THE following work, written by the ingenious author of
A Summary History of New England, &c., has gone thro'
several editions in America. The present one is printed
from the third, which came out in October 1801, with large
additions, and was dedicated to John Adams, late pre-
sident of the United States.

The design of such a work is not to convey an idea of
all religious principles being equally true, or safe, to those
who embrace them, but to exhibit the multiplied specula-
tions of the human mind in as just and impartial a manner
as possible. Such things exist, or have existed in the
world, whether we know them or not; and the reading of
them in a proper spirit may induce us to cleave more
closely to the law and to the testimony; forming our reli-
gious principles by their simple and obvious meaning; and
avoiding, as a manner would avoid rocks and quicksands,
every perversion of them in support of a pre-conceived
system.
Several publications of the kind have appeared amongst us, on whose merits we shall not take upon us to decide. Suffice it to say, that the present work, having been written on the other side the Atlantic, and by a person who has not only informed herself of the general state of religion in the world, but has manifestly paid a particular attention to the religious controversies of her own country, may be supposed to include many things, with which our writers, as well as readers, are but little acquainted. While, however, we have printed those parts of the work, and the account of almost all the denominations which are become extinct, as they were, we have in respect of the living ones, frequently availed ourselves of other sources of information, where it appeared capable of being done to advantage. The late missionary undertakings have furnished some additional matter with respect to Paganism and Mahometism.

Some parts of the accounts, given by the author, of the Eastern Pagan nations, we have omitted, considering the authorities on which they are founded as suspicious. By a close attention to fact in those nations with which Europeans have lately been in the habit of the most familiar intercourse, we have been compelled to distrust much of the panegyric bestowed upon them by former writers; and to consider it as one of those indirect methods, by which deistical historians, geographers, and travellers, have thought fit to assail the religion of Jesus.
PREFACE

TO THIS EDITION

BY

THE PRESENT EDITOR

WHEN it was agreed to reprint this Work, a competent person was employed to reduce the three parts into one alphabet for the convenience of the reader; to make some abridgments, and to insert a few modern sects, which had recently attracted public notice. After this was done, at the request of the other proprietors, I undertook to give the work a cursory review before it was sent to press. This I did without the least intention of becoming Editor—for which I had no time, but what must be wrested either from the hours of business, or of domestic comfort. A cursory review, however, was sufficient to detect many errors and omissions; and a desire to see the work as complete as possible, induced me to give it a more minute attention, without calculating, I must confess, upon the extent of the sacrifice I was making. But having undertaken the task, I have spared neither time nor pains in performing it; and only hope that my labour will not be esteemed in vain. What is done, with a view to improve the work, may be reduced to the heads of correction, retrenchment, and addition.
On reading the black list of heretics, and examining my Author's authorities, I have been induced to strike out some, and moderate the censure upon others. For instance, the Paulicians, which, on the authority of Mosheim, Mrs. Adams had described as Manicheans, I have been led by the evidence adduced by Mr. Molnar and some others, to consider as the genuine disciples of St. Paul, and the Cathari, or Purtans, of the ancient Church. The Diggers, who were put down as heretics, on the authority of Broughton, appear to me a poor and pious people, "of whom the world was not worthy," and who, by their merciless persecutors, were obliged to hide themselves "in dens and caverns of the earth." Even as to the more early heretics, though doubtless some of them were as ignorant and wild as the enthusiasts of modern times, (and we cannot say more) it is impossible to believe all the contradictory charges brought against them. But they helped to swell the Index Heretica, which was also much increased by the variety of names applied to the same people.

* Broughton, I would observe, is a weak writer and very credulous, at least on this subject. He was neither choice in selecting his authorities, nor careful in examining them. Hence his "Dictionary of Religions," though in 2 volumes, folio, is of little credit or value. I have therefore in this work frequently superseded his authority by writers of better credit, as Dr. Lardner, Mr. Milner, &c.

There seems a doubt as to some other of the Works and Editions referred to, in many parts of this Book, by Mrs. Adams. The Dictionary of Arts and Sciences used by her I suppose to have been that of Chambers, in 4 vol. folio. The Encyclopedia frequently referred to, appears to have been the 3d Edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica. The Edition of Mosheim used by her must have been prior to 1801, which I have sometimes cited as a new edition is Baynes's, 1810.
These circumstances have afforded opportunity for considerable abridgments. I have generally omitted the charges which I did not believe, and have avoided the frequent repetition of the same opinion, under a variety of names, by referring from one article to the other.

A source of further retrenchment has been found in some long accounts drawn up by the parties themselves for the last Edition, but which have been thought unnecessarily prolix: yet the abridgment has been chiefly in the redundancies of the style, or in extraneous matter; no authentic and valuable information being suppressed. But the room thus gained has given me opportunity to introduce one hundred and fifty articles entirely new to this work, and many of them not to be found in any similar publication, among them are the names of sporting modern Enthusiasts, which ought to be left on record as warnings to our children.

In the last Edition, the Editors distinguished their additions by enclosing them in brackets; and I should have gladly followed their example, but many are too numerous: only the new articles are therefore distinguished by an asterisk (*) placed at the beginning of each, and many enlargements are made without this distinction. By this I am aware of having taken upon me an additional responsibility, from which I would gladly have been excused.
However, after all the corrections and additions here made, I am still sensible of many defects, and suspect many errors, which could not well be avoided in a work of five hundred Articles. Corrections candidly suggested shall be thankfully received, and may contribute to its future improvement; and should Envy or Malvolence revile me, I flatter myself they will not excite the same tempests in return. To labour to do good, and meekly to bear reproach as an evil doer, should be the ambition of a Christian.

IRRATA.

The Editor particularly begs the following IRRATA may be corrected in the Introduction, which did not pass under his revision.

Page 36 line 26—for they read there.
37—5 & 23 for planted read initiated.
40—10 for Cest read Christ, and for appointed read appointed.
AN

ESSAY ON TRUTH:

CONTAINING AN ENQUIRY INTO ITS NATURE AND IMPORTANCE,

WITH THE CAUSES OF ERROR,

AND THE REASONS OF ITS PERMISSIBILITY.

