



T W O

DISCOURSES,

F I R S T,

Concerning the Nature of ERROR in
DOCTRINES merely Speculative.

S E C O N D,

Shewing that the DOCTRINE of the
TRINITY *is not* merely Speculative.



T W O
DISCOURSES,

The FIRST concerning the
NATURE OF ERROR
I N

Doctrines merely Speculative;

S H E W I N G,

That the Belief of such Doctrines may be required
of us as *necessary Terms* of Salvation; wherein also
the Case of *positive Institutions* is particularly considered.

The SECOND shewing that the

Doctrine of the TRINITY
is not *merely Speculative.*

In ANSWER to the ARGUMENTS of
Mr. SYKES and Mr. CHUB.

With a PREFACE, containing some Remarks
upon the *present Times*, particularly in Rela-
tion to the CLERGY.

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T H E

P R E F A C E.



T H E S E Discourses were intended, as the reader will easily perceive, only for an Introduction to another book. What induced me to venture them abroad by themselves was, the advice of several persons, for whose judgment I have the greatest regard. Had I consulted my own interest, worldly prudence would have discouraged me from appearing in defence of such unfashionable and unpopular principles. The enemies of Religion will certainly be offended at them; and it is an observation as obvious, as it is melancholly, that they have more zeal for Infidelity, than Believers usually shew in favour of the Advocates of their Faith. Numerous, and liberal even to profuseness are the friends of irreligion, whilst a religious, or really useful work can hardly find encouragement enough for the carrying it on. Yet, I hope, I shall

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shall always be ready to engage in the cause Religion, whenever I shall be thought capable of doing it any service, without seeking the favour, or dreading the displeasure of any man, or set of men. As I have but little to expect from their approbation, I have the less to fear from their resentments, my mean abilities and low station being too inconsiderable to give them any disturbance. As I am not likely to stand in their way to preferment, I am the more likely to escape their unjust aspersions. But the only concern of a wise and good man ought to be, the discharge of his duty in his proper station, leaving the event of things to God's providence, and expecting our reward at his good time.

THIS is the method, by which Christianity was first propagated, and by this we may best preserve any particular doctrine, or institution, when opposed. The primitive Christians did not prevail over the rage and fury of their enemies by the force of policy and artifice; by disguising, or concealing their faith; by silence and caution; but by a plain, and open, and undaunted profession of it. Let us imitate them in the innocency of their lives, in the plainness and simplicity of their manners, in their courage and constancy, and we shall as certainly succeed; tho' not, perhaps, in the advancement of our selves, yet in the triumph of our cause over all gain-sayers.

To cut off any occasion, from them who may seek occasion, to misrepresent my meaning, I must declare

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declare plainly, that I do not intend to draw a parallel between the present times, and the times of the first Christians. Christianity, God be praised, is not under persecution with us, but enjoys the protection of the Civil power, under the government of a most gracious and religious Prince. Yet I will venture to observe, that, in one respect, the present condition of some of its teachers, bears too near a resemblance to that of its primitive ones: They were represented as enemies to Cæsar, though they published a religion the most friendly to government, and in their doctrine and behaviour were the most dutiful subjects. Many of the Clergy of the Church of England are traduced, by such as want to engross all publick favour to themselves, as enemies to the present happy establishment, tho' they have pledged their allegiance by the most solemn oaths; tho' they offer up their constant prayers for the prosperity of his Majesty, and his most illustrious Family; and omit no proper opportunity of testifying their duty. But by whom are we thus injuriously reproached? not only by professed enemies, for then we might have expected it, and could have born it, but by brethren, of the same religion, of the same communion, of the same order. And why are we thus treated? not for writing against any part of the established religion, the best support of the crown, but for defending some particular points of the religion of our Country, and of our King; of that Faith,
of

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of which his Majesty is the Defender ; and of that Church, of which he is the Supreme head.

BUT it is as dangerous to write against particular persons, as against particular doctrines. Certain favourite writers of a party find it convenient to express an uncommon zeal for the government, and then it becomes a very disloyal thing to answer them, let their principles, or the subject of their books, be what they will. Whoever writes against them, weakens their credit ; whoever weakens their credit, lessens their capacity of serving his Majesty ; and whoever does That, is in the interest of the Pretender.

THERE is another crime still more heinous than either of the former ; and that is, to vote, or make interest, at an election, against any Candidate who is strongly recommended. Upon such occasions there are always officious spies to give in the names of the disaffected ; sentence is immediately pronounced upon them ; the Anathema goes forth ; like Cain they have a mark of infamy and disgrace fixed upon them ; Tories and Jacobites they must be all the days of their life, resembling the condition of those forlorn wretches, described by Milton, to whom hope never comes that comes to all.

PRIVATE Judgment is allowable in Religion, but not in Politicks. You may, as freely as you please, judge of the terms of a Communion, but not of the qualifications of a Candidate, without offending some powerful, tyrannical neighbour.

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bour. You may dissent from the received opinions, and from the established Church, and yet continue the most loyal-Subject, but a tender, scrupulous conscience will not justify a Separation from your political Guides at an Election. The true reason of all this inconsistency is obvious; our religious conduct does not affect their Interest, but they can make a Merit of our Vote to serve the ends of their ambition and avarice.

WHAT real advantage can be done, or intended, to his Majesty, and his Government, when Fellow-subjects stigmatize and oppress one another, I am not capable of understanding. One thing I know; that the Master of a Family would not think his affairs the more likely to prosper because the servants were continually quarrelling, and abusing, and beating one another. We are then serving the Government when we are endeavouring to cultivate and improve a good understanding between his Majesty and all his Subjects, and a good agreement amongst our selves. Whoever acts otherways is influenced by Self-interest, and not any regard to the Publick. But the pretence for this practice is as weak, as the practice it self is unjust and unchristian. The design, it seems, is to bring us over. To bring us over! to what? to the interest of the King? Let them make it appear that the Tory Clergy (as they are reproachfully stiled) or their friends, give the least colour for an imputation of Disloyalty. One of

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of their Oracles has pronounced the interest of the Pretender to be so inconsiderable that it is too scandalous a subject to be mentioned. We readily agree with them; and make this observation upon their open confession; that so inconsiderable an interest, is too scandalous a subject to be made the pretence for cruelty and oppression. I find, according as occasion requires, they can make the Majority of the Nation dwindle into a small Junto, or a few inconsiderable people become a formidable Multitude.

Is it the interest of a Ministry that is meant? I hope we shall always pay all proper regard to persons employed by his Majesty, but it is highly agreeable to the Duty of good Subjects, as well as the Liberty of Englishmen, to vote for any Candidate, whom we believe to be best qualified to serve his King and Country, tho' we vote against the inclinations of a great Man, or a number of great Men.

If they mean to bring us over to their own Party; it is a most ridiculous and weak design, because it would frustrate the only end of Party Distinctions, for then there would be no manner of plea for excluding one set of men from their proper Share of publick Encouragement, for the Sake of countenancing another.

