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Theological lectures by Rev. John Smith ca. 1797 (1843)
with introduction and memoir by Susan Smith, 1842
(includes history of Dartmouth College in 1770's)

MS-1266
John Smith

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SMITH, JOHN, 1752-1809

A COURSE OF THEOLOGICAL LECTURES... c1797

DARTMOUTH COLLEGE LIBRARY

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SMITH, JOHN

Course of Theological lectures

To,

The Librarian of the Northern Academy of Arts and Sciences in this place ——

Rev. Sir;

Having lately heard of a new society, or Academy of Arts & Sciences that has been established in this Village for the purpose of collecting and preserving Historical, Biographical, and Statistical accounts of persons, and things; or whatever may tend to elucidate the means by which this part of the "new world" has become, as it were like "the garden of the Lord;" More especially to preserve the literary history of the Institution planted here; among those who are in future to be educated within its walls, (as well as those who have been, and are spread abroad throughout our land, and doing a large part in supporting the glorious fabric of our Country's Constitutions both in Church and State. And wishing to add something to these laudable exertions, I have taken the liberty of requesting a niche in your archives, for an unfinished Manuscript work which my departed husband was engaged in, at the time of his decease, it being the substance of a part of a course of theological Lectures delivered before the Students of Dartmouth College at the close of the last, and beginning of the present Century. To which is added a brief memoir, written by myself, as due to the memory of one whose untiring and persevering labors for the Spiritual as well as literary benefit of all those who were placed under his instruction, hoping it may prove a Stimulus to those who may read this book, and are following on in the wake of time in the noble employment of forming the minds of the coming generation, which I hope and trust, may by their knowledge and true piety, be the instruments of hastening on that latter day glory when the true principles of philosophy and religion, "shall cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea". When there will be no more occasion to endeavor to prove the being of a God; for "all shall know him from the least to the greatest." And may they also inherit the reward which I trust he is now in the enjoyment of, "even well done good and faithful Servant enter ye into the joy of your Lord." ——

It is requested by the donor, that this Manuscript be at no time taken from the Library.—

Respectfully yours, Susan Smith

Dartmouth College plain,
October 18. 1842.

CHAPTER I.

Of the being of God; his unity, &c.

§I. The being and perfections of God are the ground of all our religious duties in this world, and of our reasonable expectation of happiness "in the world to come".

Our belief that there is an eternal & self-existent Being, whom we term God, is not required, merely because others believe, nor on the principle that, from our infancy, we have been taught this important truth. Such a belief would be unbecoming, since we may obtain the most convincing evidence of the existence of a being of this description. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead.*

Yet fools say in their hearts, there is no God;† no almighty ruler and omniscient judge of the world, whose providence regards the concerns of men.

* Rom. I. 20. — † Ps. XIV. I.

Doubtless, they wish this; & probably, they flatter themselves with a kind of hope, that there is none.
The truth is, they whisper this secretly in their hearts, to silence the accusing voice of conscience, and embolden themselves in the practice of vice.

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§ II. I shall now attempt to prove the existence of an unoriginated, immutable, and independent Being, who is the author of all creation, and the supreme ruler of the universe.
As things now exist, it is manifest that something has existed from eternity; otherwise, these things must have been produced without a cause. To say a thing was produced, but that there was no cause of its production, is as absurd as to say that something is effected, when it is not effected. Whatever exists has a ground or reason, either in the necessity of its nature, or the will of some other being, why it does exist, rather than not exist. That something, therefore, has existed from eternity, is a truth too obvious to be disputed. — Yet, how this can be, no man is able to comprehend. Indeed, how any thing can have eternally existed, that is, how an eternal duration can be now actually past, it is impossible that beings of limited understandings should conceive. But to deny the truth of the proposition, that an eternal duration is now actually past, would be to advance ~~some~~ what is more unintelligible, than that ~~something~~ has existed from eternity.

Since something must have existed from eternity, either there has always existed an immutable and independent being, possessing all possible perfections, by whom all other beings that are or ever were in the universe, have been produced; or there has been an infinite succession of finite and ~~un~~changeable beings, produced one by another. If there have been an endless series, or an infinite succession, of finite and changeable beings, produced one by another, there is not any thing self-existent and unchangeable in the universe. ~~On this sup~~ ~~position~~ On this supposition, it is equally possible, that from eternity there never should have existed any thing, as that there should have existed a succession of finite, changeable, and dependent beings.

These two cases, that there might, and that there might not, have been existence, being equally possible, the former could not have taken place rather than the latter, but in consequence of a determination that it should take place. But this determination could not have been made, unless some being ~~could~~ could have determined its own existence, and have been the cause of itself; which would be absurd to suppose. Consequently, there always has existed an immutable and independent being, possessing all possible perfections, by whom all other beings, that are or ever were in the

universe, have been produced.

On this view of the subject, every man, who properly reflects, must be convinced that there is some one being, at least, whose non-existence is impossible. As the impossibility of his non-existence is absolute, or depends on no condition, it must at all times be the same. This being, therefore, never was, nor can be, non-existent; but has existence without beginning, and without the possibility of an end.*

§III. We shall now endeavour to illustrate the unity of God.

To determine whether it is possible that there may be more than one unoriginated, self-existent being in the universe, we should inquire whether we can conceive, or consistently suppose, a second.

If there exist a second being, unoriginated, independent, and possessing all possible perfections, it is evident, that they both are unoriginated, independent, possessing all possible perfections. Neither of these beings can be without any attribute which pertains to the other. Therefore, our idea of the second being ~~when we suppose~~ is no other than the very idea we have of the first.

* The argument, which proves there is a being whose nonexistence is impossible, is deduced from this truth, that something now exists, which is indisputable, and, in the order of our thoughts, prior to all other truths.

All the ideas of the latter are as much the ideas of the former, as the properties of one circle (abstractly considered) are the same with those of another.

Were there two such beings, as they would both be eternal, unoriginated, and everywhere alike present; they could not differ one from the other, in any circumstance whatever. There could be no possible ground of distinction between them; and, therefore, they would not be different beings, but one and the same being.

Euclid tells us that, upon the same straight line, and upon the same side of it, there can not be two similar segments of a circle, not coinciding with each other.* In this case, the segments would be in common, so that all difference between them would vanish; and they would not be two distinct segments, but one and the same. In like manner, similar segments of circles upon equal straight lines are equal to one another.† These segments are the same.

To apply these remarks to the present subject.

Two beings cannot be unoriginated, and each have possess all possible perfections, and necessary or self-existence, as the common mode of their existence: for, in that case, they must have their whole natures, and all the circumstances of their ex-

* Elem. Book III. Prop. 23. — † Book III. Prop. 24.

istence in common also; and, therefore, they would not be distinct beings, but one & the same being.*

* Two hypotheses only, and these directly opposite to each other, have been advanced, to show that we can conceive the universe might have existed, without any unoriginated, independent being, from whom all others have derived their existence.