THE Multifarious and discordant sentiments which divide mankind, afford a great temptation to scepticism, and many are carried away by it. The open enemies of the gospel take occasion from hence to justify their rejection of it; and many of its professed friends have written as if they thought, that to be decided amidst so many minds and opinions were almost presumptuous. The principal, if not the only use which they would make of these differences is, to induce a spirit of moderation and charity, and to declaim against bigotry.

To say nothing at present how these terms are perverted and hackneyed in a certain cause, let two things be seriously considered:—First, Whether this was the use made by the apostles of the discordant opinions which prevailed in their times, even amongst those who “acknowledged the divinity of our Saviour’s mission!” In differences among Christians which did not affect the kingdom of God, nor destroy the work of God, it certainly was: such were those concerning meats, drinks, and days,* in which the utmost forbearance was inculcated. But it was otherwise in differences which affected the leading doctrines and precepts of Christianity. Forbearance in these cases would, in the account of the sacred writers, have been a crime. Paul would that they were even cut off,† who troubled the Galatian churches by corrupting the Christian doctrine of justification. And it is recorded to the honour of the church at Ephesus that it “could not bear them that were evil; but had tried them that said they were apostles and were not, and had found them liars.”‡ Secondly, Whether an unfavourable opinion of those who reject what we account the leading principles of Christianity, supposing it to be wrong, be equally injurious with a contrary opinion, supposing that to be wrong? To think unfavourably of

another does not affect his state towards God: if therefore it should prove to be wrong, it only interrupts present happiness. We have lately been told indeed, but from what authority I cannot conceive, that "The readiest way in the world to thin heaven, and to replenish the regions of hell, is to call in the spirit of bigotry." Far be it from me to advocate the cause of bigotry, or to plead for a bitter contentious spirit, a spirit that would confine the kingdom of heaven to a party; but I do not perceive how this spirit, bad as it is, is productive of the effects ascribed to it. If, on the other hand, through an aversion to bigotry, we treat those as Christians to whom an Apostle would at least have said, "I stand in doubt of you," we flatter and deceive them; which is really "the readiest way in the world to thin heaven, and to replenish the regions of hell."

Surely there is a medium between bigotry and the esteeming and treating men as Christians, irrespective of then avowed principles. A benevolent and candid treatment is due to men of all denominations; but to consider all principles as equally safe, is to consider Truth as of no importance. The abuse of the terms heresy and heretic by the Roman Catholics, and others who imbibe their persecuting spirit, seems to have furnished occasion for considering a departure from Christian doctrine as a light matter. Some have endeavoured to neutralize heresy by criticising the term; others, by a constant reference to the misapplication of it to principles held by the best of men, think themselves at liberty to treat it with derision. But the abuse of a term does not divest it of its meaning. Mr. James Foster held that "no person can be a heretic in the Apostle's sense of the term, in Tit. iii. 10, 11, but he who, to make himself considerable, propagates false and pernicious doctrine, knowing it to be such." Mr. Foster was answered by Dr. Stebbing and Mr. Brine. Dr. George Campbell

"So Dr. Macknight defines a Heretic to be "one who from worldly motives teaches doctrines which he knows to be false." [Mackn. on Titus iii. 10.] But is not this rather the Character of an Impostor? And is it not a breach of the Candour so strongly recommended to any of any Teacher, that he does not believe his own doctrines? But, in many cases, heretics have suffered persecution, and even death, sooner than renounce their principles. Even as to "the Judases, who made the ritual enjoined by the law, more necessary than a holy life"—how do we know that they were not sincere? Doth not a part of mankind do the same?"
also objects to Mr. Foster’s position, that it makes the precept of the apostle, to “reject an heretic,” of little or no use, seeing it is impossible for us to judge whether he who professes an opinion be sincere or not. Dr. Campbell considers the term as having no relation to doctrine, but merely to denote a sect or faction. There is no doubt but the term heresy (ἀληθεία) is used in the N. T. for a sect, without any reference to doctrine, and sometimes without implying anything evil. It does not appear to me, however, that Dr. Campbell has proved it is thus used in 2 Pet. ii. 1. where false teachers are described as bringing in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and as bringing upon themselves swift destruction; or that his criticism on that passage is well founded. But if it be, while he allows false doctrine to be “destructive,” it is of small account whether he call it heresy or not. It is certain that this term is now generally used in reference to false doctrine, and in that view is by many lightly treated.

Let us candidly enquire, christian reader, whether, not.

Again, Dr. M. says, “He also is a heretic who from the same motive makes a party in the church, in opposition to those who maintain the truth.” But how are we to judge of motives? Can we search the heart? And without this how are we to reject heretics—if the heresy depend upon the motive?

But St. Paul says of heretics that they are self-condemned—and does not this imply a knowledge of their error? I conceive not. Every man whose principles are inconsistent with his practice, is self-condemned. So the Judaizing preachers, admitting the Messiah of Christ and adhering to Moses—and the Heretics spoken of by Peter, who (in allusion to a master buying, or redeeming a slave) though they profess to admit the doctrine of redemption, yet disowned the authority of the Redeemer—“denying the Master, (διαστάσει) or lord who bought them,”—were therein inconsistent and self-condemned.

What then constituted the notion of a heretic in the first ages of the Church? 1. He was supposed to be in an error. 2. That error was thought pernicious. “Heresy (says Dr. Waterland,) lies in expounding pernicious doctrines.” (Import. of the Trin. 2nd Edit. p. 119.) 3. That error was of sufficient importance to break communion, and to violate the unity of the Church. This I conceive accounts for the different use of the same term in the Acts and the Epistles, which is admitted by Dr. Campbell. Prior to Christianity, the word was used indifferently for any sect or party, religious or philosophical; but after the erection of the Christian church it was used for such separations only as were made on the ground of doctrine or principles; and other sects were grounded on difference of religious rites, or the preference of particular Preachers, were designated heretics. 1 Cor. 1: 10—11.
withstanding the diversity of sentiments in the religious world. Truth may not be clearly ascertained. Whether it be not of the utmost importance? Whether the prevalence of error may not be accounted for? And lastly, Whether the wisdom, as well as the justice of God, may not be seen in permitting it?

