

CONTEMPLATIONS

ON THE

BEAUTIES OF CREATION

AND ON ALL THE

PRINCIPAL TRUTHS AND BLESSINGS

OF THE

GLORIOUS GOSPEL;

WITH THE

SINS AND GRACES

OF

PROFESSING CHRISTIANS.

V O L. I.

THE THIRD EDITION.

By JOHN RYLAND, A. M.
OF NORTHAMPTON.

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A
CONTEMPLATION
ON THE
EXISTENCE AND PERFECTIONS of GOD,
DRAWN FROM THE
SEVERAL PARTS OF THE VISIBLE WORLD,
THE
STRUCTURE OF THE HUMAN BODY,
AND THE
WONDERFUL POWERS OF THE SOUL;
AS AN IMAGE OF THE
WISDOM, POWER, AND THE INVISIBLE AND
IMMORTAL NATURE OF GOD.

TO my WORTHY FRIENDS in LONDON, BRISTOL,
and NORTHAMPTON, and several other parts
of the KINGDOM, who have encouraged the
publication of these CONTEMPLATIONS.

Dear and honoured Friends,

AS this work is designed to give a pleasing
and comprehensive view of all the branches
of the CHRISTIAN RELIGION, I must desire your
attention for a few moments, whilst I lay before
you the chief outlines, and the manner in which
I have conducted the whole.

I have determined to take no principle of religion upon trust; that is, I have not supposed any one thing to be true, but my own existence; and this is so evident, that I cannot make it more plain by any kind of reasoning whatsoever. I proceed to consider the most striking and popular evidences of the existence of God—and in the second CONTEMPLATION, I shall prove the immortality of the soul, and represent its powers and affections in the most easy and familiar manner, on the principles of reason alone—in the third CONTEMPLATION, I shall set before you the nature and madness of atheism,* and its ruinous consequences to mankind—in the fourth CON-

TEMPLATION,

* This part is omitted on account of the horrid deformity of the subject.

TEMPLATION, I shall attempt to demonstrate the utter insufficiency of reason, in its present state, to lead us to eternal happiness, or the everlasting possession of the favour of God. I shall then easily evince the absolute necessity of a divine revelation to lead us to the clear knowledge of God and our duty, and a state of future happiness or eternal life. We shall go on to demonstrate the possibility of a revelation from God—the nature of inspiration, and the clear evidences of it.—As this is a subject of great difficulty, and unutterable importance, I must proceed, by slow and sure steps, to state this matter in the most clear and unexceptionable manner in my power; and, indeed, this I have found, by many years experience, to be the most arduous part of my work: it requires the most intense thoughts, and the most severe attention and care: how I have succeeded, must be left to the candid and impartial judgment of my readers. I trust I have not written one line, but with a sacred reverence of God, and with clear and determinate ideas, as far as the very sublime nature of the subject would admit. I desire to write every page of this work with a prospect of the awful tribunal of God: before him I must shortly appear to give an account of all the secret springs of my actions, and all the labours of my life. I know, after thirty-two years enquiry, that, on the principles of reason, my soul is immortal; and, on the principles of the gospel, my eternal existence,
either

either blissful or miserable, must be determined by the word and will of the Lord Jesus Christ: I am certain, that, by Him, every man's character will be declared, and the state of every soul fixed for eternity. At my time of life, there is not a moment to be lost in trifling with God and the souls of men; I would therefore wish to be as serious as death in every thing I do for the service of mankind. The happiness of the rising generation lies very near my heart, and to that object I direct all my labours and all my views. If I may promote and propagate the clear knowledge of God in Christ, and vital holiness in the souls of men—if I can but possess a peaceful conscience and an approving God, I shall feel myself not only easy under any unkind suspicions of men, but shall be safe from unjust censure and scorn. I hope I shall pity bad men, and love good men, even if they should treat me with severity and rigour. If I should be found in any material error, I will readily acknowledge it, and gratefully love the friend who shall point it out.

When we have fully demonstrated the divine inspiration and authority of the holy Scriptures, we shall proceed to display their excellent usefulness to the souls of men—the affections of true christians towards these sacred writings, with rules for the right understanding of the law and gospel—we shall close this part of our work with a plain and easy view of the whole book of the Revelations.