The ancient atheistical hypothesis was, that the universe consists entirely of derived and dependent beings, each of which owed its existence to the power and efficiency of the one which immediately preceded it; and that there has been an infinite succession or series of causes and effects of this description, without a beginning, and without an unoriginated, underived cause, at the head of the series.

When a being is considered as brought into existence by another, it is evidently possible, or there is no contradiction in affirming, that it might not have been brought into existence. According to this hypothesis, there is no being in the universe that was ~~not~~ not brought into existence by some other; and, therefore, it follows, that there is no being but such as possibly might not have existed. The absurdity of this hypothesis is shown in Sect. 2. of this chapter.

The other hypothesis is that of Spinoza, who contended that no being in the universe has derived its existence from another, but that every being is necessarily existent, eternal, and unoriginated. The inconsistency of this hypothesis is evinced above: and it will further appear, when we consider the attributes of God.

§ IV. The unity of plan observable in physical objects indicates the unity of God. The universe itself appears to be a system, each part of which is connected with, or depends upon, other parts, by some common law of motion, or by the presence of some common substance.

One law of attraction causes a stone to fall to the earth; the moon to revolve round it, & the planets round the sun. This philosophers clearly demonstrate.

All the planets experience vicissitudes of days and nights, and changes of season. At least, Venus, Mars, and Jupiter, have atmospheres, like the atmosphere of the earth. In all the planets, the axes of rotation are permanent.

The light from a fixed star affects our eyes, & is reflected and refracted, in the same manner as the light of a candle.

The heat of the sun's rays does not differ, in kind, from the heat of common fire.

On our globe, new countries are, from time to time, discovered; but, in them, the old laws of nature are always perceived. We never find such modes of existence as indicate, that we are come into the province of a different Creator, or under the direction of a different will. Indeed, wherever we go, we find the same order of things.

The elements act in the same manner upon each other, and attraction and repulsion are the same,

in all regions of the earth and sea. One atmosphere encompasses ~~the~~ this globe. One sun enlightens it; and one moon exerts its specific attraction. If there be a variety in physical effects, produced by the same cause, as, for instance, in the tides of different seas, that variety is the result of the ~~same~~ cause, operating under different circumstances.

The inspection and comparison of living forms add, to this argument, examples without number. Of all large land animals the structure is very much alike. Their viscera, digestion, nutrition, circulation of blood, senses, passions, and natural functions, are nearly the same. The experiment of transfusion proves, that the blood of one animal will serve for another.

The skeletons of the larger terrestrial animals exhibit particular varieties, but yet a great general affinity. In these respects, there is an evident similarity between quadrupeds & birds. In fishes, the points of comparison are not so numerous. Every fish, however, has a stomach, a liver, and a spine; bile, and blood; teeth and eyes. Their eyes are but slightly varied from human eyes. The variation corresponds to the medium, in which the rays of light fall upon them. The provinces of water and of earth are connected by the species of animals which inhabit both; and also by a large tribe of aquatic animals, which in their internal structure, greatly resemble those of the land. I refer to the cetaceous tribe, which have bowels, respiring lungs, and warm blood.

Insects and shell fishes seem, in several respects, to differ from other classes of animals. Yet, even here, beside various points of particular agreement, there exists a general resemblance of a peculiar kind. It is that of inversion. Whereas, in other animals, the bones to which the muscles are attached lie within the body, in shell fishes, they lie on the outside.

The shell of a lobster performs to that animal the office of a bone, by furnishing to the tendons that fixed basis or immoveable fulcrum, without which they could not act. The crust of an insect is its shell, and answers the same purpose. The shell of an oyster also stands in the place of a bone, as the bases of the muscles are fixed to it, in the same manner as, in other animals, they are fixed to the bones.

The observations here made equally apply to plants. I shall only advert to a single circumstance, that, in this part of organized nature, we perceive a continuation of the sexual system.

Thus, the uniformity observable in the works of nature indicates the unity of God.

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§ V. One creature could not create another. Every creature acts within its own sphere; that is, according to the laws of nature. But creation is the effect of infinite power. It is evident that a created being could not produce itself, nor any other being, because it cannot

preserve itself, nor any other created being, from decay and destruction.

As no creature could produce its own existence, nor that of another, we must be convinced that there is an unoriginated, independent being, in the universe, who is the first cause of all created things, and by whose power they exist.

The structure of human bodies affords us clear demonstration of the existence of an infinitely wise and benevolent Creator. When we attend to our corporeal frame, we are convinced, that "we are fearfully and wonderfully made". Could it be in the power of any creature to form and adjust the organs of sense; or effect the circulation of the blood? The internal parts of the body, which would, otherwise, be exposed to injury from the external, are secured in proper enclosures. "Thou hast clothed me with skin and flesh, and hast fenced me with bones and sinews. *

The wisdom, power, and goodness of an unoriginated, self-existent being are not less displayed in the nature of our souls, than in the structure of our bodies. As what we know of our souls is confined to their operations, we could not form them. There is, therefore, a supreme and self-existent Creator, who is the Father of our spirits. The soul or mind of man reflects on things past, and looks forward to things to come, with pleasure or regret. The soul is capable of exercises agreeable to the principles of reason, and those rules which are ordained for the attainment of the highest good. As it is immortal in its nature, it cannot be destroyed by any created being.

* Job. X. 11.

None but the almighty first cause has an absolute power over the souls of men. We conclude, therefore, that he is the Father of our spirits.

The being of an unoriginated and almighty Creator may be inferred from the unbounded desires, which are implanted in our souls. We can derive complete satisfaction from no object, inferior to a being of infinite perfection. We may, therefore, be assured, that there is a being of this description.

The existence of a supreme being is further proved by the belief of all nations. That sentiment, in which men, in general, agree, must either have its foundation in their constitution, or arise from some other source common to all. As, in every nation and age men have, in general, believed there is a God, since the belief is, and always has been, almost universal, it is gained by the exercise of reason, or from tradition.

It is true, many, "when they knew God, glorified him not as God; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened." * But it does not hence follow, that idolaters and polytheists have no idea of divine power. Even idolatry and polytheism evince, that there is something in the mind of man, which suggests the existence of a being, or beings, superior to himself, on which he depends for safety and happiness. The heathens have always esteemed atheism to be absurd, as it is opposed to the dictates of reason.

* Rom. I. 21.

The existence of a supreme and almighty Agent may also be proved from the operations of providence, by which the world, with the various creatures that it contains, is preserved and governed.

If there were no God to exercise a providence, would the heavenly bodies, from age to age, continue with astonishing exactness their various motions? And would the alternate succession of day and night, and the seasons of the year, be uniformly constant? The conduct and dispensations of providence evidently exhibit footsteps of infinite wisdom, power, and goodness.

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§VI. Should a man be cast upon an unknown island, and there find houses, but no men to inhabit them, he would conclude that men had been there, and builded those houses.