*I WILL not presume to give my advice, but I may, with decency, express my Wishes, in respect to the conduct of my Brethren. I hope no unjust reproaches, or hardships, will either deter
any*

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any of us from a steady defence of the established Church, or provoke us to withdraw any part of our sincere affection for the established Government. However fashionable it may be with some, and how useful soever it may be to them, to vilify good Church-men, our Kings of England have always found those men their best friends, who were the truest friends to the Religion, and the Church of England; and whatever a few weak, or prejudiced people may think, on the other hand, it is as impossible to be true friends to the Church, without a firm adherence to the constitution in the State. If we persevere in acting uniformly and agreeably to our principles, we shall defeat our enemies, at least, in one particular, by preserving our Integrity; and by degrees we can scarce fail of approving our innocency to our Governours in Church and State; especially to our several Diocesans, who have the immediate inspection of our behaviour, and from whom we reasonably expect, not only Justice and Protection from the wicked insinuations of designing Men, but every instance of paternal affection and encouragement, without any regard to distinctions so destructive to Religion and Learning.

BUT the most effectual means of keeping us constant to our duty will be, to set as loose as may be to worldly Interest. When once ambition and avarice become the predominant Passions, we are in great danger of being more intent upon the End, than upon the Means; more concerned for the success of our political projects, than for the
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honour of God, and the Salvation of Mankind. Where our Treasure is, there will our heart be also. Where our heart is, thither will the bent of our actions, and designs run. He that is of the World, his thoughts will be employed upon worldly views. He, whose hope is full of immortality, will be more careful to deserve preferment by a conscientious discharge of his duty, than to get it, by forming Schemes, and studying the tempers of men, and the arts of address.

As to those Gentlemen (for some such there certainly are) who keep up party names and distinctions, for political purposes, let them, if they can, reconcile their conduct to their profession. Our blessed Master came into the world under the indearing character of the Prince of Peace. His Gospel is stiled the Gospel of Peace. His Example, and his Precepts, recommended every thing that is beneficent, every thing that is kind, every thing that is compassionate, every thing that is generous. And shall we, his Ministers, and Dispencers of his word; shall we foment divisions and animosities? shall we promote malice and hatred? shall we practise cruel and oppressive methods? By the death of Christ the wall of enmity between Mankind was broken down; and shall we be the forwardest and the busiest to rebuild it? His precious blood was the cement to unite the whole world in one bond of brotherly love; and shall we contract all our good offices, and all our good wishes, within the narrow limits of a Party? God forbid. Amen.



DISCOURSE

CONCERNING

The NATURE of ERROR
in *Speculative* Points.

WHEN I determined to engage in the publication of the history of *Arianism*, and *Socinianism*, I thought it a seasonable opportunity for publishing a discourse concerning *doctrinal* points in Religion, in answer to the loose and pernicious notions of those who maintain the *necessary innocency* of *Error*, or *Ignorance* in such points. For, tho' they seem to allow the necessity of believing certain articles of *Faith*, yet they will not allow that matters of *Doctrine*, or *Speculation* can be of That number. What points they will allow to be *fundamental* articles of Faith, they do not offer to declare, but by *doctrinal*, or *speculative* ones, they understand those *mysterious doctrines* of *Christianity* relating to the

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divine nature and manner of existence, and the method of our Redemption by *Jesus Christ*; such as the doctrine of the ever-blessed Trinity, and several others, which I forbear to mention here, as having no immediate relation to my subject. This important doctrine, tho' plainly revealed in the *New Testament*, and commonly maintained in the first and purer ages of Christianity as generally necessary to salvation, is yet rejected, because inconsistent, as is pretended, with the principles of *reason* and *philosophy*. Many unsuccessful attempts having been made by the *Socinians*, and *Arians* to defend their heresies from *scripture*, and *antiquity*, they have been constantly projecting new schemes for the support of them. Among others, the doctrine of the *innocency* of errors in points of *speculation* has been of late, tho' not invented, yet more fully and particularly enlarged upon, and digested into a regular scheme. However true the doctrine of the *Trinity* may be in itself, or how clearly soever it may be revealed in *Scripture*, yet, as it is a matter of *speculation* only, the knowledge and belief of it, it seems, do not affect our *salvation*. It may serve, like mere *philosophical* and *metaphysical* questions, to employ the thoughts of the learned or inquisitive; it may serve for an amusement in a leisure hour, or as a trial of ingenuity; as an opportunity of shewing a great deal of reading, a rational head, or a critical sagacity; but the subject, as to the belief

belief of it, is, in its own nature, as indifferent as any *mathematical* truth, and therefore cannot possibly be a *necessary* and *fundamental* article of *Faith*.

THE Foundation upon which this objection is built, is not good, as will appear afterwards when we come to consider the nature and consequences of the *Christian Mysteries*, especially the most important Mystery of the *Trinity*. It is not so purely *speculative* and *abstracted* in its nature, as they would insinuate, but is immediately connected with *practice*, as requiring certain external actions, and those too of the essence of true Religion, to be performed in consequence of it; and as having a necessary influence upon the mind, in exciting and improving *religious dispositions*. Indeed it seems to me an impossible Supposition that any truth, immediately respecting the nature of *God* and his most wonderful and gracious dispensations in the *redemption* of Mankind, should be *speculative* only; if *speculation* be opposed, as it must be, to any influence upon the *religious dispositions of the mind*. But, previous to this inquiry, I thought it might be of great use to examine the Case of *doctrinal* or *speculative* points in Religion, how far they are *indifferent* in their nature, and, as such, incapable of being made *terms* and *conditions* of *Salvation*: For, to such a persuasion it is owing, that a great number of Christians neglect the consideration of the

essential doctrines of their Religion. They are prepossessed with a Notion that such matters do not at all concern them, and then rationally enough determine not to spend their time upon Subjects of no consequence to their real happiness, and as little entertaining to their taste and humour. But if we can convince unbelievers, that, *were* the articles of *Christian Faith* purely *speculative*, the belief of them might, nevertheless, be required of us by God as necessary to a participation of the benefits of *Christianity*, we have gained one considerable point upon them, by removing an objection that lay in the way to a proper enquiry. As they will not be persuaded to bestow much pains in inquiring into the truth of useless doctrines, the first proper step towards their conviction seems to be to shew, that the belief of such doctrines may be of the last importance to their eternal happiness, because required by God, however *indifferent* in their own nature. They may then the more easily be persuaded to enquire whether God has revealed them, and required the belief of them; and such an enquiry will as naturally shew them of what importance the doctrines, in dispute between us, are to the *whole Christian scheme*, and effective of true *Christian dispositions*.

BUT the main reason why I thought an enquiry into the nature of *doctrinal* or *speculative* points seasonable is, because the manner of defending the prevalent notion concerning the *innocency*

innocency of such *Errors*, has led the abettors of it into very dangerous principles, destructive of *all Faith* and *Morals*. Indeed *modern free thinking*, in respect to *Religion*, resolves at last into *Deism*, but in nothing more manifestly than in the present dispute; tho' I am willing to hope, the consequences are not seen by every one who maintains the principles from whence they flow. This, however, tho' it may, and ought to incline us to judge charitably of the intention of the authors of *heretical* notions, yet it ought not to lessen our industry and zeal in endeavouring to prevent their pernicious effects upon the Faith of others.