We

We shall then advance to the consideration of the glorious perfections of God—the scripture doctrine of the true and proper divinity of the Son and Spirit of God—a prospect of the various parts of creation—and a large demonstration of a special and peculiar providence for the support of sincere believers in Christ. We shall consider the original perfections and glory of man—his ruin and recovery in all its capital parts—and take a view of all the doctrines and blessings of grace—the various branches of sin and duty—the beauty of social religion, and the last scenes of death—the immortality of the soul, on the principles of revelation—the terror and glory of the resurrection, the eternal judgment, heaven and hell.

Such is the work now proposed to the consideration of serious young christians in general. The author commits himself and his readers to the providence and grace of the most glorious redeemer of souls, waiting for that hour when we expect a most solemn interview in the presence of God.

JOHN RYLAND.

NORTHAMPTON, March 8, 1780.

INTRO-

INTRODUCTION.

THE ideas of existence, and the ideas of a God, do not immediately appear connected so clearly and instantly as the ideas of existence, and the idea of our own being; or so readily as we perceive that two and two make four.

But the existence of God will admit of proof by making use of other ideas or representations of the visible things of the universe, whose agreement, with the idea of God, is in a moment perceived by the mind in the whole process of demonstration.

Demonstration is an easy process of reasoning, beginning from some plain and self-evident truth, and regularly descending by a clear connexion, or chain of ideas, till you come at your conclusion.

Reasoning is employed only about demonstrable truths, and our intuitive and self-evident perceptions are the ultimate foundation on which all our reasoning rests.

And in this manner we have proceeded with respect to this contemplation and easy demon-

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stration of the existence and perfections of God. We have made use of other ideas, taken from the visible creation and the soul of man; and the agreement of these ideas, with our idea of God, is instantly seen by every man of common sense, in the whole process of the demonstration.

And thus we may proceed, with respect to all the branches of natural and revealed religion, and by beginning with clear self-evident truths and simple ideas, and advancing by easy steps, produce a satisfying and beautiful evidence of every doctrine and duty of the christian religion; and display, in a striking and alluring manner, to our ingenious and pious youth, all the parts of vital holiness and social virtue: and, at the same time, the opposite sins and vices may be painted in the most ugly and disgusting colours, so as to expose them to the hatred and scorn of every person that has the least love for his own soul, or the lowest degree of desire to avoid utter ruin for both worlds.

Thus we may display, in contrast, the horrid deformity and madness of atheism, and the beauties of true religion; the detestable ugliness of infidelity, and the excellence of true faith; the loveliness of gratitude to God, and the deformity and horrors of ingratitude. The nature, appearance, and horrid effects of pride, as it is a resemblance

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semblance of the devil, and the beauties and happy consequences of deep humility.

Thus we may display the horrors of rash anger, and the infernal malignity of envy and revenge, with all the lovely charms of meekness and patience.

The infinite evil of apostasy from the gospel, and the causes and ruinous consequences of such a dreadful temper, can never be set in too strong a light, or painted in too terrible a manner.

The luxury, riot, debauchery, lust, and madness of the present age, can never be painted in colours equal to the life: our language hath no words nor powers equal to the subject, nor is there a language in the world strong and copious enough for it: a new one ought to be made on purpose that has phrases, images, and energies, that were never seen before; and even then, the keenness of a Juvenal, the imaginative powers of a Milton, the force and grandeur of a Young united, would be all too weak to use an eloquence and language equal to our crimes.

The lukewarmness and hypocrisy of multitudes of professors of christianity, ought to be displayed in the most vivid and striking manner, to the end that the guilty may see their own picture, and tremble at the frightful deformity: at the same time, a well-informed and rational

iv. I N T R O D U C T I O N .

zeal, remote from blind bigotry, and well purged from uncharitableness, and a bitter, bloody, absurd spirit of persecution; I say, a well-illuminated zeal for the truths and purity of the gospel, demands and deserves to be displayed in all its shining-beauty and lovely colours. Never was a judicious and manly zeal for the glory of God more wanting than in our day.

In a word, all the parts of practical religion, with the opposite sins and vices, may be treated with great advantage in short dissertations, and so as to instruct, convince, and persuade, at the same time.

I will not say that I have been able to execute a work in this manner; but this I may affirm, that I have had an hearty good will to it for thirty-five years past.

