that perfection of his nature according to which he is infinitely righteous in himself, and just and equal in all his proceedings with regard to his creatures. "A God of truth, and without iniquity, just and right is he."—Deut. xxxii. 4. God is just to himself, by acting in all things agreeably to his nature and perfections, and by maintaining his own rights and prerogatives. He is just to his creatures, by governing them in a way agreeably to their nature, according to a law which he has given them. God's justice has been variously distinguished, according to the various ways

in which it is exercised. His legislature justice is his giving righteous laws to his creatures, suited to their original abilities, commanding or forbidding such things as are fit for them to do or forbear. Hence, his law is said to be "holy, and just, and good."—Rom. vii. 12. His distributing justice, is his rendering to every one his due, according to law, without respect of persons. This, again, is distinguished by various names. There is remunerate justice, whereby God rewards the sincere, though imperfect obedience of those who are accepted in his sight as righteous, through the righteousness of Jesus Christ imputed to them, and received by faith. "Verily, there is a reward for the righteous." "God is not unrighteous, to forget their work and labour of love."—Ps. lviii. 11; Heb. vi. 10. But this reward is entirely of free grace, and not of debt. There is punitive justice, whereby God renders to the sinner the punishment due to his crimes. This is nothing else than God's distributive justice, as it regards punishment. It is sometimes called vindicatory justice, and sometimes avenging justice. This, we hold, in opposition to Socinians, is not an arbitrary effect of the will of God, but an essential perfection of his nature; and, therefore, upon the entrance of sin, its exercise was indispensably necessary. God must inflict the punishment due to sin, either upon the transgressor himself, or upon another as his surety. This appears from the holiness of God, which requires that he should demonstrate his aversion to sin by punishing it according to its demerit. It appears from the threatening of the law, taken in connection with the truth of God. "In the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die," was the penalty annexed to the law, and the faithfulness of God is pledged for the execution of the sentence upon transgressors. This is confirmed by the testimony of conscience in all men, apprehending that punishment shall overtake the transgressor; hence, both barbarous and civilised nations have had recourse to sacrifices to appease the anger of the Deity. This appears, further, from God's indicting remarkable judgments, even in this life, on sinning nations and individuals; and especially from his executing punishment upon his own Son, as the surety of sinners. Christ having substituted himself in the place of sinners, justice exacted of him full satisfaction. And never did justice appear in such terrible majesty, as when God gave it the commission to awake, and smite the man that was his fellow.—Zech. xiii. 7. Then it was seen that God "can by no means clear the guilty," or allow sin to pass with impunity.

Several writers, of late, have attributed to God what they call public justice; that is, justice which respects the great general end of government,—the public good. But, we apprehend, there is no foundation, either in Scripture or reason, for supposing that this kind of justice has any place in the moral government of God. Such an idea proceeds upon the supposition that the divine government, so far as punishment is concerned, is completely analogous to human governments. There is, however, a wide and obvious distinction between the procedure of human governments and the procedure of the Most High.

12. God is infinitely good. Though all the perfections of God are his glory, yet this is particularly so called; for when Moses earnestly desired to behold the glory of Jehovah, the Lord said, "I will make all my goodness pass before thee and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee." "And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth," &c.—Exod. xxxiii. 18, 19, and xxxiv. 6. The goodness of God is distinguished by different names, according to the different aspects in which it is viewed, or the different objects about which it is exercised. When it relieves the miserable, it is called mercy; when it confers favours on the undeserving, or on those who deserve nothing but what is evil, it is called grace; when it supplies the wants of indigent beings, it is called bounty; when it forbears to execute punishment upon provoking rebels, it is called patience or longsuffering. The goodness of God is, therefore, a very comprehensive term; it includes all the forms of his kindness towards men, whether considered as creatures, as sinners, or as saints. But we may describe it generally as that property of the Divine Being which disposes him to communicate happiness to his creatures, as far as is consistent with his other perfections.

Innumerable are the instances in which God has manifested his goodness. What but goodness could prompt him to give being to so many creatures, when he stood in no need of them, being infinitely happy in the enjoyment of himself? What goodness does he display in upholding innumerable creatures in existence, and in making ample provision for their wants? But the most astonishing display of this, as well as of all the other perfections of Deity, is in the redemption of sinners. In the contrivance of the plan, and in the execution of it from first to last, God appears good, in a manner and to a degree that astonishes the inhabitants both of earth and of heaven. The goodness of God, as manifested in this world, is usually expressed by the term love; and the love herein displayed surpasses knowledge.—John iii. 16.

The goodness of God may be considered as absolute and relative,—as it is in himself, and as it is exercised toward his creatures.—Ps. cxix. 68. It may also be considered as common and special. Of his goodness, in the former view, his creatures promiscuously are partakers.—Ps. xiii. 5, cxlv. 9. Of his goodness, in the latter view, his chosen people are partakers.—Ps. cvi. 5.