WHAT IS TRUTH?

In attempting to answer this question, I desire to take nothing for granted, but that Christianity is of God, and that the scriptures are a revelation of his will. If Christianity be of God, and he have revealed his will in the holy scriptures, light is come into the world, though the dark minds of sinful creatures comprehend it not. It does not follow, because many wander in mazes of fruitless speculation, that there is not a way so plain as that a way-faring man, or one who "walketh in the truth," though a fool, shall not err. The numerous sects among the Greeks and Romans, and even among the Jews, at the time of our Saviour's appearing, did not prove that there was no certain knowledge to be obtained of what was truth. Our Lord considered himself as speaking plainly, or he would not have asked the Jews as he did, "Why do ye not understand my speech?" The apostles and primitive believers saw their way plainly, and though we cannot pretend to the extraordinary inspiration which was possessed by many of them, yet if we humbly follow their light, depending on the ordinary teachings of God's holy Spirit, we shall see ours.

Truth, we may be certain, is the same thing as what in the scriptures is denominated "the gospel," "the common salvation," "the common faith," "the faith once delivered to the saints," "the truth as it is in Jesus," &c.; and what this is, may be clearly understood by the brief summaries of the gospel, and of the faith of the primitive christians, which abound in the new testament. Of the former, the following are a few of many examples:—"God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believed in him should not perish, but have everlasting life—The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which is lost—I am the way, the truth, and the life—no man cometh unto the Father but by me." To him gave all the prophets witnesses, that through his name who-
soever believeth in him shall have remission of sins.—We preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness; but to them that believe, the wisdom of God, and the power of God—I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.—Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye hold fast what I preached to you, unless ye have believed in vain: for I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day, according to the scriptures—This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief—This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son—Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved.”

If language have any determinate meaning, it is here plainly taught that mankind are not only sinners, but in a lost and perishing condition, without help or hope, but what arises from the free grace of God through the atonement of his Son; that he died as our substitute; that we are forgiven and accepted only for the sake of what he hath done and suffered; that in his person and work all evangelical truth concentrates; that the doctrine of salvation for the chief of sinners through his death, was so familiar in the primitive times, as to become a kind of christian proverb, or “saying;” and that on our receiving and retaining this depends our present “standing,” and final “salvation.” If this doctrine be received, christianity is received; if not, the record which God hath given of his Son is rejected, and he himself treated as a liar.

When this doctrine is received in the true spirit of it, (which it never is but by a sinner ready to perish,) all those fruitless speculations which tend only to bewilder the mind, will be laid aside; just as malice, and guile, and envy, and evil speakings, are laid aside by him who is born of God. They will fall off from the mind, like the
cest of the chrysalis, of their own accord. Many instances of this are constantly occurring. Persons who, after having read and studied controversies, and leaned first to one opinion and then to another, till their minds have been lost in uncertainty, have at length been brought to think of the gospel, not as a matter of speculation, but as that which seriously and immediately concerned them: and embracing it as good news to them who are ready to perish, have not only found rest to their souls, but all their former notions have departed from them as a dream when one awaketh.

Corresponding with the brief summaries of the gospel are the concise accounts given of the faith of the primitive Christians. Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God—Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?—If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” The sacred writers did not mean by this language to magnify the belief of one or two divine truths at the expense of others; but to exhibit them as bearing an inseparable connexion; so that if these were truly embraced, the other would be certain to accompany them. They considered the doctrine of the person and work of Christ as a golden link, that would draw along with it the whole chain of evangelical truth. Hence we perceive the propriety of such language, as in the following: “He that hath not the Son, hath not life; and he that hath not the Son, hath not life.” Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father.”

The doctrine and the faith of the primitive Christians were summarily avowed every time they celebrated the Lord’s Supper. The leading truth exhibited by that ordinance is the same which John calls “the record,” namely, that “God hath given unto us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.” Under the form of a feast, of which we are invited to “take, eat, and to drink,” are set forth the blessings of the new testament, or covenant, and the medium through which they were obtained; namely, “the blood of Jesus, shed for many for the remission of sins,” and the way in which they must be obtained: that is to say, with fervent, broken, penitent, on the
unworthy for his sake. If this simple doctrine were believed with the spirit of a little child, and lived upon as our meat and drink, we might take an everlasting leave of speculations on things beyond our reach, and that without sustaining the loss of any thing but what were better lost than retained.

**Importance of Truth.**

If the above remarks may be thought sufficient to ascertain what is truth, its importance follows as a necessary consequence. If, as transgressors, we be exposed to the eternal displeasure of our Maker; if a door of hope be opened to us; if it be at no less an expense than the death of God’s only-begotten Son in our nature; if through this great propitiation God can be just, and the justifier of believers; finally, if this be the only way of escape, and the present the only state in which it is possible to flee to it for refuge, who, that is not infatuated by the delusions of this world, can make light of it? There is an importance in truth as it relates to philosophy, history, politics, or any other branch of science, inasmuch as it affects the present happiness of mankind: but what is this when compared with that which involves their everlasting salvation? To be furnished with an answer to the question, “What shall I do to be saved?” is of infinitely greater account, than to be able to decide whether the Ptolemaic or Copernican system be that of nature. The temporal salvation of a nation, great as it is, and greatly as it interests the minds of men, is nothing when compared with the eternal salvation of a single individual.

But many, who would not deny the superior value of eternal salvation to all other things, have yet gone about to depreciate the importance of divine truth, and to represent it as having no necessary connexion with either present holiness or future happiness. Such appears to have been the design of those well-known lines of Pope:

> For modes of faith let graceless zealots fight;
> His can’t be wrong whose life is in the right.