On March 16, 1745, I first laid down my plan of a body of divinity, including all the principal branches of natural and revealed religion, and I have been working at it ever since, sometimes with more assiduity and success, and sometimes with less; but I believe few days have passed without some view to it, or preparation for it. I began it for my own use, and in order to fit myself the better to execute the office which divine providence and grace assigned me: whatever I have met with in books, or public sermons,

or

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or conversation with wise and good men, I have seized as my own, judging that the whole system of truth and knowledge lies free and open to every man that has a love for it. I would wish to imitate the bee, who roves over all the fields and flowers, and converts to her own use whatever she finds fit for her purpose: she carries home her spoils, and works them up in her own way, without ever being accused of theft or injustice.

However, as a Pagan could observe, that it is honest and grateful to acknowledge your obligations to all those from whom you have received instruction and advantage; so I would, with the utmost gratitude and pleasure, confess, that even this first essay would not probably have been written, if I had not read Ray, Derham, and Cambridge: Mr. Martin's Demonstration of the Existence of God especially, pleased and struck me so much, that after reading and digesting it, I was determined to attempt to write a more easy Contemplation on the same plan: any person of taste, who shall think it proper to compare them together, will see that his dissertation is more learned, copious, and philosophical than mine: on the other hand, mine is adapted to the capacities of all sensible and virtuous young persons, and is, upon the whole, best suited to my design, as a proper foundation to all my other Contemplations. Upon

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Upon a review of a great variety of authors* on the Existence of God, I think most of them too abstracted, or too prolix, to suit the understanding and taste of our British youth. The most simple, striking, and popular arguments, are those which are drawn from the visible world, the structure of the human body, and the powers and passions of the soul; these are adapted to the common sense and reason of all mankind, and will be found the best sources of evidence as long as the world endures.

If any person of reading and taste shall think it worth his while to read over this essay on God and the soul, he will easily perceive that I am indebted to Mr. Grove, Mr. Hubbard, Charnock, Beattie, Dr. Waterland, Dr. Samuel Wright, Dr. Watts, Mr. Addison, Dr. Blair, Dr. Leng, Dr. Gill, and Dr. Young.

In all my subsequent Contemplations and Demonstrations, I have freely borrowed whatever is fit for my purpose from every quarter. I take a delight in acknowledging my obligations to many authors of the richest genius, taste, and piety ;
and

* The best authors are, 1. Dr. Cudworth. 2. Dr. Wilkins. 3. Mr. John Howe. 4. Charnock. 5. Tillotson. 6. Mr. Ray. 7. Dr. Bates. 8. Mr. Locke. 9. Dr. John Edwards. 10. Dr. Bentley. 11. Dr. Clarke. 12. Dr. Derham. 13. Dr. Wisheart. 14. Whiston's Astronomical Principles of Religion. 15. Dr. Nieuwentyte's Religious Philosopher. 16. Cambray on the Existence of God. 17. Mr. Robt. Millar. 18. Wollaston. 19. Dr. Leng. 20. Sir Richard Blackmore. 21. Dr. Ridgely. 22. Mr. Abernethy. 23. Mr. Grove. 24. Dr. Gill. 25. Dr. Cotton Mather.

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and rejoice in the occasion I have to subscribe to the words of the most amiable and excellent Rollin. “ En un mot, tout ce qu’il y a de meilleur dans cet ouvrage n’est point de moi ; & que m’importe d’où il soit, pourvû qu’il se trouve utile à la jeunesse, qui est le seul but que j’ai dû me proposer ?

“ Je n’ai garde de vouloir me faire honneur des richesses d’autrui : il y auroit en cela quelque chose de plus que de l’imprudence. Je souhaiterois seulement qu’elles pussent couvrir ma pauvreté, & que cette foule de beautés étrangères qui ornent mon ouvrage fît oublier, ou du moins excuser, les défauts qui me sont personnels.” †

† See Rollin’s *De la Maniere d’Enseigner et d’Etudier Les Belles Lettres*, tome premier, page 109.

N. B. The first part of this volume is reprinted a fourth time.

NORTHAMPTON, Feb. 16, 1780.

P O S T-



P O S T S C R I P T.

The reader is desired to observe, that the glorious discoveries of divine revelation are not introduced in this Contemplation, because we have not yet demonstrated the divine authority and inspiration of the Scriptures; but we have, in the present essay, proceeded on the principles of reason, though it was difficult for a man who feels the strongest veneration and love for the word of God, to restrain himself in this manner.



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N. B. A translation of Dr. Lowth's latin verses will be given in vol. 2.

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T O T H E

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