I SHALL therefore proceed to the question in dispute, in stating and prosecuting of which, I shall have particular regard to a celebrated performance, written professedly upon the subject, under the title of *The Innocency of Error asserted and vindicated*. This author, as he himself declares, has *taken the utmost care and pains to go to the bottom of it*, and his friends, if we may judge from *their* avowed character of it, and *his* publick encouragement from them, espouse the principles laid down in his book, and seem to think, he has succeeded very well in his design; so that in confuting *him* I may fairly be supposed to have confuted the general sentiments of the *party*. What *care* the author may have taken, he himself best knows; but it is more than my *opinion*, that he has not gone to the
bottom

bottom of the question, but only made it more difficult for others to do it for him.

ERROR, he says, p. 3. *is an Assent of the Mind to a proposition as true, which is not so. If Error extends no further than the Mind, 'tis what I call SIMPLE Error: If a man proceeds upon this false bottom to regulate his practice, such Error is then call'd a practical one; of the former of which he thinks it clear and beyond dispute, that they are not punishable. By simple Errors then he means such as are purely speculative, in opposition to such as have an influence upon practice. But this distinction of Errors into speculative and practical is often repeated.*

P. 12. *If we guard against evil practices, if we take care that our actions are but regular and agreeable to the laws of Christ, I do not see what harm can ensue; from notions, he means; for he had observed, a little before, that God will not damn us for our notions.*

AGAIN, p. 16. *For any one to imagine it zeal for God to persecute men for Errors in Speculation, what is it but to betray an ignorance of God and his attributes?*

AGAIN, p. 27. *Errors in PURELY SPECULATIVE matters are not punishable.*

AGAIN, p. 29. *If Errors of the Understanding are criminal, let all be so, and punish philosophical ones as well as theological. I need not cite any more passages, the abovementioned being abundantly sufficient to prove, that by simple*

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ple Errors he means in these places *speculative* or *doctrinal* ones; Errors concerning such things as are barely the objects of our *Understanding*, without having any influence upon our *actions*, and consequently that he grounds the *innocency* of such Errors upon their *speculative nature*.

THUS the terms *doctrinal*, or *speculative*, and *simple*, are used promiscuously, as equivalent in their signification. Yet, at the 27th page, when he recapitulates the *particulars* of his discourse, he makes them signify two different kinds of Error.

1. 'Tis evident, I believe, that *simple Errors*, let them spring from what cause they will, are not punishable.

2. That *Errors in matters of speculation* are not punishable.

WHERE he particularly distinguishes them as different and distinct from each other, tho' in his *definitions* of *simple*, and *speculative* Error, and afterwards in the course of his arguments, he considered them as one and the same. Sometimes, you see, *simple* Error, or Error *simply* considered, is used in the same sense with *speculative* or *doctrinal* Error; at other times those terms signify two distinct sorts of Error. Which mistake I have not observed; for the sake of finding fault, but in order to render the following discourse the more clear, by fixing determinately the meaning of our terms, and the true state of the question.

ON the same account I am obliged to observe another mistake, at the 14th page, which quite alters the question, by placing the *innocency* of Error, not in its *simple* or *speculative* nature, in opposition to *practical* Errors, but in men's not *justifying* their *practical* Errors. His words are these, *Such as err, and justify their practical Errors.* And again, p. 22. *The fourth and last, and only bad sort of erroneous persons are, such as err, and practise according to, and justify* (he puts it in *Italick*) *their practical Errors*; which is removing the stress of the cause to a quite different point from that, whereon he had placed it before; to a point, not only different, but utterly unintelligible. If an erroneous conscience obliges us to act in consequence of it, it can be no crime to justify what we are obliged in conscience to perform. In short, the crime does not lie in *justifying* our obedience to the dictates of conscience, but in not using all the proper means to inform our conscience aright. Surely nature has given this writer, or he has happily acquired, such a facility of writing obscurely, that his meaning will soon become as great a secret to himself as it is generally to the reader.

ANOTHER remarkable instance of his inaccuracy in stating his notion is, his adding *involuntary* to his definition of *simple* or *speculative* Errors. I must transcribe the whole passage to do him and myself justice, tho' I have already cited part of it. P. 3. *If Error extends*

no farther than the mind, 'tis what I call simple Error. If a man proceeds upon this false bottom to regulate his practice, such Error is then called practical. How far this latter sort of Errors (practical ones) falls under the cognizance of man, or of a much higher tribunal, that of God, will appear from the ensuing discourse. In order to which 'tis clear beyond dispute, that simple and involuntary Errors are not, nor can be punishable.

THERE can be no dispute but *simple Errors*, or Errors confined to the mind, and *simple and involuntary Errors*, are here used as signifying the same thing. Our author has observed, that writers ought to proceed *step by step*; I wish he had followed his own advice, for he has made too much haste, and taken two steps at once, which is indeed a very unsafe way of proceeding.

1. *Simple and involuntary* cannot possibly be *equivalent* terms, and therefore ought not to have been joined together in his *definition* of *simple Errors*.

2. BUT he may say, that *simple and involuntary* are here so annexed, that whatever Error is *simple* must necessarily, from the nature of it, be *involuntary*; and consequently, tho' they are not *equivalent* in their *signification*, they *infer* one another.

BE it granted, for argument sake, that *all simple Error* must be *involuntary*, yet *involuntary* should not have been added to *simple* in a *definition* of *simple Errors*, where nothing should

be inserted but what is *peculiar* to the thing *defined*, in order to distinguish it from all others of a different nature. Now the *peculiar* nature of *simple Errors* consists, as he all along supposes, in their *being confined to the mind*, in opposition to such as influence *practice*. This is the *ground* of his whole scheme; and the proper *foundation*, upon which he ought to build the *innocency* of such Errors, is, the *speculative nature* of them. If it follows from the *nature* of *speculation* that Errors in *such* points *must* be *involuntary*, let the *consequence* be deduced regularly from the *premises*, but not made part of the *definition* or *proposition* itself.