Could the timber and the other materials place themselves in such positions as to form edifices? Or, could the beasts, which are without understanding construct them?

Or, when one beholds a watch or clock perform all its motions with entire exactness, could he suppose the wheels, and the proportion and adjustment of all its parts, were the result of chance? No. He would conclude that the machine was made by an intelligent being, of sufficient skill to form and put its parts together in order, and give them motion. — View the spacious heavens. Behold the sun, the moon, the planets, and the fixed stars. Reflect on their arrangements. Reason declares that they did not create themselves, and that they could not, by chance, or the casual concourse of wandering atoms, spring from chaos.

In a word. When we consider the air we breathe, the light of our eyes, the earth on which we dwell, the proportion of land and water on our globe, and their various and rich productions, our minds must be deeply impressed with the idea of a self-existent and supreme being, who created all things, and on whom their existence depends.

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§VII. It becomes us to contemplate and adore the perfections of God. He is unoriginated, self-existent, and independent. This being is the Father of our Spirits: he is the Author of our existence. We depend upon him for preservation, and all the blessings which we enjoy. To disobey him is most unreasonable impiety. Will a being indued with rational faculties provoke his Creator, who can punish him forever? Will such a being ~~being~~ act in opposition to him, from whose omniscient eye no place of concealment can be found? Will he not adore his Creator, who fills with his presence every place in the universe? who fills infinite expansion.

Those men discover their extreme folly, who attempt to comprehend the eternal Jehovah. Some, because

they cannot effect this, deny his being, or, at least, disown his perfections. We should reflect, that the Author of all created existence is infinite and incomprehensible. Could we comprehend him, we should not be secure of safety and happiness.

We should think a man foolish, if he boasted that he could measure the waters in the hollow of his hand; that he could mete out heaven with a span; that he could comprehend the dust of the earth in a measure; and weigh the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance. Such a man, however, would not be so foolish, as one pretending to be able to comprehend the Almighty.

It has been demonstrated, that there must be in the universe a being whose non-existence is impossible; whose existence had no cause, nor beginning, and can have no end; and who possesses all possible perfections. This exhibits in clear light the perverseness and miserable condition of atheists.

An atheist, according to his professed belief, enjoys in this life all the happiness which he can possibly have. He must, therefore, on his own principles, fail of real happiness. Constant and universal experience has taught us, that complete felicity cannot be derived from the enjoyment of the objects of the present world. And he cannot, according to his system, be happy after death; for his soul will die with his body. Indeed, if his soul should survive, there would be no God to confer happiness. And the bible declares that, after death, he will be most miserable. The Scriptures affirm that all, who disbelieve the being of God; all, who do not sincerely love and faithfully serve him, will be forever punished, as standing examples of the folly and impiety of those, who refuse to hearken to the dictates of reason, and the gracious warnings and counsels of the author of their existence.

This is the woful state of atheists. They must be expelled from all the pleasing works of the hands of the Almighty, to those doleful regions of everlasting darkness and despair, where every object will display the inflexibility of eternal justice, and vindicate the veracity of God.

The world is a spacious temple; and wherever we are, we should praise and adore the name of God. "All nature is his temple".

Clarke's Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God. — Hamilton on the Existence and absolute Perfections of the Supreme, Unoriginated Being. — Paley's Natural Theology. Ridgley's Body of Divinity. — Wallaston's Religion of Nature Delineated.

CHAPTER II.

Of the Operation and Attributes of God.

§ I. The unoriginated Being is the Creator, to whose power, as he operates according to his holy will, all finite beings owe their production.

From the simple existence of God, considered apart from his operating power, no effect or consequence of any kind can possibly ensue. No cause produces its effects merely by existing. Indeed, the very idea of a cause, as such, implies operation.

In producing or creating beings, the unoriginated first Cause exercised an active power, agreeably to his adorable will; from exercising which power, he might have abstained, had it been his will to abstain. Otherwise, his infinite power must of necessity be exercised. To say that power either finite or infinite must of necessity be exerted or exercised means, that it is impossible such power should subsist without actual & incessant exercise. But this is opposed to the idea of active power, which we can as easily conceive to subsist without, as with, actual exertion or exercise. It is not, therefore, impossible that it should subsist without actual exercise; and it is falsely affirmed, when it is said that it cannot but be exercised. The power of the first Cause cannot be otherwise exercised, than designedly. Consequently, all things owe their existence, ~~ultimately~~ to his power operating according to the determination of his will. He has produced such beings and systems as in his infinite wisdom and goodness he chose to produce. And he disposes of all his creatures in such ways as these attributes require.

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§ II. Some atheists, particularly, the followers of Spinoza, have asserted, that there is no self-existent, unoriginated being indued with liberty and the power of choice.

Spinoza affirms, that no existence nor mode of existence could possibly have been, in any respect, different from what it now actually is. To support this position, he contends (1.) that, from an infinitely perfect nature, infinite things in infinite manners must necessarily proceed: (2.) that, if any thing could possibly be otherwise than it is, the will and nature of God must be supposed capable of change; (3.) that, if all possible things in all possible manners do not always and necessarily exist, they never can all exist; but some things which do not exist will always be possible only; ~~and never can actually exist~~; and so the actual omnipotence of God is an imaginary idea.

The first of these arguments is an evident begging of the question. For, if an infinitely perfect being can produce infinite things in infinite manners; yet, that he must always thus act, by absolute necessity, without any power of choice, as to either

time, or manner, or circumstance, does by no means follow from his perfections, unless he be supposed to be* a necessary agent; which would be to beg, not prove, the question.

The second argument is not less infirm. For how does it follow that, if God, according to his eternal, unerring purpose, and infinite wisdom, produce different things, at different times, and in different manners, that his will and nature are changeable? It might as well be argued that, if God should always necessarily produce all possible differences and varieties of things, his nature & will would be always necessarily unequal and various.

As to the third argument, which is merely metaphysical and trifling, it is such reasoning as if a man should argue that, if all possible duration be not always actually exhausted, it never can be all exhausted, and that, therefore, the eternity of God is an imaginary idea.

Spinoza acknowledged no god, but nature, i.e. all beings which exist; as, the sun, moon, and stars, and this earth with its inhabitants, and whatever pertains to it. He denied the existence of any final causes, as they would prove that there is an infinitely wise and benevolent being, who made all things, and qualified each to answer its purpose.

Spinoza was obliged to confess that, if there be final causes in the universe, there is a supreme cause who is a voluntary agent. He, therefore, considered all final causes, as the fictions of ignorant and superstitious men. He laughed at those as being childish, who have thought that eyes are designed for the purpose of seeing, and ears, for that of hearing; and that the teeth of animals are formed for the purpose of chewing their food.*

We see the propriety that they, who say in their hearts there is no God, should be termed fools; and the justness of Saint Paul's remark, that they become vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart is darkened, who glorify not the Creator as God.