13. God is infinitely true and faithful. The truth of God is that perfection of his nature whereby it is impossible for him not to fulfil whatever he hath spoken. He is "a God of truth, and without iniquity, just and right is he." Whatever God hath spoken, whether in a way of promise or of threatening, he will, sooner or later, infallibly accomplish. "It is impossible for God to lie." No difficulties can arise to render a performance of his word impracticable; and he is not liable to a change of mind.—Numb. xxiii. 19. We may, therefore, be confidently assured, that "there shall not fail one good word of all that the Lord our God hath spoken."

How blessed are they who, upon good grounds, can call this all-perfect Being their Father and their God! How miserable those who live "without God in the world!" and what a "fearful thing" must it be to "fall into the hands of the living God!" That we may escape this misery, and possess the happiness of those "whose God is the Lord," let us unreservedly yield ourselves to God, through Christ, and take him to be our portion for ever. May the unfeigned language of every reader be, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee."

SECTION III.—In the unity of the Godhead there be three Persons of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. The Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternal begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.

EXPOSITION

We are here taught,—First, That in the one Godhead there are three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Secondly, That these three are distinguished by their personal properties. Thirdly, That each of these persons is truly God.

1. That in the one Godhead there are three persons, is affirmed in opposition to the Anti-Trinitarians, who maintain that God is one in respect of personality as well as of essence. The term which has been chosen to express the doctrine now under consideration is Trinity. This word is not to be found in Scripture, but it is a very appropriate and happy term to express this profound mystery. It is a compound Latin word, signifying three in unity; that is, three distinct persons in one undivided Godhead. The adversaries of this doctrine now call themselves Unitarians, by which they mean to intimate their belief of only one God, and insinuate that those who believe the doctrine of the Trinity must admit more than one God. But we maintain, as strongly as they, that there is only one God, and we think it perfectly consistent with this belief, to acknowledge three persons in the Godhead. This, indeed, is a mystery, but there is nothing in it absurd, or contradictory to reason. We do not say that three are one in the same sense and in the same respect in which they are three; that would, no doubt, be a plain contradiction in terms. But we say, they are three in one respect, on in another respect,—three in person, one in essence; and there is no absurdity in that at all. It surpasses our reason, indeed, fully to understand it; and so do a thousand things besides, which yet we know are true and real. But, if it be a doctrine clearly revealed in the Sacred Scriptures, we are bound to believe it, however incapable we may be of comprehending it.

Before proceeding to establish the doctrine, we must explain the terms employed. The word Godhead signifies the divine nature. This is a scriptural term.—Rom. i. 20; Col. ii. 9. In the Scriptures, and, agreeably to them, in our Confession, Godhead denotes that infinite, eternal, and unchangeable nature, or essence, which is not peculiar to the Father, or the Son, or the Holy Ghost, but common to all the three. The distinction in the Godhead is characterised by the word person. This term, in the common acceptation, denotes “a separate and independent being, whose existence and actions have no necessary connection with the existence and actions of any other being. It has been defined to be a thinking substance, which can act by itself, or an intelligent agent, who is neither a part of, nor sustained by another.” But this term, when applied to the Sacred Three, is not to be understood in exactly the same sense as when applied to creatures. The cases are totally dissimilar. “Three human persons have the same specific nature, but three divine persons have the same numerical nature. Anti-Trinitarians affirm, that, by holding three divine persons, we necessarily make three Gods, because they most unfairly maintain, in the face of our solemn protestations, that we affix the same idea to the word person which it bears when used in reference to men. But we deny that it has this meaning. We do not teach that there are three distinct essences mysteriously conjoined,—that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit possess, each of them separately from the others, a divine nature and divine perfections. What we believe is this, that there is a distinction in the Godhead, to which there is nothing similar in creatures, who are one in every sense of the term; and we employ the word person to express that distinction. It may be objectionable, because, being applied to other beings, it is apt to suggest an idea which is inconsistent with the unity of God; but this is the unavoidable consequence of the imperfection of human language; and we endeavour to guard against the abuse by declaring that, in this application, it must be qualified so as to exclude a separate existence. When we say that there are three persons in the Godhead, the word person signifies a distinction which we do not pretend to explain, but which does not trench upon the unity of essence.”