3. *Simple Errors* are no more *involuntary* in their own nature, than *practical* ones, nor *practical* ones any more necessarily *voluntary* than *simple* ones. Certainly a man may assent to a *speculative* proposition *as true*, which is *not* so, thro' his *own* fault, thro' *obstinacy*, thro' *neglect* and *carelessness*; as he may likewise be mistaken in his opinion concerning *practical* truths, for want of *ability*, or *opportunity*, or by means of other causes which he has allowed, and endeavoured to prove, to be sufficient to render Errors innocent. But these things will be considered afterwards, when I come to examine particularly his arguments in proof of the *innocency* of *simple Errors*; from whence, if he proves any thing, he proves too much, *viz.* that *practical* Errors are *equally innocent*, because

because *equally involuntary*; and that Errors concerning the truth of the *facts* contained in the Gospel are no more punishable than Errors about the *mysterious doctrines* of it. At present I only observe, that, by placing the *criminal* or *innocent* nature of Error in its being *voluntary* or *involuntary*, without regard to any other circumstance, he destroys his own scheme, the design of which is to ascribe innocency particularly to *simple* or *speculative* Errors, by way of distinction from *practical* ones. He says, the only punishable Errors are *involuntary* ones. And who ever said otherwise? But the question is not, whether *involuntary* Errors are *punishable*, but only concerning *speculative* Errors as *opposed* to *practical*. Now, how does he undertake to prove the *innocency* of *speculative* Errors? Why, by saying, that *if a man does but take care of his actions, that they are good and regular, and for his notions let him but use common prudence and discretion, and a God of infinite goodness will not be so rigid a task-master as to require brick without straw.* He proves the *innocency* of *notions*, as *opposed* to *practice*, by a circumstance that will make *actions* as *innocent* as *notions*. *Notions*, he says, are not *punishable*. And why so? Because God *will not require brick without straw.* Neither will he require *impossibilities* in respect to our *actions*, any more than in respect to our *notions*. . . Whatever is *involuntary* must be *innocent*, and therefore *involuntary notions* cannot be

be *punishable*. But all this time he ascribes no *particular innocency* to *speculative Errors* in opposition to *practical* ones, because he places it in a circumstance that will render them *both* equally innocent. I am afraid the reader is tired with so much tedious trifling, but I thought it absolutely necessary towards a clear and full view of the question before us, to settle the true state of it, by freeing it from those perplexities in which this author has involved it.

THE question then (to use our author's own words, as we find them at *p. 29*) is concerning *some Notions or Speculations about the blessed Trinity, or such mysteries of Christianity*. Our author asserts, that Errors about *such* points are *not punishable*, because *notions* or *speculations* are, in their own nature, *innocent*, as having no influence upon *practice*. This question necessarily infers another, tho' our author has taken no notice of it, *viz.* whether the doctrine of the *Trinity*, or other *mysteries of Christianity*, be doctrines *purely notional* or *speculative*. For, otherwise, we may grant the truth of his proposition in respect to the innocency of Error in *speculative* points, and yet deny the innocency of Error concerning the doctrine of the *Trinity*, or other *mysteries of Christianity*. But I shall now confine myself to an enquiry into the *necessary innocency* of *notions* and *speculations* in *religious* matters; wherein I shall examine the several arguments brought in support of this favourite scheme.

THE first thing offered by way of proof, we find at the beginning of the last paragraph of the 3d page, in these words, *because in the perceptions of the mind men are perfectly passive.*

THIS argument, tho' the author, I dare say, did not perceive it, will equally render *all* Errors innocent, the mind being equally *passive* in those perceptions, upon which we ground our judgments in *practical* truths, as in *speculative* ones; and this is the very same argument which is usually urged against *free will*. We *act* in consequence of our *judgment*, and our judgment is made in consequence of our *perceptions*; and therefore, if, in *speculative* truths, the agreement or disagreement of the terms of a proposition *appears necessarily* to the mind, and the mind *judges according* as things appear true or false, the progress of the mind is the same in the judgments which it makes concerning *practical* truths; and so our errors concerning *practical* truths are as *involuntary*, and consequently as *unpunishable*, as *speculative* Errors.

THE same consequence will follow in respect to the belief of the *Christian Religion* in general, or of any particular fact or facts, upon which our belief of *Christianity* is founded; the mind, according to our author, must be *passive* in its *perceptions*, and *passive* in its *judgments*: It is not in any man's power to determine how the evidence for the truth of those facts shall *appear*, or whether he shall *judge according* as things

things appear; consequently, any Error respecting the truth of *Christianity* is as *innocent* as any Error in our *notions* or *speculations* concerning the *Trinity*, &c. Thus effectually; tho' unwarily, docs our author destroy, not only *revealed Religion*, but even *Morality* itself, by rendering us *necessary*, and, if *necessary*, *unaccountable* beings. But I need not urge this any farther; our author, and his friends, if they be friends to Religion, will readily give up the argument, or shew how the mind is *passive* in its perceptions and judgments concerning *speculative* points, and *free* in its perceptions and judgments of *practical* truths; *passive*, when it perceives and judges of *notions* and *speculations* about the *Trinity*, and other *mysterious doctrines* of Christianity; *free* when it perceives and judges of the *speculative* evidence for the truth of *Christianity* itself.

As this is a matter of great importance to *human Liberty*, and to *Morality*, I shall endeavour to give a true state of it. I agree with the author of the *Innocency of Error*, that the mind is *passive*, as in its *sensations*, so likewise in its *perceptions*, not only of *speculative*, but of *practical* truths; but it is not passive in its *judgments*. The mind receives the ideas, which offer themselves, as they are, and which cannot possibly be received otherways. *Perception* is *necessarily* what it is, and consequently always infallibly true. A man cannot be deceived in what he
perceives.

perceives, any more than he can be in what he *sees, hears, or feels*. Things must appear to the mind just as they offer themselves to it; if the *Understanding*, which is the *perceptive* faculty of the mind, be in a proper condition to receive objects, and the mind applies itself properly for such a reception, things will appear, as they really are in themselves; if the intellectual faculty be naturally defective, or if the mind be not sufficiently attentive, either thro' carelessness, prepossession, or any other means, things may appear different from what they are; yet, in both cases things appear to the mind, whether truly or falsely, always as they are offered to it. Just as it is in respect to our *senses*; *sensations* are excited *necessarily*; objects must appear as they are presented. If, for instance, the organ of sight be in its natural disposition, a proper object, at a due distance, thro' a proper medium, will appear to the mind as it really is in nature; but if the organ in itself be any ways defective, or if the object be at too great a distance, or seen thro' a false medium, things will not appear in their true shape and colour: yet still, be the appearances true or false, they must be such as they are offered. But then, as in the exercise of our *senses*, things do not always appear to be what they really are (which appearances are yet necessarily such as they are presented to the mind) the mind is *free* to *judge* or *determine* within itself whether those appearances be true or
false,

false, till it has fully considered the matter, so likewise is it in respect to the *perception* of *intellectual* objects; tho' they will appear to the mind such as they offer themselves, yet the *judgment*, or *determination*, which the mind makes concerning the truth of those appearances, is *free*. If, for instance, our author's performance has fallen into the hands of any persons, who read without attention; without a capacity for such subjects, or with a strong inclination to favour his scheme, it is possible that to such persons his arguments, weak and obscure as they are, may appear strong and clear; and, while their incapacity, inattention, or strong prejudices continue, his arguments will necessarily appear to them such as they offer themselves; but they are under no *necessity* of *judging* his arguments to be as strong and clear, as they at first appeared to be; they may *suspend* their *judgment* till they have attentively examined the force of them, as also the state of their own heart, whether they be not under the influence of *party prejudice* and *passion*, and whether the subject be suited to their capacities and habit of thinking. That the mind has actually a liberty of *suspending* its *judgment* or *determination* concerning the truth of its *perceptions*, and that in many instances it can forbear making *any judgment* at all, is what every man, that attends to the operations of his own mind, must experience in himself, tho' there may be some insuperable difficulties in our