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§ III. We shall next consider the attributes of God.

These are certain names of his perfections, by which he has been pleased to reveal himself, and according to which we conceive of the exercise of his power. These perfections are called attributes, because they are attributed or ascribed to the supreme Being, for our clearer apprehension of him.

It should be observed, that the attributes of God are expressed in the abstract, as well as in the concrete. Thus, he is termed not only living, wise, good; but life, wisdom, goodness, &c.

It should be further observed, that whatever are the attributes of the unoriginated Being, he must possess each of them unlimitedly, or in its whole extent.†

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* Naturam finem nullum sibi præfixum habere; et omnes causas finales, nihil nisi humana esse figmenta. Append. ad propos. 36.

† By the phrase, in its whole extent, is meant without any limitation or restriction.

An attribute of God in its whole extent is invariable: i.e. it admits not of different degrees, nor is it subject to any contingent circumstances.

An attribute considered partially, or as limited, may admit of various degrees. It may be as possibly restricted to one degree as to another. Therefore, an imperfect attribute in any degree whatever, in any subject, would imply the operation of some cause upon that subject. Thus, the limitation of an attribute, being in itself evidently contingent and caused, cannot take place in the unoriginated and self-existent being. Since then he must have some attributes, and a perfect one may, but an imperfect one cannot, belong to him, he must possess each of his attributes in its whole extent, or without limitation.

Some of God's attributes are physical; others are moral. His physical attributes are called primary, as they are conceived to arise immediately from his essence or substance. Of this kind are his ~~are his~~ power, wisdom, omnipresence, and omniscience.

His moral attributes are called secondary, as they seem to result from his physical attributes.

They imply his manner of acting towards his rational creatures, as he is their Creator, Preserver, and Lawgiver, & will be their final Judge. To this class belong goodness, mercy, faithfulness, truth, holiness, justice, &c.

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§ IV. The unoriginated and supreme Being, who is the first cause of all things, cannot but possess infinite power.

No being, beside God, can possibly be self-existent. Consequently, all created existences were produced by him, & absolutely depend upon him. All the powers of all things are from him, and must, therefore, be entirely under his control. His wisdom dictates, and his power effects. The sun, the moon, the stars, and all the works of God, evince that he is powerful beyond our conception. All which man can do, by any power or art which he possesses, is to fashion that in some other manner which previously has existence. But, by the word of his power, God created and stretched out the heavens, and suspended the earth, in the wide expanse.

Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their hosts by number; he calleth them all by names, by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth. *

Which removeth the mountains, and they know not; which overturneth them in his anger: which shaketh the earth out of her place, and the pillars thereof tremble; which commandeth the sun, and it riseth not, and sealeth up the stars. †

Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his

* Isai. XL. 26. † Job IX. 5–7.

hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the duſt of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in ſcales, and the hills in a balance? *

We may obſerve, ~~that~~ that God's infinite power extends to all poſſible things. It cannot, however, be said to extend to the effecting of any thing which implies an evident contradiction; as, that a thing should be and not be, at the same time; or, that five added to five should not make ten only, but a hundred.

The reason of this is plain. The idea of a power to make a thing be, when, at the same time, it is not, is only an idea of not doing any thing: which is no power at all. The idea is chimerical.

And infinite power cannot be said to extend to those things which imply physical imperfection in the being to whom ſuch power is aſcribed; as, that he might weaken or destroy himself: Nor ~~can infinite power be said to extend~~ to any moral imperfection.

§V. Another of God's attributes is wisdom.

The ſupreme Cause and Author of all created exiſtence cannot but be infinitely wise. All things are preſent to his view: they depend entirely upon him and from him proceeded their exiſtence and all their powers. As he knows all things which actually exist, ſo he knows all poſſibilities of things, that is, all the poſſible effects of his infinite power.

* Iſai. XL. 12.

As he alone is ſelf-existent, and has given to his creatures all the powers and faculties which they have, it is evident that he perfectly knows the extent and efficacy of those powers and faculties. At one boundleſs view, he ſees all the poſſible compoſitions and divisions, variations, changes, and circumstances of things; all the poſſible relations which they have or may have to each other; and their dispositions and fitneſs to their respective ends. He knows, therefore, what is best, in all the poſſible ways of disposing things. He knows how, in all respects, to order and adapt means for the accomplishment of what is best in its kind, or on the whole; and, in a word, what is best and most fit in its end.

As we have ſhown, the supreme Being is infinite in power. Consequently, he can no more be prevented by force or oppoſition, than by error or mistake, from effecting always what is the moſt wise and fit to be done. Hence, it undeniably follows that he is, in the highest and most complete sense, infinitely wise, & that the world and all things in it must be, and are, effects of infinite wisdom.

This is demonstration a priori. The demonstration or proof a posteriori of the infinite wisdom of God, from the exquisite perfection and consummate excellence and beauty of his works, is as conclusive and undeniable. How wise as well as powerful is

He who created all the systems of beings, & preserves them in existence; who, from generation to generation, maintains the order and harmony which adorn his works! In the CXXXVI Psalm, we find ascriptions to the Supreme Being, which in a striking manner apply to this subject. To him who alone doth great wonders.--- To him that by wisdom made the heavens.--- To him that stretched out the earth above the waters.--- To him that made great lights:--- the sun to rule by day; the moon & stars to rule by night. Said the prophet Isaiah, With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, & taught him knowledge, and shewed to him the way of understanding?*

From the Supreme Being men and angels receive all the wisdom which they possess. He is the only source of wisdom. Indeed, he is infinitely wise in all his purposes and operations.

We may observe, that the more men inquire into the nature of things, and the more discoveries they make in philosophy, this reasoning a posteriori becomes proportionably more convincing. This is certain evidence that it is founded on truth.

As Galen, a long time ago, found in the constitution of the human body such undeniable marks of contrivance and nice design, as compelled him then to admire the wisdom of its author, what would he have said, if he had understood the circulation of the blood, the exact structure of the heart and brain, & the design

*Isai. XL. 14.

of the glands, the arteries, and veins? He would, doubtless, have adored the wisdom, power, and goodness of the Almighty, in the formation of man, as being fearfully & wonderfully made.

§VI. Omnipresence is an attribute of the Supreme Being.

When we ascribe omnipresence to God, we ascribe what is invariable, and cannot admit of different degrees. If we say that he exists or is present somewhere, but not every where, this implies that his presence is limited. If this should be asserted, there ~~there~~ would be no contradiction in affirming that his presence might possibly be limited, in some other manner or degree. But a limitation of God's presence could not take place, but in consequence of some previous cause. It is impossible, however, that this should be the case, as God is unoriginated and independent. His presence, therefore, is not local or confined, but universal, unlimited. He as really exists every where, as he exists any where. Thus, the Supreme Being, who is without beginning and without end, who is the first and the last, and beside whom there is no God, is excluded from, & yet included in, no place. If we ascend into heaven, he is there; if we make our bed in hell, he is also there. If we take to ourselves the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there will the hand of God lead us, & his right hand hold us.* The heaven & the heaven of heavens cannot contain him.†

* CXXXIX Psalm 8—10.— † I. Kings VIII. 27.