And so the same purpose we have often been told in prose, that we shall not be judged at the last day by our opinions, but by our works. If truth and error existed, in the mind
merely as opinions, or objects of speculation, they might possibly have but little influence upon us: but if they be principles of action, they enter into the essence of all we do. Such is the influence of living faith, otherwise it could not be shewn by our works: and such is that of the belief of falsehood, else we had not read of the word of false teachers eating as death (γαργαρίζει) a gangrene. The works by which we shall be judged cannot mean actions in distinction from their principles; for as such they would contain neither good nor evil, but as connected with them. All pretences, therefore, to separate the one from the other, are as contrary to reason as they are to scripture.

To render this subject more evident, let the following particulars be duly considered.

First. It is by the belief of truth that sinners are brought into a state of salvation.—Great things are ascribed in the scriptures to faith: but faith could have no existence without revealed truth as its foundation. Whatever importance, therefore, attaches to the one attaches to the other. The great blessing of justification is constantly ascribed to faith; not as the reward of a virtue, but as that by which we become one with Christ, and so partakers of his benefits. While unbelievers, we have no revealed interest in the divine favour; but are declared to be under condemnation; but believing in him, we are no longer “under the law,” as a term of life and death; but “under grace.” Hence it is, that in the gospel, as “heard and received,” we are said to “stand.” Take away evangelical truth, and you take away the standing of a christian. Bereaved of this, the best man upon earth must despair of salvation.

Secondly: Truth is the model and standard of true religion in the mind.—That doctrines, whether true or false, if really believed, become principles of action; that they are a mould into which the mind is cast, and from which it receives its impression, is evident both from scripture and experience. An observant eye will easily perceive a spirit which attaches to different species of religion; and which, over and above the diversities arising from natural

*James ii. 18. 2Tim. ii. 17.
temper, will manifest itself in their respective followers. Paganism, Mahometism, Deism, Apostate-Judaism, and various systems which have appeared under the name of Christianity, have each discovered a spirit of their own. Thus also it was from the beginning. Those who received "another doctrine," received with it "another spirit:" and hence we read of "the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error." He that had the one is said to be "of God," and he that had the other "not of God." *

Revealed truth is represented as "a form of doctrine into which believers are delivered." † As a melted substance, cast into a mould, receives its form from it, and every line in the one corresponds with that of the other; so true religion in the soul accords with true religion in the scriptures. Without this standard, we shall either model our faith by our own pre-conceived notions of what is fit and reasonable, or be carried away by our feelings, and lose ourselves among the extravagant vagaries of enthusiasm. Our views may seem to us very rational, or our feelings may be singularly ardent; and yet we may be far from being in the right. The question is, Whether they agree line to line with the divine model? God saith in his word, "Seek ye my face." If our hearts say unto him, "Thy face Lord will we seek," then does line answer to line; and this is true religion. Is it a leading feature of evangelical truth, that it honours the divine character and government? It is the same with true religion in the mind. Does that manifest love even to enemies? So does this. * Is it the object of the former to abase the pride of man? It is no less the nature of the latter to rejoice in lying low. Finally: Is the one averse to all iniquity, and friendly to universal holiness? The other, dissatisfied with present attainments, presseth towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Thirdly: Truth is that which furnishes the motive for every exercise of true holiness.—It once we are enabled to behold its glory, the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, it changes us into the same image, begets and excites holy affections, and every kind of gracious exer-
case. Hence we are said to "know the truth, and the truth to make us free," to be "sanctified through" it, and "begotten by" it.*

It is not denied, that there is much of what is called morality in persons who know and believe nothing to the purpose of evangelical truth. Honour, interest, and the habits of education, will induce men to shun open immoralities, and to comply with things which are reputable and praise-worthy. But though there be great cause for thankfulness to God, who by his providence thus restrains mankind from much evil; yet this is not holiness. Holiness is the love of God and one another; whereas this is mere self-love.* All works and worship of this kind are no better than the offering of Cain, which, being without faith, could not please God.

And as there may be a semblance of holiness without faith, so there may be a semblance of faith without holiness. The doctrines of the bible, though in themselves practical, yet may be treated as mere speculations; and frequently are so by men who profess to believe them; and where this is the case, instead of producing holiness, they may have a contrary effect; but this is owing to their being perverted. God's words do good to the upright. There is not a sentiment in the living oracles but what, if received in the true spirit and intent of it, will contribute to the sanctification of the mind.

True religion is with great beauty and propriety called, "Walking in the truth."† A life of sobriety, righteousness, and godliness, is christian principle reduced to practice. Truth is a system of love, an overflow of the divine blessedness, as is intimated by its being called, "The glorious gospel of the blessed God:" a system of reconciliation, peace, and forgiveness; full of the most amazing condescension, and of spotless rectitude. To walk in truth like this is to walk in love, to be tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us; to be of the same mind with him who made himself of no-reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant; and to be holy in all manner of conversation.

Such were the fruits of truth which were actually

* John viii. 32. xvii. 17. James i. 18. † 3 John 4.
brought forth by the primitive believers; and such, in
different degrees, notwithstanding the many defects and
scandals which abound amongst us, are the fruits of it in
ture christians to this day. Thousands of examples,
both in earlier and later times, might be produced, in
which men who previously walked according to the
course of this world, in rioting and drunkenness, in cham-
bering and wantonness, in strife and envying, on em-
bracing the doctrine of Christ crucified, have put off all
these, and become, as it were, new creatures.

It is also worthy of special notice, that in every in-
stance in which the primitive churches deviated from the
doctrine of the apostles, they appear to have degenerated
as to zeal and practical godliness. A careful review of
the epistles to the Corinthians, the Galatians, and the
Hebrews, who departed more than any other churches
from the simplicity of the gospel, would furnish proof of
the justness of this remark. It was not without reason
that Paul observed to the Corinthians, "Evil communica-
tions corrupt good manners:" by which, he appears to
have meant the communication of false teachers, who en-
deavoured to undermine the resurrection, and other im-
portant truths. And such was the "corruption of man-
ners" which accompanied these notions, that, degenerate
as we consider ourselves, compared with the primitive
christians, if any of our churches tolerated the same
things, we should be almost ready to pronounce it a syna-
gogue of Satan. Among other things, they divided into
parties, boasted of the talents of their preachers, con-
mved at the most unnatural kind of formation, went to
law with one another, communed with idolaters at their
temples, and profaned the supper of the Lord, by appro-
priating it to purposes of sensual indulgence! Such were
the fruits of error!