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conceptions concerning *free-will*. We are inwardly conscious of such a freedom; our consciousness is a thing wherein we cannot be mistaken, any more than we can be mistaken in any other *simple sensation*. We may as well dispute whether we really feel any painful or pleasing sensations, as whether we do really experience a power of attending or not attending to the consideration of any subject, of judging or not judging about it. Our author obliged me to make this digression about *free-will*, because his argument, drawn from the *passiveness* of the mind in its *perceptions*, destroys the notion of *agency* in us. I shall conclude this head with a short observation upon another mistake of his, in stiling *speculative Errors*, Errors of the *judgment*; tho' in this mistake he has the good luck to be kept in countenance by Dr. *Whitby*. I remember, in his notes upon the *Epistles*, speaking of the *essential* doctrines of Christianity, the Doctor observes, that *matters of judgment* were not in the number of *Fundamentals*. I presume (for he does not explain himself) he means, with our author, some *notions*, or *speculations*, about the *Trinity*, or other *mysterious* doctrines. But what an absurd manner of speaking is this? It supposes that *some* Errors are not Errors of the judgment. What are they then? Or what is Error, but a false *judgment* or *determination* of the mind concerning the truth of our *perceptions*? *All* Errors must relate to the *judgment*, and to

that only. Our author speaks also of Errors of the *Understanding*; where, by *Understanding* he must mean either the *judgment*, or the *perceptive* faculty, both which I have already explained. He seems to confound the *Judgment*, the *Understanding*, and *Perception* together; whereas *perception* is previous to the *judgment*, and the foundation of it. The *perceptive* faculty of the mind does not properly *perform any operations*, but receives *impressions*, internal notices of things, as the bodily eye receives impressions from external objects; but the *judgment* belongs to the *will*, which implies *action*; it is an act of the mind, determining concerning those notices which appear to the *perceptive* faculty.

HIS next argument (tho' he calls it the fifth, having divided one into three, or four, all of them resolving into the *involuntary* nature of *speculative* Error) is at the beginning of the last paragraph of the 7th page, and is only the consequence of the former argument. *Error*, he says, *cannot be punishable, because we cannot repent of Error*; where, by *repenting* he does not mean *retracting* an Error, but explains himself after this manner: *A man can have no sting of Conscience, no remorse, no self-condemning notions, for having been in an Error, unless it has affected his actions*; which, at the bottom of the page, he proves thus: *As 'tis a contradiction to be fully persuaded of any point, and repent of it at the same time, 'twill follow that Error cannot be repented of.*

of. The gentleman shewed some judgment at the end of his book, when he put in a caveat against *carping at words*, for a captious reader may frequently take advantage of the impropriety of his expressions. I guess, that by *Error*, in this last passage, he means *speculative Error*, and not *Error in general*, because, not only the preceding passage, but many other places, and even his whole scheme, expressly limit the signification to such Errors only ; but hasty readers will unavoidably be led into mistakes by such writers. But, I presume, his argument, when properly expressed, must run thus:

Men cannot be punished for what they cannot repent of, or be sorry for :

They cannot repent of, or be sorry for having been in speculative Errors :

Therefore they cannot be punished for having been in speculative Errors.

THE first, or major proposition, *viz.* that *men cannot be punished for what they cannot repent of, or be sorry for*, is, in some sense, true, but not under all circumstances ; because their incapacity to repent may be the effect of an obduracy proceeding from a wilful habit of sinning ; but that *men cannot repent of, or be sorry for having been in speculative Errors*, is the point disputed, and which our author proves in a most extraordinary manner. I shall once more put his argument into the form of a *sylogism*, that, if possible, he may see the fallacy of it.

If a man cannot be fully persuaded of any point, and repent of it at the same time, he cannot repent of, or be sorry for having been formerly in a speculative Error:

But a man cannot be fully persuaded of any point, and repent of it at the same time:

Therefore a man cannot repent of, or be sorry for, having been formerly in a speculative Error.

I HAVE added *formerly*, because *have been* signifies the *time past*; from whence the reader will easily see a double defect in this argument. For, 1st, tho' our author and his friends cannot *be fully persuaded of any point, and repent of it at the same time*, they may, and I hope they will, live to be convinced of their Error; and, *after* their conviction, they may *repent* and be *sorry* for having entertained and so industriously propagated it.

2^{dly}, THOUGH to be *fully persuaded* of any truth, and to *repent* of such persuasion at the *same time*, is an impossibility; yet to be *fully persuaded* of a truth, and to be *punishable* for the belief of such a truth, are very consistent things, because it may be his own fault that he is so fully persuaded.

BUT his argument, were there any force in it, would prove *practical* Errors as innocent as *speculative* ones. For, if a man be fully *persuaded*, tho' *erroneously*, of the lawfulness, or unlawfulness of any *action*, it is impossible he should

should be so *fully persuaded*, and *repent* of that action during the continuance of such a persuasion; and, if he cannot *repent* of it, he cannot, in this writer's opinion, be *punished* for it. Either the consequence is good in respect to every instance of persuasion, or in none at all. This is the usual unhappiness of our author's reasoning; but here he has been at some pains to confute himself. *A man*, says he, *p. 7. can have no self-condemning notions for having been under a mistake, unless it has affected his actions.* For,—what would any man expect should follow? Something, no doubt, in proof of his assertion; instead of which, he not only proves a different proposition, but one destructive of the distinction which he had made between *speculative* and *practical* Errors; shewing, that *both* are equally innocent. *For*, says he, *Error being a mistake of the judgment, it must direct and guide our actions as much as truth itself.* Now the *sway of truth is, by directing our actions according to our judgment; and if That be misinformed, or misguided, the effect must be the same as of truth, as flowing from the same principle.* If then an *erroneous* judgment must direct and guide our *actions* as much as a *well informed* one, we can no more *repent* of such actions, than of mere *notions* or *speculations*, which have no influence upon our *actions*.

THESE are the only arguments which are offered in this performance to prove the *innocency*

innocency of speculative Errors, as distinguished from practical ones, viz.

1. That *speculative Errors* are *involuntary*.

2. That we cannot *repent* of such Errors.

BUT at the 2d page of the Preface, which is prefixed to the second Edition of his book, by way of defence or vindication of it, he gives us another reason why *speculative Errors* cannot be *punishable, viz.*

That the evil lies not in them, strictly speaking, but in that peculiar frame and disposition of mind which tends to betray men into them.