VII. Living or life is an attribute of God.

He is, for various reasons, called the living God. He is thus called, because he is the fource of all created existence, and of all living operation. He giveth life and breath. In him we live, move, and have our being.

He is also termed living, because he operates agreeably to his good pleafure, not moved by any external impulse. And he is thus called, as distinguished from idols. Said the Psalmist, My heart and my flesh cry out, not for a fenselefs idol, but for the living God.

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§ VIII. Omniscience is also an attribute of God.

Every thing is most perfectly underftood & comprehended by him. At once, he sees and knows every thing through the universe. From eternity he had the same knowledge which he now has; and his perfect knowledge of every thing, whether past, prefent, or to come, will forever remain invariable.

We should ever remember that, at all times, and in all places, we are under the inspection of the omniscient Jehovah, who will be our final Judge. If we afcend into heaven, God is there. O Lord, thou hast searched me, & known me. Thou knowest my down-sitting, & my up-rifing; thou understandest my thoughts afar off. For there is not a word in my tongue, but lo! O Lord, thou knowest it altogether.

These divine attributes are phyfical; which are also called primary. God's moral attributes, which are called fecondary,* are likewife to be underftood in their whole extent, i.e. without limitation. We will attend to his goodnefs, or benevolence.

IX. Goodnefs, or a disposition to confer happinefs on his creatures, is invariable in the Almighty. No degree can either be added to, or taken from, this attribute.

If we say he is good, but not absolutely and infinitely good, this implies some imperfection of his goodnefs, or that it is, in some respect or other, limited or restricted. The limitation or restriction of an attribute, being in itself a circumstance evidently contingent or caused, could not take place in God, who is unoriginated and unchangeable.

We form our ideas of God's attributes, by joining the idea of infinity to every kind of good or excellence of which we can conceive, in rational creatures. For instance, having formed the ideas of existence and duration, of knowledge and power, of goodnefs, pleasure, happinefs, and other qualities and properties which it is more defirable to have, than not to have, we enlarge each with the idea of infinity.

Since the eternal, felf-existent Creator must necessarily have perfections which we term attributes, and an

* Sect. 3.

imperfect attribute cannot belong to him; he must possess each of his attributes in its whole extent. Consequently, as he is unoriginated, self-existent, & independent, he possesses unlimited goodness or benevolence.

Goodness or benevolence consists in a disposition to make others happy; & it implies satisfaction resulting from actions terminating in such a manner as to effect this end. As every thing owes its existence & all its properties and powers to God, and exists within his boundless presence, the thoughts of all hearts, & the inmost essence of all things, must be open to his view. He knows in what the happiness of all sentient and rational beings consists; how it may be most effectually promoted; and how their unhappiness may be in the best manner prevented.

There can be no doubt but that the exercise of his power and his other perfections must be pleasing to Almighty God: and we know, that he is the author and preserver of all things.

No being can choose pain or physical evil for himself. And if any one being should choose pain or physical evil for any other being, he would choose it, that he might gratify a passion, as jealousy or hatred, hoping that the pain or evil of another would, in some way, secure or promote his own pleasure or happiness. On no other account, or, for no other reason, can pain or physical evil in one being be desired by another.

All such desires or passions in a being as aim at the pain or suffering of other beings, for the reasons now offered, imply some want or imperfection. Therefore, as the Supreme Being is absolutely perfect, possessing all his attributes in their whole extent, he can have no desire or passion of any kind, which would give him pleasure or satisfaction in the pain or suffering of other beings. Neither envy, jealousy, cruelty, nor any attribute which implies negation or imperfection, can belong to him. If these cannot belong to him, their opposites must, as they are perfections; for all perfections, without limitation or restriction, belong to him. And we may rest assured that, as far as the Almighty has permitted or suffered any evil to take place in the whole system of creation, he was not influenced, in so doing, by any pleasure arising to him from pain or suffering. In all such cases, he has the most gracious view, either to the final happiness of the subject, or the advancement of the happiness of the system. Therefore, when God suffers moral evil to take place, or dispenses physical evil or pain, he acts the most benevolent part, consulting the good of his great family, over every individual of which he continually exercises his providential care.

X. Let us see what evidence of the goodness of God may be gained from the appearances of nature, or his physical works.

In all these, contrivance or design is perceivable;

contrivance to give and promote convenience and happiness. Every part of an animal has a subserviency to its well-being. When we duly consider the various species of animals; the great number of the individuals of each species; the various parts in each individual; the complexity of structure, and the success of the result,—we reflect with admiration on the character of the eternal & self-existent God.

We must confess that creation was an exertion of goodness, as minute in its care, as vast in its comprehension. When we attend to the limbs and senses of animals, we are presented with the proper medium of proof for the conclusion, that the Almighty is infinitely good.

Although the limbs and senses of animals constitute, in mass & quantity, but a small part of the material creation; yet, since they alone are instruments of useful operations & perception, they compose what is of very great importance, estimated with a view to the disposition of the Creator. Here, we are to seek his character. And, if we carefully seek it, we shall be convinced that the world was made with the most benevolent design. Nor is the design defeated. The world exhibits marks of happiness, in various forms and modes. The earth, the air, the water, teem with existences expressing delight. In a summer evening, wherever we turn our eyes, countless happy beings crowd upon our view. "The insect youth are on the wing."

But the atmosphere is not the only scene of enjoyment for the insect race. On the earth, many are sporting with an alacrity, which indicates every mark of pleasure.

If we look to the productions of the water, we shall perceive shoals of young fishes frequenting the margin of rivers, of ponds & lakes, & the sea itself. Their attitudes, their vivacity, their leaps out of the water, and their sportive gambols in it, show their excess of pleasure, and are the effects of that excess.

The common course of things is in favour of happiness. We are too prone to overlook the effects of divine goodness, although they are many & various. Repose in the silent hours of night, our daily bread, & the use of our limbs, senses, and understandings, are gifts of unspeakable advantage, and demonstrate the goodness of God. Yet, because these are blessings which almost every man enjoys, they do not greatly impress the minds of many. They move no thankfulness: they raise no sentiment.— Here our judgment is perverted by selfishness. Whereas, a blessing ought to afford more satisfaction, at least, the bounty of the giver is rendered more conspicuous, for its diffusion; by its falling to the lot, and contributing to the happiness, of the great body of our species. But, it must be confessed, that pain and privations exist in various cases, & to a degree which, collectively, would appear very great, if they were compared to any thing else than the ug-

gregate of animal enjoyments. For the application of this remark to the mixed state of things, which this exception presents, two rules are just & fair. One is, that we especially regard those effects which are accompanied with proofs of intention: the other, that, when we cannot resolve all appearances into benevolence of design, we make the few give place to the many.