If we look into the epistle to the Galatians, who had
been turned aside from the apostolic doctrine of justifica-
tion, we shall find fruits of the same kind. They are de-
scribed as "not obeying the truth," as "foolish," as in a
manner "bewitched," as having, lost, their former "zeal,"
and rendered their christianity a matter of "doubt," as
needing to have "Christ again formed in them:" and it is
strongly intimated that they were guilty of "biting," and
as it were "devouring" one another; of "fulfilling the
lusts of the flesh," and of coveting, "van glory, provok-
ing one another, and envying one another." *

If the Hebrews had not, in turning aside from the truth,
been injured in their spirit and conduct, it is very prob-
able that such language as the following would have been
addressed to them: "Wherefore, as the Holy Ghost saith,
To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts
as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilder-
ness; when your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw
my works forty years, wherefore I was grieved with that
generation, and said, They do always err in their hearts,
and they have not known my ways. So I sware in my
wrath, they shall not enter into my rest.—Take heed,
brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of un-
belief, in departing from the living God! Exhort one
another daily while it is called to-day, lest any of you be
hardened through the deceitfulness of sin!"—Neither is
it likely that they would have been exhorted to "look
diligently, lest any man should fall of the grace of God;
lest any root of bitterness springing up should trouble them,
and thereby many be defiled; lest there should be any fornic-
ator or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat
sold his birth right;" if no such symptoms had appeared
amongst them. Finally: It is not probable that so solemn
a warning against "whoredom and adultery" would have
been introduced, and the offenders cited as it were to the
tribunal of God, if there had been no occasion for it in their
own conduct. †

Whether these instances of the pernicious effects of error
in the primitive churches, be not in direct opposition to
the modern notions before stated, let the reader judge.
Nor are such things peculiar to the primitive churches. If
you see men desert the principles before stated, or hold
them in a corrupted sense, you may commonly perceive a
change in their spirit. They may retain what is called
character, in the eyes of the world; but the savour of
godliness is departed. They may retain their zeal; but it
will be confined to some little peculiarity, to the neglect
of the common faith. There will be a want of that lovely

* See ch. iii. 1. iv. 11, 12, 20. v. 7, 15, 16, 26
† Ch. iii. 7—13. xii. 12, 13, 15, 16. xiii. 4.
proportion which constitutes the true beauty of holiness. A man who chews opium, or tobacco, may prefer them to the most wholesome food, and may derive from them pleasure, and even vigour for a time; but his pale countenance, and debilitated constitution, will soon bear witness to the folly of spending his money for that which is not bread.

Fourthly: The love which the primitive christians bore to one another was FOR THE TRUTH'S SAKE. Now, that for the sake of which we love a person, is considered as of greater importance than any thing else pertaining to him. It is that which constitutes his value in our esteem; and which, if he abandon, we should no longer esteem him.

Here we may perceive what is essential to the true legitimate charity of the primitive christians. Instead of regarding men irrespectively of their principles, they "knew no man after the flesh" John, who was the most loving, or charitable, perhaps of all the disciples of Christ, is so far from considering a departure from the truth as a light matter, and the subject of it, as entailed to the same christian affection as hitherto, that he expressly writes as follows: "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God-speed; for he that abideth him God-speed, is partaker of his evil deeds." Would not such language, I ask, in our days be reckoned very uncharitable? It would. But this proves, beyond all reasonable doubt, that the common ideas of charity are anti-scriptural. Charity will not take it for granted that whosoever deviates from our views must needs deviate from the doctrine of Christ; but will carefully enquire at the oracles of God, what is truth. Yet there is no need of being ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of it. The lady whom John addressed was supposed to be able to distinguish between those who "brought the doctrine of Christ," and those who "came without it; and so are christians in the present day." Charity "hopeth all things," and will always put the most favourable construc.
tion upon the motives of others that truth will admit: but without truth, as its ground and guide, it will not proceed.

Here also we may see the nature of Christian unity. It is not merely for two or more persons to be agreed; for this they may be in evil. This is mere party attachment. It is natural for men to love those who think and act like themselves, and that for their own sake. But Christian unity is to love one another for Christ's sake, and for the truth's sake that dwelleth in them. Christ, as revealed in the gospel, forms the great point of union. A number of minds are drawn towards this point; and the nearer they approximate to it, the nearer they approach to an union with one another. If all true Christians were nearer to the mind of Christ, their differences would soon subside; and they would feel themselves as they approached it, to be of one heart, and of one soul.

Lastly: Truth is the only solid foundation of peace and happiness—There are cases, it is granted, in which the mind may rejoice in error, or be distressed by truth. False doctrine will operate like opium, filling the imagination with pleasing dreams; but all is transient and delusive. Truth, on the other hand, when it barely commendeth itself to the conscience of a sinner, may render him extremely unhappy. Such was the effect of Judas's conviction of Christ's innocence; and such is the effect of similar convictions in the present times. But where truth takes possession of the heart; or, as the scriptures express it, where we "receive the love of the truth," peace and joy accompany it. This is a fact established by history and experience, and is easily accounted for. Revealed truth carries in it a message of pardon, reconciliation, and eternal life, and all in a way honourable to the divine character and government. This, in itself, is good news; and to everyone who, as a sinner ready to perish, receiveth it, is a source of solid and lasting happiness. Truth also pours light upon all the dark and mysterious events of time, and teaches us, while weeping over human misery, not to despond or repine; but viewing things on a large scale, to rejoice in whatever is. It exhibits God upon the throne of the universe, ordering everything for the best; and thus reconciles the mind to present ill, by pointing it to the good that shall ultimately out of it.
Contrast with this the horrible complaints of an infidel.