THIS reason is urged by another *popular* writer (Mr. *Chubb*) in a discourse concerning *persecution*: a writer less obscure and intricate in the manner of stating his notions, but equally opiniated and self-sufficient, without a proper foundation to support such an opinion of himself. Whether these two writers fell naturally into the same way of thinking, or whether Mr. *Chubb* condescended to be beholden to our author, the argument, upon examination, might serve Mr. *Chubb's* purpose as little as it does *this gentleman's*; but at present I am only to consider it in respect to the innocency of *speculative Errors*. And he could not possibly have thought of a more unfortunate reason; it undeniably proves that *speculative* and *practical Errors* are *equally punishable*. For, if the *evil* of any Error lies wholly in the *frame or disposition of mind which occasions it, speculative Errors* of any kind may

may sometimes, and often are, occasioned by an *evil frame and disposition of mind*, and consequently, according to our author, are *punishable*. *Philosophers* frequently take up erroneous opinions, and continue in them thro' *pride* and *self-conceit*, or thro' a *spirit of opposition*; such a *frame and disposition* of mind is undoubtedly *evil*, and, according to his argument, every erroneous opinion occasioned by them is likewise evil. Thus again *practical* Errors are not always owing to an *evil frame and disposition*, but to want of *ability*, or *opportunity* of enquiry: Wherever, then, the *frame and disposition* of mind, from whence *practical* Errors arise, is *innocent*; such Errors our author is obliged, upon his own principles, to acquit of any guilt, tho' the confession destroys his whole scheme, the distinction between *speculative* and *practical* Errors in respect to their *innocency*.

'Tis time now (to use our author's own words once more upon this occasion) *to look back and view the ground we have gone over*. I have taken the liberty to alter the latter part of the expression; for, tho' to *look back* and view the ground we *stand upon*, as he expresses himself, may be possible, as far as I know, yet it is not a proper way of speaking. But to borrow the metaphor without criticising on the phrase. Upon a review, I see, we have travelled over a great deal of ground, thro' many blind and almost unpassable roads of absurdity and self-contradiction,
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and are at last arrived at the very spot from whence we set out. If this be our author's cautious way of *proceeding step by step* in a dispute, it brings to my mind the story of a person who divided *Christian runners* into three sorts, the last of which *stood still*. He has said, and unsaid, or said nothing to the purpose. His arguments prove nothing, too much; or something foreign to the question. Not one argument is advanced respecting the innocency of *speculations*, or *notions* in particular, as distinguished from *practical* truths, tho' That was confessedly the design of his book, but only such as either prove *all Errors innocent*, or *all punishable*. I shall therefore try to go, if not to *the bottom* of this question, yet a little farther into it than he, or his fellow-labourers, seem to me to have done.

WHEN *Speculations*, or *Notions*, as being *confined to the mind*, are opposed to *practical* truths, such as have an influence upon our *actions*, they do not mean *any* external action whatsoever. For *action*, as action, is no more *criminal* or *punishable*, than *Error* or *Thought*, considered absolutely *as such*. Our *external actions*, considered in *themselves*, are like the motions of any other piece of inanimate matter, which is actuated by some other being; and they are criminal, or innocent, only as they are directed by the *soul*, which is an *intelligent agent*. It does not therefore follow that an Error is punishable,

punishable, because it has a connection with *practice*, considering practice *simply* as an *external action*, because action, *as such*, is as *indifferent* in its nature as *absolute thought*; and, consequently, every argument that proves the necessary innocency of *simple* or *speculative* Errors, from the *indifferent* nature of such Errors, will as strongly prove the innocency of *practice*, considered *simply* as an *external action*: So that, if God cannot require the belief of certain *speculations* or *notions*, only because such truths have no *inherent* goodness in them, separate from the positive command of God, for the same reason he cannot require the performance of *external actions* which are of an *indifferent nature*. These cases are exactly parallel; and every argument, drawn from the *speculative* nature of any doctrine in proof of the *innocency* of *Error*, or *Ignorance* concerning it, will equally affect our obligation to the performance of any *external action*, the *antecedent fitness* of which does not appear to us from the *relation* and *reason* of things. So that, in the opinion of these writers, there neither is, nor can be any duty or obligation arising properly from the *authority* of the *legislator*, but solely from the *antecedent fitness* of the things commanded. For, if God should at any time be pleased to make a revelation to his creatures, unless he reveals also the *reasonableness* and *fitness* of every part of it, we, it seems, are not obliged to obey him; which

absolutely destroys the *legislative authority* of God, and makes him only the means of informing us of our duty, but not the fountain of that *authority*, from whence our duty arises. Suppose a person directs one of his *equals* to do a certain thing, if the thing appears to the person directed *fit* and *reasonable* to be done, the *direction* will have the same binding force as if it were the *command* of one who was invested with the most proper *authority*, which any being is capable of having over another. Or should a *command* come from one in *authority* to another properly subjected to his *jurisdiction*, it would nevertheless carry no obligation along with it, till the *fitness* of it appears to the person to whom it is given; the *apparent* fitness of things being, in the opinion of some, the proper source of *all* obligation. Where then is the notion of *jurisdiction*, of *power*, and *authority*? The very ideas, to which these terms are annexed, are vanished. They must imply, if they mean any thing at all, that the *superior* has a power of giving laws, of prescribing rules of action to his *inferiors*, properly subjected to his *jurisdiction*; which power he has not, if the duty of *obeying* arises *solely* from the *fitness* of the command, and not from the *authority* of the person who imposes it. In this sense it is no command at all; the subject has as much right to command his sovereign, as the sovereign has to command his subject. He can tell him what is *fit*
and

and *reasonable* for him to do,— which is all the authority that the sovereign has over his subject, upon this supposition. But the case is otherwise; the *Creator* of the world is the *Governor* of it; in right of his *dominion*, he has the sole *prerogative* of giving such laws for our government, as seem best to his infinite wisdom. *His will* is the *only law* to us, his creatures, from whence *our duty* and *obligation* properly arise. The *fitness of things* is to *him* the *reason* or *motive* of his commands, and to *us* the means of discovering his will, wherever he has not vouchsafed us the benefit of an *external revelation*. But, if the *will* of *God* be, as it certainly is, the *rule* of our actions; if *God*, in right of his *dominion* over us, has authority to prescribe laws to us, they are obligatory, tho' the subject matter of them seems ever so *indifferent in itself*. If he requires the performance of any external action, or the belief of any doctrine, without acquainting us with the wise ends to which his all-wise providence will make those things subservient, it is *rebellion* in us to refuse obedience to his commands. Thus much Mr. *Chub* seems to own in favour of *positive institutions*, at the 16th page of his *supplement to the previous question*; says he, *In all those cases where there is no apparent unfitness, and where we are satisfied of the divinity of the command,— there This* (the command itself, he must mean) *will be a reason for our compliance.* In consequence of which

concession it must follow, that the command of God will be as good a reason for our belief of *mere speculative doctrines*, as he allows it to be for the performance of an *action*, whose *antecedent fitness* we are not able to discover: unless he could shew, that there is an *antecedent unfitness* in requiring the belief of *doctrines*, tho' not in the performance of *external actions*, indifferent in their own nature. *It is agreeable to the moral fitness of things*, that creatures should obey their Creator; which they absolutely refuse to do, if they demand any *other* reason, besides *his positive command*, for their obedience.

WHEN Mr. *Chubb* says, in his previous question, That *God does not act arbitrarily*, and that there can be no duties of *mere arbitrary appointment*, he means no more than this; That, as God is a wise and good being, he must have some wise and good end in all his commands *antecedent* to them, which is the reason or motive inducing him to command. To act without some *antecedent reason* for acting in such a manner, is not to act wisely; and to entertain such a notion of the all-wise governour of the world, is the highest blasphemy.