Thus, reason assures us by conclusive argument, and the appearances of nature declare, that the unoriginated, selfexistent Creator is infinitely benevolent.*

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* I shall now demonstrate the impossibility that the earth could have existed from eternity, as some atheists have affirmed.

That the earth has existed from eternity is not a self evident proposition; nor can it be proved by arguments. Those, therefore, who believe, it has existed from eternity, place their belief on this foundation, that, for aught they know, it has existed from eternity.

That the earth is not eternal, is the obvious consequence of ~~the~~ reasoning, which has been employed in the foregoing pages. It has been proved, that there must be, in the universe, a being, whose non-existence is impossible; who had no beginning, and can have no end; and that it is impossible he should not possess every perfection or divine attribute. Therefore, if the earth were the unoriginated being, it would be omnipresent. If the earth were omnipresent, it would fill infinite space, and make a perfect plenum, through the universe. But various other bodies, as the sun, moon, and stars, exist; therefore, the earth can be supposed by no one to possess infinite space.

As there must be in the universe a being who cannot but exist, and who must of necessity possess all possible perfections, he is infinitely wise, powerful, and benevolent, &c. But this being cannot be the earth. No man believes that the earth is infinitely wise, powerful, benevolent, just, and holy.

The earth, as we have observed, is not omnipresent. As it lacks ~~one perfect~~ one ~~infinite~~ and divine attribute, it can have no one ~~infinite~~ and divine attribute. Therefore, it is not eternal, but must have been created.

XI. From the view which we have taken of the Supreme Being, we may see with what propriety the Scriptures so expressly ascribe holiness to him. By his holiness, we are to understand that transcendent excellence, by which he is infinitely removed from all moral imperfection, and from whatever can tend to lessen or counteract the perfection and happiness, of obtaining which he has made his rational creatures capable.

The term holiness, when applied to the Supreme Being, signifies that he invariably wills what is right, & fit to be done; or what his uner-

ring wisdom points out as tending to promote, in the best manner, the general good of the countless variety of creatures, to which he has been pleased to give existence and reason.

Neither moral perfection nor imperfection is, in the least, inconsistent with that liberty which constitutes a free agent; that is, a being who has the power of acting according to his volition or choice; or of acting, or forbearing to act, without being acted upon; by which power an agent is distinguished from an instrument.

Actions ~~of all kinds~~ of all kinds & descriptions are equally objects of God's power; &, consequently of his infinite power. Therefore, he as much exercises his liberty, in abstaining from evil actions, as he does, in performing good or holy actions.

When it is said, that the perfections of God necessitate him to act, and to do that only which is good or holy, this is not meant in the same sense as when it is said, he is necessitated to exist. But the meaning is, that the perfections of God form in him a certain and invariable principle of acting with perfect wisdom & benevolence. Of moral necessity he must forever act and do only what is good and holy. Necessity in this sense of the word is consistent with the most perfect free agency. As Doctor Clarke observes, "it is as impossible, and as contradictory to suppose, that his will should prompt him to do any thing contrary to goodness, justice, and truth, as that his power should be able to do any thing inconsistent with power. It is no diminution of power not to be able to do things which are no objects of power; and it is no diminution either of power or liberty in God, that he has such a perfect and unalterable rectitude of will as never possibly to choose to do any thing inconsistent with perfect rectitude.

Thus, the unoriginated, self-existent Creator is possessed of invariable holiness, in its whole extent. He is glorious in holiness. In like manner, he must possess all moral, as well as physical perfections. We should, therefore, adore him with the most profound reverence, and love him supremely!

Clarke's Demonst. — Hamilton on the Existence, &c. — Paley's Natural Theol. — Locke on Human Understanding.

CHAPTER III.

How and in what respects the Supreme Being is incomprehensible by us.

§I. Some men have asserted, that the being of God is altogether inconceivable; and that, when we ascribe to him thought and reason, we should confess that the import of these terms is entirely unknown. They affirm that, the imbecility of our nature does not permit us to reach any ideas which, in any sense, correspond with the infinite sublimity of his perfections and character. They say to scrutinize his being, attributes, and government, is next to the impiety of denying his existence.

While we confess that, in various respects, the Almighty cannot be comprehended by any created understanding, we must, at the same time maintain, that his existence and some of his attributes are, in a sense, comprehensible or (if any prefer the term) apprehensible even by us. Otherwise, we must admit that we have no ideas of God; that we worship we know not what; and are unable in any way to define that Almighty Being who made and preserves us, and who is the subject of our present inquiries. This, however, is not the case: for all, who believe in one first cause, agree in conceiving him to be a spiritual, eternal, self-existent, unchangeable, and independent being. All the ideas contained in this description are clear, distinct, and abstract, perfectly consistent one with another.

In defining or describing this being, we are to estimate no uncertain degrees of qualities or powers. No allowances are to be made for any probable or possible changes in the object defined. Every thing contained in it is fixed and invariable.

We do not pretend to form an idea of any being or substance, perfectly adequate to its essence, and all its relations; especially of the Supreme Being. Yet we are able to define him in so evident and perspicuous a manner, that no one can doubt what is meant, when we say there is an eternal, self-existent God.

We shall now consider how, and in what respects, the Supreme Being is incomprehensible by us.

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§II. As we have observed,* having formed the ideas of existence and duration, of knowledge and power, of wisdom and goodness, of pleasure and happiness, and of other properties and qualities, which it is more desirable to have than not to have, when we would form an idea the most suitable we can to the Supreme Being, we enlarge

* Chap. II. §§ IX.

each of them with the idea of infinity. These, and all possible perfections, thus enlarged, are to be ascribed to him.

It is evident that we cannot form an adequate idea of God, because we cannot have an adequate idea of infinity. Consequently, as to the extent of his being and of all his perfections, he is incomprehensible by us.

And frequently we must be unable to trace the particular reasons of his conduct, in the administration of his government. Who by searching can find out God? Who can find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is high as heaven.---It is deeper than hell.*

As the perfections of the Supreme Being are infinite, it is reasonable to believe that some parts of his works, as well as instances of the dispensations of his providence, will never be completely understood by the most exalted of his creatures. It is not surprising then, if we, who, it is probable, are the lowest in the orders of rational beings, should often be unable to investigate the reasons of his holy and wise arrangements in the government of the world.

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§III. Important events in providence are often effected by means, which seem to us altogether insufficient to the ends proposed. As the Supreme

*Job XI. 7 & 8.

Being is omniscient, he always has in view all the events which will ever take place. With this unbounded view he acts.—He has produced such systems, and such existences to act in them, as in his infinite wisdom he chose to create. However complicated any system may be, he sees through all its mazes, and, with perfect ease, orders and controls every circumstance to subserve his wise and gracious ends. As he possesses universal power, all creation being at his command, he employs what instruments he pleases in executing his designs. On these accounts, beings of circumscribed views and powers cannot comprehend all the reasons of the dispensations of his providence.