The doctrine of the Trinity is not discoverable by the light of nature, or by unassisted reason. It can only be known by divine revelation, and it is amply confirmed by the Holy Scriptures. There are many passages in the Old Testament which prove a plurality of persons in the Godhead, such as those passages in which one divine person is introduced as speaking of or to another. To these we can only refer.—Gen. i. 26, iii. 22, xi. 7; Ps. xiv. 6, 7, cx. 1; Isa. vi. 8. All these texts plainly point out a plurality of persons in the Godhead. But it is evident from Scripture, not only that there is a plurality, but also that there is a Trinity, or only three persons in the Godhead. This is plain from Isa. lxi. 1, where our Divine Redeemer thus speaks: The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me,” &c. Here one divine person is the speaker; he speaks of another divine person, whom he styles the Spirit; and of a third divine person, whom he calls the Lord God. The work of creation is

ascribed to the agency of three distinct persons, Ps. xxxiii. 6: "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth." Here three are distinctly pointed out,—the Father; the Word, or the Son of God; and the breath of his mouth, which can be no other than the Holy Spirit. But in the New Testament this doctrine is still more explicitly revealed. In the history of our Lord's baptism we have a plain intimation of the mystery of the Trinity.—Matt. iii. 16, 17. The Father, by an audible voice from heaven, bears testimony to the incarnate Redeemer; the Son, in human nature, is baptised by John; and the Holy Spirit: descends upon him in a visible manner. Hence the primitive Christians used to say to any who doubted the truth of this doctrine, "Go to Jordan, and there you will see the Trinity." Plainer still is this truth from the form of words appointed to be used in Christian baptism,—"Baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."—Matt. xvi. 19. To baptise in the name of one, is to baptise by his authority, and dedicate to his service. This is competent only to a divine person. Now, if the Father, in whose name we are baptised, be a person, so must the Son, and the Holy Ghost, for we are baptised in their name, as well as in the name of the Father. The apostolic benediction furnishes another proof of a Trinity: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all."—2 Cor. xiii. 14. "This is evidently a prayer, which it would be impiety and idolatry to address to any other but God. Yet three persons are distinctly addressed, and consequently are recognised as possessed of divine perfections; as knowing our wants, and hearing our requests, and able to do what we ask; as the fountain of all the blessedness implied in the terms, grace, love, and communion." We have a most explicit testimony to this doctrine, 1 John. v. 7, "There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one." The genuineness of this text has been much disputed; but the truth of the doctrine does not rest on a single text, as has been already shown.

Nor is the doctrine of the Trinity a mere-speculation. On the contrary, to use the language of Dr Dick, "without the knowledge of this doctrine it is impossible to understand the grandest of the works of God—redemption,—in which the three persons act distinct and conspicuous parts. We are called to contemplate the love of the Father, the condescension of the Son, and the gracious operations of the Spirit. Redemption is not the work of a solitary agent, but of three, all concurring in the salvation of our perishing race. Hence we owe gratitude to each of the persons of the Godhead distinctly, and are bound to give to each the glory to which he is entitled. We are baptised in their name, and consecrated to their service; and our prayers are addressed not to God absolutely considered, but to the Father, through the Son, and by the assistance of the Holy Ghost. It appears, therefore, that the Christian system of duty is founded upon this doctrine, and that without the belief of it there can be no acceptable religion. So far is it from being useless, that it is the very foundation of practical piety."

II. The Sacred Three are distinguished from each other by their personal properties. It is the personal property of the Father to beget the Son.—Ps. ii. 7. It is the personal property of the Son to be eternally begotten of the Father.—John. i. 14. It is the personal property of the Holy Ghost to proceed eternally from the Father and the Son.—John xv. 26; Gal. iv. 6. These are called personal properties, to distinguish them from the essential perfections of Deity. Essential perfections are common to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, but a personal property is something peculiar to each, something which may be affirmed of one, but cannot be affirmed of the other two. Paternity is peculiar to the first person, filiation to the second, and procession to the third. We pretend not to explain these personal properties; here, if in anything, it is safest to abide by the language of Scripture.

III. Each of the Sacred Three is truly God. That the Father is God is admitted on all hands; it is, therefore, unnecessary to prove what no one denies. But the Deity of the Son was controverted and denied at an early period of the Christian Church. The Arians, who arose in the beginning of the fourth century, held that the Son had a beginning, and is a creature, though in antiquity and excellence superior to all other creatures. The Socinians, who sprung up towards the close of the sixteenth century, went further than the Arians. They held that the second person had no existence till he was formed in the womb of the Virgin, and that he is called the Son of God because God employed him to propagate divine truth by his ministry, and to confirm it by his death, and advanced him, after his resurrection, to the government of the universe. The modern Socinians, who call themselves Unitarians, the disciples of Dr Priestley, have gone still further in degrading the Son of God. They maintain that Christ is a mere man, that he was the human offspring of Joseph and Mary, that he is no proper object of religious worship, but only the most excellent of human characters,—the most eminent of all the prophets of God. They go along with the old Socinians in maintaining that Jesus had no existence prior to his birth, but they disclaim the notion of Socinus, that, since his resurrection, he has been advanced to the government of the universe; and contend that, as he differed in no respect from other men in his mode of coming into the world, so he can have no dominion or superiority over men in the world of spirits. In opposition to adversaries, earlier and later, our Confession asserts that the Son is God, of one substance, power, and eternity, with the Father. This might be evinced by a great variety of arguments, which we can only indicate in a very summary manner.