IN this opinion we shall join issue. Nay, I will concede a little more to him than he seems to demand, *viz.* That it is agreeable to my imperfect conceptions of the Divine Being, that in all his actions he not only proposes some *good end*, which intention is *antecedent* to every action,
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but that (where any ends or means are preferable to each other) he always proposes the *best end*, and makes choice of the *fittest means* for the accomplishment of it. I think, to suppose otherwise of him, is to destroy the notion of the *infinity* of his *goodness*, or of his *wisdom*. But what advantage will they be able to make of this concession, in prejudice of *positive institutions*, which may have the *wisest reasons* for their appointment, tho' those reasons do not appear to *us*? Certain *actions* (by which I do not mean only *external* actions, but any act of the *mind*) seem to us to be of an *indifferent nature*: That is, they do not seem to have a *natural tendency* towards effecting some *good end*. The belief of certain truths do not seem, of *themselves*, conducive to the improvement, the perfection, and happiness of the mind; from whence they would infer, that it is not consistent with a *wise being* to command any thing which, in the nature of it, can answer no *wise end*. And true it is, that *wisdom*, in all its operations, must intend something agreeable to its own nature. To talk otherwise is a contradiction in terms; but an action, which to *us* seems to have no such *natural fitness*, may, by the direction of *infinite wisdom*, be made subservient to certain good purposes. It may be very expedient to make such actions the subject of a divine command, as a proper trial of our humility and obedience; of our readiness to submit

submit *our* wisdom to God's, and to acknowledge his *legislative authority* by an *implicit* observance of his commands. Nay, they seem, in some respects, the most proper means of giving us a more awful sense both of the *power* and *dominion* of God over us, to whose glory all our actions ought either *actually* or *virtually* to tend. Corrupt and degenerate as our nature is, there will generally be a degree of complacency attending our observance of those laws which approve themselves to our *reason*; in which cases it is difficult to distinguish between *duty* and *inclination*; whether the ease and satisfaction, which we feel within us, when we act agreeably to the dictates of our minds, be the only motive of our actions, or whether we act upon a principle of *love* and *obedience* to God. But where we can discern no other reason besides the *command* of God, why we should act after such a manner, we then pay the most *absolute* regard to his *authority*. These are ends worthy of the Divine Wisdom; it is *fit* and *reasonable* that *creatures* should have the most awful sense of the *dominion* of their *Creator*; that they should be in a constant disposition to *obey* him; and that they should resign, with all humility, their *imperfect* understandings to the direction of *omniscience*. It is impossible, absolutely impossible, for the united strength of human reason to shew, that these good ends may not be promoted by such *positive injunctions*, tho' the subject matter

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of them seems *indifferent*, as to their *natural effects*. Mr. Chubb has observed very justly, *Suppl.* p. 16. *That, as God sees thro', and to the end of things, and thereby has a perfect view of all the circumstances and consequences which attend our actions, so he must see wherein the fitness or unfitness of every action lies; and consequently must be a much better judge, not only in MANY (as he most irreverently expresses himself) but in ALL cases, than man can possibly be, whose views are vastly contracted.* I may safely rest the whole cause upon this single point; let any man shew, that in requiring the belief of a *doctrine merely speculative*, or the performance of an *external action*, as *indifferent* in its nature, as any action can be, God can have no *wise and good end*. I would only observe, that, in order to qualify himself for such an undertaking, he must acquire a distinct view of the whole extent of causes and effects; or, in other words, he must be *omniscient*. It is not sufficient that we perceive no *fitness* in a command, because no conclusive argument can be drawn from *our ignorance*, but we must see distinctly and clearly an *unfitness*, before we can reject a command as unworthy of the wisdom of God. Altho', therefore, there are no duties of *mere arbitrary appointment*, if they mean only, that in all his commands God hath regard to some *wise and good end*, worthy of his own perfections, yet in respect to *our obedience*, and *his legislative authority*,

thority, there *may* be arbitrary commands, because we may be obliged to *obey* them, *solely* on account of *his authority*, without knowing *explicitly* the *reasons* of his enjoining them. *Arbitrary* is sometimes used to signify *humourfome* or *capricious*; but it oftner, and more properly, signifies *absolute*; and a Prince is said to be *absolute*, when *his will* is the law to his subjects, tho' at the same time he makes the rules of justice, wisdom, and goodness a law to *himself* in his administration. His government is said to be *absolute* or *arbitrary*, in that *his will* or *pleasure* carries a sufficient obligation to obedience from his subjects, without assigning the *reasons* by which it is directed; neither is it always thought agreeable to the rules of *wisdom* for *civil governours* to publish the *reasons* of their conduct, tho' mankind of late have been so forward to reject the commands of the *universal unlimited* and *all-wise governour*, unless agreeable to their own contracted notions of the *natural fitness of things*.

BUT to reconcile our adversaries the more easily to the *positive* part of religion, it may be of some use to consider distinctly the opposition between things *good in themselves*, and therefore *obligatory* in their *own nature*, and such things as receive their force from the sanction of *divine authority*. The *moral duties*, because arising from the *immutable relation* of things, are acknowledged to have an *inherent goodness* or *fitness*

ness in them, and to be of *perpetual obligation*; certain other duties, not subsisting, as is supposed, upon any such *antecedent immutable reasons*, but the *pleasure* of the *legislator*, are said to be of *positive institution*. This distinction, unless clearly understood, may mislead us into a disregard of *Divine Ordinances*.

THE *positive duties*, as they are usually termed, have a *real goodness* in them, because they were appointed on account of a certain *fitness* of things. But then *this fitness*, in respect to some of those institutions, after a certain period of time, *expired*; and in none of them was it *coæval* with the relation of things, upon which the fitness of *moral duties* is founded.

FOR instance; in consequence of God's intention to offer up his only begotten Son as a sacrifice for mankind, it might be *fit* and *expedient*, because *subservient* to *wise* and *good purposes*, to appoint *typical sacrifices*; and after that our Blessed Lord had actually offered up himself, it might be equally fit and expedient, because equally conducive to promote the glory of God, and the good of mankind, to appoint an institution *commemorative* of this great sacrifice. Now whatever has a *fitness* in it, considered as a *means* of promoting a wise and good end, may be said to be *properly* and *really good*; yet such duties may, notwithstanding, be said to be *less* excellent than the *moral duties*, which are grounded upon a certain *order* of things,