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§IV. Various ends which are pursued in God's government of the world, as well as the means by which they are obtained, must necessarily be beyond our view. It is certain that the ultimate end, which the Almighty proposes, in all the dispensations of his providence, and his whole administration through all his systems of existences, is the glory of his perfections, displayed in happiness bestowed on his rational creatures. In subordination and subservience to this, he is pursuing an infinite variety of ends. We may, therefore, conclude, that only a small part of the proceedings of the Almighty, in the dispensations of his providence, and the government of the world, is within the compass of our observation. And, with respect to this small part, we are often at a loss, with all the reason and sagacity we have,

to investigate the particular purposes of his conduct. And may not even those dispensations, in which we are most nearly concerned, and which we seem to understand in part, have many relations, of which we are altogether ignorant? This, doubtless, is the case.

§V. In human affairs, we often judge of ends by the means and agents, employed to obtain them. When we perceive only weak and unexpected means and agents employed, we are apt to form mean and contemptible ideas of the effects to ensue. But this mode of reasoning we should be careful not to apply to the proceedings of the eternal God. He frequently sees fit to employ weak means, and unexpected instruments and agents, to bring to pass the most important events, and display his glory.

§VI. Sometimes God, in his infinite wisdom, is pleased to employ means which, in our apprehension, have no relation nor suitableness to the ends proposed. We must, in such instances, be very unqualified to judge of the particular ends of his providential dispensations. Indeed, whenever God is pleased to make use of means to effect his ends, and we cannot perceive the connection between those means and ends; in all such cases, the conduct of his providence must appear to us dark and inexplicable.

§VII. Sometimes God, in his holy and wise providence, is pleased to effect his designs by means entirely opposite, in our apprehension, to the ends proposed. As he created all things by the word of his power; caused light ~~to arise~~ to arise out of darkness, and order and harmony from chaos and confusion: so, in the government of the world, he often makes events, which seem to promise only disappointment, unhappiness, and sorrow, effective of lasting and substantial good. Thus, with respect to pain and suffering in general, however terrible they may appear, yet they are designed by infinite wisdom and goodness to accomplish or promote the most gracious ends: to restrain our appetites; subdue our unruly passions; strengthen our virtues; raise our minds above the fading objects of time; and train us up for everlasting and consummate felicity and glory.

When God is pleased to remove by death, from their employments in the world, persons eminent in piety and improvements in useful science, even at the time when their lives seem most important, to us the dispensations appear dark; we cannot comprehend them. To our weak understandings they may appear inconsistent with the interest of virtue, and the goodness of the gracious parent of the human kind. But it is not for us to prescribe to the Almighty, whose thoughts are as far above our thoughts, as the heavens are high above the earth.

God often overrules the passions and vices of men, to subserve the great ends of his providence.

On various occasions, he has made the wrath of man contribute to the illustration of his glory; and the remainder of that wrath he has restrained. In many ways, he takes the wise in their own craftiness, and disappoints the counsels of the froward.

In fine. We may rest assured, that all evil, both moral and natural, will, in the issue, be overruled to answer great and wise purposes in the universe. Nor is the darkness or imperfection of our understandings, which, at present, are unable to comprehend how this can be, any reasonable objection to the truth of the assertion. It should satisfy us, that the Supreme Being is infinitely powerful and good; and that he will forever do what is fit & just, although, in various respects, his judgments are to us a great deep which we cannot fathom.

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§ VIII. The complete and comprehensive understanding of the constitution, arrangement, and reason of things, belongs to that being only, who made and governs the world. We do not completely or fully understand the most common and familiar objects which we perceive. It must then argue great presumption in man to suppose, that he can fully comprehend the dispensations of God's providence. We cannot by searching find him out; we cannot find out the Almighty unto perfection. God's way is in the sea, and his path in the great waters; and his footsteps are not known. How then can we expect to comprehend all his wise counsels, and form an adequate idea of his government of the world?

It is affirmed by one whose wisdom is universally acknowledged, that it is the glory of God to conceal a thing.* This evidently shows, that the government of the world requires secret arrangements of providence; and that, therefore, we ought not to desire nor expect to understand all the reasons of his conduct. We are ignorant of many things, without the knowledge of which it is impossible that we should comprehend the reasons of providence. We fail, not only in fully comprehending the works of nature; but in knowing the hearts and real characters of men. But, unless we more perfectly understand the characters of men, it is impossible that we should investigate all the reasons of the dispensations of God's providence towards them. And, further, the reasons of God's providence often respect the invisible world. We cannot, therefore, fully comprehend his providence, without a perfect knowledge of the ~~world~~ invisible as well as visible world. Our minds should be deeply impressed with these solemn ideas!

§ IX. As God is our Creator, it is certain that we depend upon him for preservation: for whatever does not exist by the internal principles of its nature, must depend on its Creator for its existence and preservation.

The world either exists by chance, or is preserved

* Prov. XXV. 2.

by an almighty and infinitely wise Creator.

Chance is a word without an idea, when it is used as implying an agent or cause. The term, when it signifies any thing, means that we know not the connection between an effect and its cause, or that we are ignorant of the cause of an effect. Therefore, to say that the world exists by chance means, that it exists without any cause of its existence. To say that the world, or any thing, exists, or is preserved or governed, by chance, implies that the world, or that thing, exists, or is preserved or governed, without any efficient cause or agent.

As the world is preserved, we cannot but be assured, that it is preserved by an agent. Reason certifies us, that the preserver of the world is infinitely powerful, wise, and good. However unsearchable his ways are, he can do no wrong. He perfectly knows what is best for his creatures, and will in the most illustrious manner display his glory. And with an ultimate view to these he will forever act.

Since benevolence or goodness exists in the world, and is an effect of the Supreme Being, it is one of his attributes: for whatever exercise of mind we have, which it is better to possess than not to possess, we must ascribe it to God, in its infinite extent, or enlarged with the idea of infinity.

Thus, the world is governed by a being of infinite goodness, as well as of infinite wisdom & power. God's infinite and absolute power is not only consistent, but is joined and cooperates, with infinite good will. This power cannot possibly do any thing which ought not to be done, for it is exerted according to infinite wisdom and goodness. We have, therefore, no more reason to fear infinite power, than infinite wisdom and goodness, in God.

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§ X. If we have a just view of God's character, we esteem his infinite power, and his sovereignty or unlimited control, to be our greatest security. These will not only do us no hurt, but they will rectify all the injustice which shall have been done in the universe. An unshaken belief of this would afford great relief and consolation under all those dispensations of providence, which now appear to us dark and unaccountable.

Indeed, as we have observed, while a being of infinite wisdom governs the world, various parts of his providence must be beyond our comprehension. But would not every rational and good man choose rather to be governed by a being of this description, than by a being whose counsels he could perfectly understand & comprehend?