"Who can, without horror, consider the whole earth as the empire of destruction? It abounds in wonders; it abounds also in victims; it is a vast field of carnage and contagion! Every species is, without pity, pursued and torn to pieces, through the earth, and air, and water! In man there is more wretchedness than in all other animals put together. He smarts continually under two sources, which other animals never feel; anxiety, and listlessness in appetite, which make him weary of himself. He loves life, and yet he knows that he must die. If he enjoy some transient good, for which he is thankful to heaven, he suffers various evils, and is at last devoured by worms. This knowledge is his fatal prerogative. Other animals have it not. He feels it every moment rankling and corroding in his breast. Yet he spends the transient moment of his existence in diffusing the misery which he suffers; in cutting the throats of his fellow-creatures for pay; in cheating, and being cheated; in robbing, and being robbed; in serving, that he may command; and in repenting of all that he does. The bulk of mankind are nothing more than a crowd of wretches, equally criminal and unfortunate; and the globe contains rather carcasses than men. I tremble upon a review of this dreadful picture, to find that it implies a complaint against providence; and I wish that I had never been born!"

Such is the boasted happiness of unbelievers!

And though we should not go these lengths, yet if we forsake truth, by deviating materially from any of the great doctrines of the gospel, it will affect our peace. Error is the wandering of the mind, when it thinks without a guide; the issue of which is "stumbling upon the dark mountains." It is possible in such circumstances that the stupor of insensibility may be mistaken for the peace of God: but if the soul be once raised from its slumber, especially if it be the subject of any true religion, it will find itself miserable. As soon might we expect to find happiness in the mind of one who has lost his way, and

knoweth not whether he goeth, as in a mind that has deviated from evangelical truth.

CAUSES OF ERROR.

If truth be of this importance, it may be enquired, how are we to account for the great diversity of sentiment in the religious world? Whence is it that professing christians, even the wise and the good amongst them, should be so divided?

It certainly is not owing to any thing in christianity itself. This will be found, on the strictest enquiry, to be one consistent whole; and all its precepts tend to unity of judgment, as well as of affection. To this end were all the epistles addressed to the primitive churches. In some, the writers labour to establish them in the truth; in others, to reclaim them from error; in all to promote a holy unanimity in principle and practice.

Yet, if we look to fact, we find that the churches, even in the purest ages, were never free from error. It was beyond the power of the apostles, inspired as they were, effectually to guard them against it. Of this the afore-mentioned epistles to the Corinthians, the Galatians, and the Hebrews, are standing proofs. And in after ages things were much worse. Those principles which at first were but the bud, or at most the blade, now became the tall car, and produced a harvest of corruption and apostasy. The history of christianity from that day to this, is the history of one continued struggle between truth and error, the mind of Christ, and the reasonings of the flesh. Nor was this state of things unknown to the apostles: they saw "the mystery of iniquity begin to work" in their times, and by the spirit of inspiration foretold its progress. "In the latter times (said they) some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of demons—In the last days, perilous times shall come, in which men shall be lovers of their own selves; ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." And that, "as there were false prophets among the [jewish] people, so there should be false teachers among [christians] who would bring in damnable heresies,
even denying the Lord that bought them; and bring upon themselves swift destruction."

What shall we say then? Shall we attribute the multiform and discordant doctrines of past and present times to diversity of habits, educations, and connexions, to the various tastes and talents found amongst men, or to the frailty and imbecility of the human mind? These things may be allowed to have their influence; but it is not to them principally that the scriptures attribute the corruption of christian doctrine or worship.

There is an important difference between diversity and contrariety. The former belongs to men as men, which the latter does not. One man comprehends more of truth, another less; this has a talent for discovering one part of truth, and that another; but in all this there is nothing discordant, any more than in a diversity of features, or in the variegated face of the earth, which abounds in divers kinds of flowers, every one of which contributes to the beauty of the whole. It is not so with respect to truth and error, which are as opposite as right and wrong. True doctrines are the plants, and false doctrines the weeds of the church. They cannot both flourish in the same mind. The one must be rooted up, or the other will be overrun, and rendered unproductive.

The causes which the scriptures assign for the corruption of christian doctrine, are principally, if not entirely, of a moral nature. They represent evangelical truth as a holy doctrine, and as that which cannot be understood by an unholy mind. "The natural (or merely worldly wise) man, receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." They are "hid from the wise and prudent, and revealed unto babes;" and thus "it seemeth good in his sight," whose mind it is to abase the pride of man.† If the gospel had been "the wisdom of this world," the "spirit of this world" would have sufficed to understand it; and there would be no more errors concerning it, than what arise from the imbecility of the human mind on all other subjects; but it is not: it is the wisdom that is from

* 2 Thess. ii. 7. 1 Tim. iv. 1. 2 Tim. iii. 1, 2, 7. 2 Pet. ii. 1.
above, and therefore requires a state of mind suited to it; or, as the apostle expresseth it, that “we receive not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God, that we may know the things which are freely given to us of God.” Now this being the case, so far as we attempt to judge, preach, or write of the gospel, under the influence of mere worldly wisdom, or in any other than its own spirit, we are morally certain in some way or other to pervert it.

Here then are opened to our view three grand sources of error; namely, the numbers of unconverted or merely worldly-wise characters, who intrude themselves, or are intruded by others, into the christian ministry—the greater number of merely nominal christians, whose taste calls for anti-scriptural preaching—and the large portion of unsanctified wisdom found even in godly men.

First: The great number of unconverted ministers.—Far be it from me to judge of men otherwise than by what they manifest themselves to be. I abhor the spirit of our modern Antinomians, who would persuade us that they know good ministers from others, by a kind of spiritual physiognomy; but who, if the tree be known by the fruits, have much more reason to judge themselves. Yet the personal religion of many preachers must be allowed by charity itself to wear more than a suspicious appearance. Nor is it surprising that it should be so. If in the purest age of the church, when there were but few attractions for covetousness and ambition, there were “men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith;” men who had “the form of godliness, but denied the power thereof;” is it any wonder that there should be such in our times? And as the introduction of almost every error amongst the primitive christians is attributed to this sort of characters, it is reasonable to expect that things should still move on in the same direction.