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fixed *originally* at the *creation* of the world, never to alter till the end of it ; whose *fitness* does not respect any *particular people*, or *period of time* ; and which are therefore at *all times*, and under *all possible circumstances*, subservient to God's glory, and the happiness of his creatures : However, the duties of *both* kinds, as far as they are a *fit means* of promoting a *good end*, are undoubtedly *good*, by reason of *that fitness*. For, what do we, or can we mean, when we say, that the *moral duties* are duties on account of their *own intrinsic goodness*, or for their *own sake*, but only that such actions, from the *relation* of things to one another, are *naturally* the *means of producing good* ? Their *fitness* arises from the *connection* between their *tendency* and some *good* ; which, no doubt (tho' we are not able so clearly to discern it in every, or in any instance) is the case of all the *ordinances* which God was pleased to give either to the *Jews*, or to *us Christians*. They were *fitted* and *adapted* to certain circumstances ; under those *particular* circumstances they had a *tendency* in them to answer certain *good ends* : During the *continuance* of the *same* circumstances, the *relation* between *them*, and the *good ends* to which they had, or have, a *fitness* in them to produce, is, and will be, as *immutable* and *necessary*, as the relation of things in the several instances of *moral duties*. The difference seems to be this ; the circumstances, upon which the *fitness* of *ordinances* is grounded,

grounded, are *mutable*; whereas those actions which we call *moral*, or *immoral*, are *immutable* in their tendencies, and therefore *always* good in their *nature*: But in *both* cases, wherever there is a *fitness* between an *action* and some *good end*, That action has a *real goodness* in it. The reason why its *goodness* or *fitness*, under those *particular circumstances*, does not oblige mankind to the performance of it, without an *express command* from God, is, because mankind by the *light of nature* could not have discovered it, as we are able to do in the case of *moral duties*; for which reason, as I apprehend, such actions are called *positive institutions*. Their obligation arises wholly from an *express command*, because we have no other way of knowing it to be the *will of God* that we should perform them. But, could we clearly discover the *fitness* of those actions without the help of an *external revelation*, our obligation to the performance of them might be regularly deduced from *thence*, because our *reason* informs us, that it must be the *will of a wise and good Being*, to have his creatures govern themselves by the rules of *wisdom* and *goodness*, which are the measure of his *own* actions.

WHEN I observe, “ that *positive* duties are
 “ less excellent than the *moral* ones, which are
 “ grounded upon a certain *order* of things fixed
 “ originally at the creation of the world, I do
 not mean that *abstracted truths* began to be

truths at the creation, by the *arbitrary appointment* of the Creator ; my meaning is only this, that the *subject matter* of them was then determined. As for instance, *temperance* and *chastity* are duties on account of a certain *fitness* arising from the *natural* and *necessary tendency* of those actions ; yet the *nature* of *men*, upon which their *fitness* is grounded, commenced at his *creation*, and was of *arbitrary appointment*. That creatures of such a nature ought to act after such a manner, is a truth *eternal* and *immutable*, but their nature was neither *eternal*, nor *necessary*, but depending upon the *good pleasure* of their Creator.

THIS digression (if that may be called a digression which has so necessary a connection with my subject) may deserve the consideration of those who think that *the moral duties are the things which alone are required by God in order to salvation*. They may reasonably be desired to suspend their dislike to *positive institutions*, till they can prove, more satisfactorily than it is possible for any man to do, that such institutions are not *wise and good, worthy of God, and beneficial to us*. I have endeavoured the more carefully to set this matter in a true light, because of the consequences of it upon the truth of *revelation*. According to the principles, against which I have been arguing, men will unavoidably be led to reject every part of the *Scriptures*, besides what respects *morality* ; and a
disbelief

disbelief of *one* part of revelation, will soon be followed by a disbelief of the *whole*. I am unwilling to bring a direct charge of Deism against any *particular* writer; but the present favourite opinions, so industriously propagated, and so greedily received, tend in their proper consequences to introduce it; and I cannot help thinking it to be the design of these writers in *general*, to seduce people into *Deism*, without incurring the censure and odium of so mischievous an undertaking, by a more open profession. I wish what I have offered may be of any use to guard unwary readers against embracing their schemes, before they have well weighed them.

I HOPE I have sufficiently established my opinion concerning *speculative doctrines*; but, before I conclude this discourse, I shall mention one argument which I find in Mr. *Chubb's previous question*. This argument I have reserved for the conclusion, that I might not interrupt the thread of the discourse.

AT the 27th page, speaking of *speculative points*, where the *moral fitness* of things can give us no light, he says, *It ought to be remembered, that God will either so clearly deliver such points, as that there shall be no place for Error, or else he will excuse all Errors which may arise from them; it being most absurd to suppose, that a wise and good Being should give a revelation in a way in which it is liable to be misunderstood, and then be displeas'd with his creatures if they mistake the*

meaning of it ; seeing such Errors are not, in the nature of the thing, a proper foundation for resentment. It is usually the fate of these writers to defend their peculiarities upon such principles as subvert religion in general.

Speculative doctrines, he says, are innocent, unless they are so clearly revealed as to leave no place for Error.

IF this argument be conclusive, not only *speculative*, but *all* Errors are innocent, because, if there be *room for Error*, he thinks it inconsistent with the wisdom and goodness of God to punish men for *erring* ; but if this writer believes *Christianity*, or even the *moral fitness* of things, his belief is a confutation of his own argument : For, there is *room for Error* even in *these* points, and yet there is no *necessity* that a man should be either *ignorant*, or *mistaken* concerning them. Now, if we are capable of *understanding* and *believing* any *speculative* truth, we may be *punished* for *not* understanding and believing it. Or, will Mr. *Chub* deny that God may, under certain penalties, require any thing which it is in our power to perform ; which, however, his argument obliges him to deny, or else there is no force in it. Let us try how it holds when applied to *sin in general*. It is *absurd* and *ridiculous* to suppose, that a wise and good Being should create us capable of *sinning*, or leave *room for sin*, and yet be displeas'd with us for *sinning*. It would be a much more absurd thing

to

to lay us under the necessity of assenting to any truth, and then be pleased with, or reward us for, believing. In short, he destroys the notion of virtue and vice, of a state of trial and probation, and takes away the foundation of rewards and punishments.

I AM told, that this writer has no small share of credit with his *party*; but it is to me somewhat difficult to conceive how such extravagant and wild and pernicious opinions should meet with a favourable reception, while there is any regard to *religion*, or the peace and welfare of *society*, any *common sense* remaining among us. Probably, in a time of so much *indulgence*, not to say *licentiousness*, I may be thought to speak with too much warmth and zeal; but I am speaking, as I think, in defence of every thing that is valuable, and worthy of our most affectionate concern. It does not arise from any *personal* prejudices towards the *men*, for I am not known to any of them; nor from *party considerations*, for *religion* and the *publick good* can be of *no party*; but from a sincere conviction of the dangerous tendency of their principles. A *spirit of meekness*, I acknowledge, is a *true Christian spirit*; but to be *zealously affected in a good thing*, is an *Apostolical* rule, of equal authority, and very consistent with it. *Charity* likewise, and *moderation*, are virtues of a most excellent nature, and of the highest estimation with God; but they are sometimes counter-

feited

feited by an *irreligious indifferency*; and a *Christian Divine** can, not only labour to lessen the crimes of *Heresy* and *Schism*, but contemptuously stile them *Theological Scarecrows*, frightful only to such foolish people as are not able to see thro' the appearances of danger, with which the superstition of ignorant, or the policy of designing people have cloathed them. I have not heard, that he ever met with any publick disgrace or discountenance, for publishing such an opinion, so rudely and vulgarly expressed; but history tells us how it would have fared with him, had he lived in those times when *Church censures* were duly executed.

* The author of the *Innocency of Error*, p. 28.