The more excellent & perfect God's wisdom is, the less can we understand it; but, at the same time, we are proportionally more safe, under his conduct. Thus, since we are safe in the hands of a being of infinite wisdom, power, and goodness, we should acquiesce, and, indeed, rejoice, in all the dispensations of God's providence.

XI. Are we less happy, because we know not how God formed us, or gave us existence? And what disadvantage is it to us, that God governs the world, and takes care of all his creatures in it, by wisdom as incomprehensible as that which produced us into being? We perceive that we are wisely made, although we know not how we were made. And, hereafter, we shall be perfectly happy, if we now love and obey our Creator, although we shall never be able to trace all the intermediate steps and advances of providence to effect our happiness. It becomes us, therefore, to maintain a firm belief that God preserves & governs the world with infinite wisdom and goodness. And, although the dispensations of his providence often appear dark and mysterious in our view and apprehension, yet we should sincerely rejoice in his universal government.

Whatever our state and circumstances in the world are, we should acquiesce in the administration of the Supreme Being, who made us, and preserves our existence. Under afflictions, we should earnestly desire the disposition of mind which was manifested by that pious ancient, who said, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord". *

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§ XII. Contemplating the Supreme Being as possessing all possible perfections, and in so many respects incomprehensible in the dispensations of his providence and the government of the world, we should reflect upon him with the most profound veneration.

The mind of man often is disposed to give a free scope to its inquiries. We are too prone to judge ourselves equal to the task of solving every subject, unless it be absurd, which comes under our consideration. The consequence is, when we meet with deep and abstruse subjects beyond our comprehension, we sometimes conclude they are absurd in their nature, instead of confessing our imperfection and ignorance. We should carefully guard against such presumption, in our reasonings upon the counsels and conduct of the Governor of the universe.

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§ XIII. We should study to form rational ideas of

* Job I. 21.

God's being, perfections, and providence, as far as our conduct and happinefs are concerned. And for this we have sufficient light from reason and the scriptures. But it does not become us to foster in our breasts a vain curiosity, in prying into the secret counsels, and labouring to investigate the perfections of God, in their whole extent. We should be content with what our Maker has been pleased to reveal to us, beyond which we should not even wish to be wise.

Shall man arrogate to himself the wisdom of God? Shall we assume to ourselves the government of the universe; and audaciously attempt to comprehend all the counsels and designs of the most High?

We have the fullest reason, from what we discover of his works and providence, to conclude that perfect wisdom and goodnefs preside at the head of the universe. We should then reflect, that there not only may, but that there must, be many things incomprehensible by us, in the dispensations of God's providence, and the administration of his government; and that it is impossible for us to enter into all the reasons of his proceedings.

We should be modest and humble in our inquiries on this subject. We should never rashly pronounce, concerning our Maker, what is fit or unfit for him to do. We should never distrust the justice, the wisdom, or goodnefs of his dispensations. On the other hand, we should maintain a deep and humiliating sense of the infirmity and darknefs of our understandings; confessing and adoring the infinite wisdom of God, whose ways are unsearchable, and whose judgments are a great deep.

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§ XIV. This subject should impress our minds with a deep conviction of the propriety of entire submission to the dispensations of God's providence. Are we competent judges, in these cases, of his administration? What if the dispensations of his providence have no apparent relation to our happinefs? Must we conclude that they will not, in any case or measure, promote our interest, because we cannot comprehend their operation?

We should remember, that the ways of God's providence extend far beyond the reach of our finite understandings, and that he acts by various means, of which we can form no ideas.

As the blessed God is self-existent and independent; as he has created, and preserves and governs, all things; and as he possesses infinite power, wisdom, and goodnefs; it is in the highest degree reasonable, that we commit ourselves & all our

concerns to the care of his providence. We should esteem ourselves happy, that all the events, which relate to us, are under his inspection and control. Secure of this, if we be in due subjection to the will of our Maker, we shall cherish no disquietude or uneasiness, on account of his government.

Indeed, we should bless God for the assurance which he has given us, that all things will be overruled for good to his faithful servants.

Reason as well as scripture assures us that, in the end, it will be well with good men.

The perfections of God and the honour of his government require, that there should be an everlasting distinction, between the pious and the impious.

When we confine our views to the scenes of confusion and calamity which overspread the world, the prospect is gloomy. But, when we duly contemplate the Supreme Being, as presiding over the whole, and overruling all events to subserve the purposes of his providence & grace, all uncomfortable thoughts vanish. The mind of the good man is kept in perfect peace, while it is stayed on God.

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§ XV. We should humbly look forward to that day, when the clouds and darkness, which intercept or obstruct our view of the wisdom and justice of providence, will be so far dispelled, that we shall receive perfect satisfaction.

Whatever reason there may be for our silent submission to the appointments of providence, in this world; and how fully soever we may be convinced, in general, of the wisdom and goodness of God's administration; yet many instances occur, which, at present, our utmost penetration cannot solve. It is then a great happiness to be assured, that what we know not now, we shall know hereafter; when we shall not see, as through a glass darkly, but with open face behold the glory of the Lord. Such expressions fully imply, that, hereafter, we shall see, in a much clearer light than we now possibly can, the reasons of such dispensations of providence as, at present, appear most perplexed and obscure. We shall discover the happy consequences of the trials and sufferings with which we are now exercised; and trace the wisdom and goodness of our Creator, even in the darkest scenes through which we pass.

It is probable, the glory of God's perfections will shine brightest in those parts of his conduct, for which we are now least able to account.

In the future world, no objections will remain from the calamities and sufferings of the godly; nor from the prosperity of the wicked. The wisdom & equity of God's final sentence will be universally confessed; & the state of all mankind will be forever fixed, according to their real characters.

§ XVI. From this subject we learn the safety of the objects of God's favour and love; and the danger of the objects of his displeasure. The objects of his favour and love are under his inspection and care. They are under the inspection and care of him who is infinite in power, wisdom, and goodness; who knows what is best for them; and will always deal with them in such a manner as will, in the issue, be for his glory, and their everlasting happiness. Wicked men may design them much evil; but these can afflict them no more than the wise and almighty Sovereign of the universe sees best to permit. He governs all worlds. He, therefore, controls all other beings in the universe. The efforts of all his creatures, combined against him, would be ineffectual. They would "strive in vain".

This Almighty Being will punish his enemies. It will, therefore, be wisdom in us to obey his will, since we must submit to his power.

He sets bounds to the raging of the sea; to the madness of the people. From him we cannot flee. We cannot defend ourselves from the arm of his power.

In a word. When we duly reflect on this subject, we must be convinced, that we ought to rejoice in God's universal government, & rely on his gracious protection. Since all we suffer is for the best; and since we are in the hands of the greatest, the wisest, and the most benevolent of beings, we should be conformed to his will, & confide in his providence.

Butler's Analogy. — Hamilton on the Existence, &c. — Locke on Hum. Understanding.