An unrenewed person, whatever be his education, talents, or natural temper, can never fall in with christianity, as it is taught in the new testament. If, therefore, he occupy a station in the church, he will be almost certain to transform religion so as to suit himself. This, it is clear, was the grand source of the Romish apostasy. No sooner was christianity adopted by the state, than it became the interest of worldly men to profess it. Eccle-
mistical offices were soon filled, in a great degree, by unbelievers in disguise. The effect was, as might have been expected, the doctrine, worship, discipline, and spirit of the gospel, were gradually lost, and a system of corruption was substituted in their place.

This has been a source of departure from the truth down to the present times, and that, in different degrees, amongst all denominations of Christians. If we look into the establishments of Protestant Europe, we shall find that, in spite of oaths and subscriptions, devised in former ages for the security of orthodoxy, worldly men have a system of their own, and will explain their articles and creeds according to it. Or if we look out of established, wherever worldly men are admitted to the work of the ministry, we shall find things much the same. Some of the greatest perverters of the gospel, during the last century, have descended from pious parents, who, fond of the idea of bringing up their children to the public service of God, overlooked the necessity of personal religion, presuming, as it would seem, that God would in due time supply that defect. The consequence was, the young men, finding evangelical truth sit uneasily upon them, throw it off, and embraced a system more suited to the state of their minds.

Observing these things among men of education, many serious people have contracted a prejudice against learning itself; and have preferred the preaching of the most illiterate for the sake of a pure doctrine. But neither is this any security: for men of assurance and address, pretending to extraordinary light, and marvellous inspirations, will often obtrude themselves upon the people, and draw disciples after them, especially from amongst the unthinking and light-minded part of Christian professors. In them have the words of Peter been eminently fulfilled "Speaking great swelling words of vanity, they have allured, through the lusts of the flesh, those that for a while were escaped from them who live in error." Nor has their influence been confined to such characters. sincere people have frequently been misled by their specious pre-

* 2 Pet. ii. 18.
stances. When Judas, professing a solicitude for the poor, condemned an expression of love to Christ, as an unnecessary piece of wastefulness, he drew away the other disciples after him. In short, men who have not the spirit by which the gospel was dictated, will not cleave to it. Some may err on this side, and some on that; some having greater talents, may do greater injury to it, and others less; but all, in one way or other, will pervert it; and where this is the case, "many will follow their pernicious ways; and the way of truth," being confounded with them, "will be evil-spoken of."

Secondly: The great number of merely nominal christians.—In the present state of things, the bulk of mankind are not governed by principle, but by custom; following the course of this world, whatever direction it may take. In one country they are Heathens, in another Mahometans, and in another Christians: in other words, they are of no religion. The effect of this is, that a large proportion of ministers are certain to be nominated and chosen by men who have no taste for the searching, humbling, and holy doctrine of the gospel; but are utterly averse from it: and where this is the case, it requires but little discernment to perceive what will be the general tone of preaching. Even in congregational churches, if the people, or the leading individuals amongst them, be worldly minded, ambitious, or in any respect loose livers, they will not be at a loss to find preachers after their own heart. Thus error is propagated, and thus it was propagated from a very early period. "The time will come (said Paul to Timothy) when they will not endure sound doctrine; but, after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables."

Thirdly: The large portion of unsanctified wisdom found even in godly men.—"The wisdom of this world," as opposed to "the wisdom of God," is not confined to mere worldly men. The apostle, after speaking of spiritual men as "judging all things," and as "having the mind of Christ," adds, "And I, brethren, could not speak unto

* 2 Tim. iv. 3, 4.
you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal; even as unto babes in Christ.” And this, their carnality, is represented as rendering them unable to understand the great doctrines of Christianity, which are compared to “meat;” and as leading them to build upon the gospel foundation a mixture of “wood, and hay, and stubble;” all which shall be burnt up another day, though they themselves shall be saved.

There is a slowness of heart, even in good men, to believe what God hath revealed, especially if it clash with their pre-conceived ideas. Such was the state of mind of the apostles themselves, previous to the resurrection of their Lord; and such is the state of mind of great numbers amongst us. We often hear men in controversy talk of being open to conviction, and willing to retract their sentiments, if but fairly confuted; but such professions either mean but little, or at best indicate a great want of self-knowledge. Those who are the most open to conviction, will commonly suspect themselves the most, and of course will not be very forward in the use of such language. If there were not a “slowness of heart” both in receiving truth, and relinquishing error, a large proportion of our controversies would soon be at an end.

REASONS WHY ERROR IS PERMITTED.

The foregoing remarks may suffice to account for the prevalence of error, so far as man is concerned; but it may be farther enquired, Wherefore doth God permit it? Why is it that the beauty of the Christian Church is suffered to be marred, and its peace invaded by a succession of perpetual discords? This is an awful subject; and if we were left to our own conjectures upon it, it would be our wisdom to leave it to the great day, when all things will be made manifest; but we are not. The scriptures of truth inform us, that “there must needs be heresies, that they who are approved may be made manifest.”

All the influences to which we are exposed in the present life, are adapted to a state of probation, and to do us good or harm, according to the state of mind which we

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* 1 Cor. iv. 6, 7, 12, 15, 16. ii. 1, 2, 12—17.  
† 1 Cor. xi. 19.
possess. We are not only "fearfully made," but as fearfully situated. The evidence in favour of true religion is sufficient for a candid mind; but not for one that is disposed to cavil. If we attend to it simply to find out truth, and obey it, we shall not be disappointed; but if our souls be lifted up within us, the very rock of salvation will be to us a stone of stumbling. The Jews required a sign in their own way: "Let him come down from the cross, (said they) and we will believe him." 'If he had publicly risen from the dead, (say modern unbelievers) none could have doubted it.' Yet he neither came down from the cross, nor rose publicly from the dead; and let them say, if they please, he could not, and that all his miracles were the work of imposture. It may be our duty, as much as in us lies, to cut off occasion from them who desire occasion: but God often acts otherwise. They who desire a handle to renounce the gospel, shall have it. Thus it is that men are tried by false doctrine, and even by the immoralities of professing Christians.