1. Divine names are applied to him. He is expressly called God,—John i. 1, Rom. ix. He is called the mighty God,—Isa. ix. 6; the true God,—1 John v. 20; the great God,—Tit. ii. 13. The Lord, or Jehovah, the incommunicable name of God, is frequently applied to the Son,—Isa. vi. 1, applied to Christ,—John xii. 41; Isa. xl. 3, applied to Christ,—John i. 93; Numb. xxi. 6. 7, applied to Christ,—1 Cor. x. 9.

2. Divine attributes are ascribed to the Son no less than to the Father. Eternity is ascribed to him,—Mic. v. 2; Rev. i. 8; omniscience,—John ii. 24, xxi. 17; omnipresence,—Matt. xxviii. 20; omnipotence,—Rev. i. 8; Phil. iii. 21; immutability,—Ps. cii. 25-27, compared with Heb. i. 10-12, and xiii. 8.

3. Divine works are ascribed to him. The production of all things out of nothing, John i. 3; the preservation and government of all things,—Col. i. 17; Heb. i. 3; John v. 17, 27, the purchasing of eternal redemption,—Heb. ix. 12; the forgiveness of sins,—Mark ii. 5; the raising of the dead at the last day,—John v. 28, 29; the judging of the world.—Rom. xiv. 10.

4. We are commanded to give the same divine worship to the Son that is due to the Father. The established law of worship is, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." But divine worship is expressly commanded to be rendered to the Son. John v. 23. Angels, the highest of created beings, are enjoined to worship him,—Heb. i. 6; and we have numerous instances of divine worship being given to him.—Acts vii. 59; 2 Cor. xii. 8; 2 Thess. ii. 16.

5. As an additional proof that the Son, no less than the Father, is the supreme God, it may be observed, that he is expressly affirmed to be equal with the Father. He claimed equality with God, and for so doing was accused of blasphemy by the Jews; yet he never charged them with misconstruing his words, but appealed to his works in proof of his claim.—John v. 18, x. 30, 38. He thought it no robbery to be equal with God,—Phil. ii. 6; and his eternal Father acknowledges him to be his fellow and equal.—Zech. xiii. 7.

We may here observe, that when Christ saith that "his Father is greater than he" (John xiv. 28), he does not mean that he is greater with respect to his nature, but with respect to his office as Mediator; in which respect Christ sustains the character of the Father's servant, and acts in virtue of a commission from him.—Isa. xlii. 1. But as the second person in the undivided Trinity, he is in all respects equal to his Divine Father.

The divinity of the Holy Spirit is also denied by Socinians; but it may be evinced by the same arguments which prove the Deity of the Son.

1. Divine names are ascribed to the Spirit equally with the Father and the Son. He is called God. In Acts v. 3, Ananias is said to "lie unto the Holy Ghost;" and in ver. 4 he is said to "lie unto God." True Christians are said to be temples of God, inasmuch as "the Spirit of God dwelleth in them."—1 Cor. iii. 16. The name Jehovah is also given to him.—Isa. vi. 8, 9, compared with Acts xxviii. 25.

2. Divine attributes are ascribed to the Spirit. Eternity is ascribed to him,—Gen. i. 1, 2; omnipresence,—Ps. cxxxix. 7; omniscience,—1 Cor. ii. 10, 11. In fine, the apostle attributes to the Spirit the most sovereign will and omnipotent power.—1 Cor. xii. 11.

3. Divine works are ascribed to the Spirit. Creation is ascribed to him, in reference to the world in general, and to man in particular.—Gen. i. 2; Job xxxiii. 4. The preservation of all things is as much the work of the Spirit as of

the Father and the Son.—Ps. civ. 30. The application of redemption is peculiarly ascribed to the Spirit.—Tit. iii. 5; 1 Cor. vi. 11.

4. Divine worship is ascribed to him. Prayer, one of the most solemn parts of worship, is addressed to him.—Rev. i. 4, 5. By the seven spirits, in this passage, are not intended any created spirits, but the third person of the Godhead, who is so called on account of the variety and perfection of his gifts and graces. Baptism is administered in the name of the Holy Ghost, as well as in the name of the Father and the Son; and the apostolic benediction is pronounced in his name.—2 Cor. xiii. 14.

The same glory, then, is due to the undivided Three,—to the Son no less than to the Father, and to the Holy Spirit equally with the Father and the Son.