The visible kingdom of Christ is a floor containing a mixture of wheat and chaff; and every false doctrine is a "wind," which he, whose fan is in his hand, makes use of to purge it. There is a great number of characters who profess to receive the truth, on whom, notwithstanding, it never sat easily. "Its holy and humbling nature gall their spirits. In such cases the mind is prepared to receive any representation of the gospel, however fallacious, that may comport with its desires: and being thus averse to the truth, God frequently in just judgment suffers the wind of false doctrine to sweep them away. Such is the account prophetically given of the chief instruments in the Romish apostasy. The introduction of that mystery of iniquity is thus described: "Whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness, in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness."*

* 2 Thess. ii. 9—12.
Not only is false doctrine permitted, that it may sweep away hypocritical characters, but the discordance which appears amongst the professors of Christianity is itself a temptation to many, and that in divers ways. Some who consider themselves as almost, if not altogether, infallible, are hereby furnished with a plea for intolerance and persecution. In this way it operated much in former ages, and a portion of it is still prevalent amongst us. 'You see (say they) whether this liberty of conscience willlead men. If they be left to themselves, and form their own notions of religion, there will be no end to their errors and divisions, and to the sects that will rise out of them.' Thus the catholics attempted to discredit the reformation; and thus some protestants have endeavoured to discredit congregational church-government, as fruitful of sects and divisions. But if either of them were required to prove that there is less error or opposition amongst themselves than amongst their neighbours, they might find it a difficult task. On one side men find it necessary either not to think at all, or to conceal their sentiments; on the other, they speak and write their minds with greater freedom: but things are what they are, whether they be avowed or not. He who persecutes men for their errors, may at last be found equally erroneous himself: but allowing that he is not, and that his creed is orthodox; yet is he far from being sound in the faith, in the scriptural sense of the words. He “knoweth not what manner of spirit he is of.” He may be willing to fight; but has yet to learn what are those weapons by which the soldiers of the Lamb are enabled to overcome.

Others, on the same ground, have rejected all religion. 'You cannot agree (say they) as to what is truth: settle it amongst yourselves, before you attempt to trouble us with it.' Very well: if you can satisfy your consciences with this evasion, do so. It will not avail you at death or judgment. You will then be reminded that you did not reason thus in things to which your hearts were inclined; but applied with all your powers, and used every possible mean to ascertain the truth for yourselves, and acted accordingly. On your own principles, therefore, will you be judged.

Others, who have not gone these lengths, have yet been
tempted to despair of finding out what is the true religion. * Amidst the opposition of opinion which continually presents itself before us, (say they) how are we, plain people, to judge and act? If you mean to intimate that it is vain for you to concern yourselves about it, that is the same as saying, it is vain to attempt any thing that is accompanied with difficulties, or to walk in any way that is attended with temptations; and this would lead you to stand still in other things as well as in religion. But if it be the real desire of your soul to know the right way, and walk in it, there is no reason to despair. Follow no man as your guide; but go to your table, and your God, and there decide the question. You need not say in your heart, Who shall ascend into heaven; or who shall descend into the deep! The word is nigh thee. . . . To read controversial books may, in many cases, be useful; but seldom, when it is done with a view to decide the great question, What is the right way to everlasting life? A book, as well as a sermon, may be the means of affording such direction. But when the mind is in a state of suspense, it is, beyond all comparison, the safest to consult the oracles of God. To launch into controversy, without having obtained satisfaction on the first principles of the doctrine of Christ, is to put to sea in a storm, without a rudder. One great reason why men are "carried about with divers and strange doctrines," is, their "hearts are not established with grace."† They have no principles of their own, and therefore are carried away with any thing that wears the appearance of plausibility.

But one of the worst inferences that are drawn from the discordant doctrines which abound in the world, is, that doctrine itself is of little or no account. As intolerance and bigotry, under the specious name of zeal, distinguished former ages; so sceptical indifference, under the specious names of candour, liberality, and moderation, distinguishes this. This is the grand temptation, perhaps, of the present times. It would seem as if men must either fight for truth with carnal weapons, or make peace with error; either our religious principles must be cognizable by human legislators, or they are neither good nor

* Rom. x. 6 - 9. † Heb. xiii. 9.
evil, and God himself must not call us to account for them; either we must call men masters upon earth, or deny that we have any master, even in heaven.

It is a favourite principle with unbelievers, and with many professing christians who verge towards them, that error not only has its seat in the mind, but that it is purely intellectual, and therefore innocent. Hence they plead against all church censures, and every degree of unfavourable opinion, on account of doctrinal sentiments, as though it were a species of persecution. But if the causes of error be principally moral, it will follow that such conclusions are as contrary to reason as they are to scripture.

The above remarks are far from being designed to cherish a spirit of bitterness against one another as men or as christians. There is a way of viewing the corruption and depravity of mankind, so as to excite bitterness and wrath, and every species of evil temper; and there is a way of viewing them, that, without approving or conniving at what is wrong, shall excite the tear of compassion. It does not become us to declaim against the wickedness of the wicked in a manner as if we expected grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles. But, while we prove ourselves the decided friends of God, to bear good-will to men. It becomes those who may be the most firmly established in the truth as it is in Jesus, to consider that a portion of the errors of the age, in all probability, attach to them; and though it were otherwise, yet they are directed to carry it benevolently towards others who may err: "In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God, peradventure, will give them repentance, to the acknowledging of the truth." *

Finally: There is an important difference between raising the foundation, and building upon that foundation a portion of wood, and hay, and stubble. It becomes us not to make light of either: but the latter may be an object of forbearance, whereas the former is not. With the enemies of Christ, we ought, in religious matters, to make no terms; but towards his friends, though in

* 2 Tim. ii. 25.
some respects erroneous, it behooves us to come as near as it is possible to do, without a degradation of principle. A truly christian spirit will feel the force of such language as the following, and will act upon it: "All that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours, grace be unto them, and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ - Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity!"