

with great truth and precision, what facts should take place, what characters should arise, and what actions of great consequence should be performed. The objects of prophecy have respected the four great empires of the world—the people of the Jews, with their city and temple—other nations around them—the person and sufferings of the Messiah, with the extent and glory of his kingdom in the world—the rise and ruin of popery—and lastly, the internal characters of all mankind in every period of time, with the glory and terror of the resurrection, and the final issue of all the councils and purposes of God.

The MORAL CHARACTER of the penmen consists in those distinguishing qualities, or virtues and graces of their minds, and the peculiar tenor of their conduct, which evidently shew their connexion with God and commission from him as his servants. This appears with the brightest light in the human and divine perfections of the son of God.

I. We now return to the most pleasing views of the GOODNESS of the DOCTRINE, LAWS, and BLESSINGS of Scripture, to promote effectually the salvation and happiness of mankind.

I will introduce my subject with the thoughts of the excellent and amiable Mr. Matth. Henry, who speaks thus: “ The Scripture proves its divine authority and original both to the wise

and to the unwise. Even to the unwise, and least thinking part of mankind, it is abundantly proved by the many uncontestable MIRACLES wrought by Moses and the prophets, Christ and his apostles, for the confirmation of its truths and laws. It would be an intolerable reproach to ETERNAL TRUTH to suppose this divine seal affixed to a lie.

“ Besides this, to the more wise and thinking, to the more considerate and contemplative, it recommends itself by those INNATE EXCELLENCIES which are SELF-EVIDENT CHARACTERISTICS of its DIVINE ORIGINAL. If we look with attention, we shall soon be aware of GOD’S image and superscription upon it. A mind rightly disposed, by an humble sincere subjection to its maker, will easily discover the image of GOD’S wisdom in the awful depth of its mysteries—the image of his sovereignty in the commanding majesty of its style—the image of his unity in the wonderful harmony and symmetry of all its parts—the image of his holiness in the unspotted purity of its precepts—and the image of his GOODNESS in the manifest tendency of the whole to the welfare and happiness of mankind in both worlds : in short, it is a work that fathers itself.* And as atheists, so deists, notwithstanding their vain-glorious pretensions to REASON, as if wisdom must die with them, run themselves upon the grossest and

* Preface to Exposition, vol. 1.

and most dishonourable ABSURDITIES imaginable : for if the Scriptures be not the word of GOD, then there is no divine revelation now in the world, no discovery at all of GOD's mind concerning our duty and happiness : so that if any man in the world was ever so desirous and solicitous to do his maker's will, he must, without remedy, perish in the ignorance of it, since there is no book but this that will undertake to tell him what it is ; a consequence which can by no means be reconciled to the idea we have of the DIVINE GOODNESS. And (which is no less an absurdity) if the Scriptures be not really a divine revelation, they are certainly as great a cheat as ever was put upon the world. But we have no reason to think them so ; for *bad* men would never write so *good* a book, nor would Satan have so little subtilty as to help to cast out Satan ; and good men would never do so ill a thing as to counterfeit the broad seal of heaven, and to affix it to a patent of their own framing, though in itself never so just : no, these are not the words of him that hath a devil." Thus far Mr. Henry.

In order to discern the transcendent goodness and beauty of the holy Scriptures, let us proceed, by regular steps, to consider what are the principal wants and wishes of a rational and immortal soul, who knows its true state in the present life, and its greatest interests with regard to

a vast eternity just before us, and to which we are hastening as fast as the rapid flight of time can carry us. Now, certainly, it must be my first enquiry, “Where is God my maker? and how shall I know him so as to love him, resemble him, and enjoy his favour for ever?”—We have already proved the utter insufficiency of reason to lead us to the true knowledge of God. Contemplation III.—Now nothing is of so great and dear importance to me as to keep continually in my soul a clear, distinct, and strong idea of the amiable and venerable character of God. No religion can rise in a soul without this: no true religion can make any progress in a soul without this: 'tis essential to all religion and happiness to keep up a lovely and lively idea of God, as the first fair, the first wonderful, the first amiable, the first adorable and the last end of my existence.

Knowledge is the conception of ideas, and comparing them to see their agreement or difference. The first of all kinds of knowledge I want is the conception of right ideas of God and my own soul, in order that I may discern my duty to him, and happiness in him.

We want, therefore, above all things, such discoveries of God as are plain and easy to the capacities of my soul, and to the capacities of all mankind. The certainty of God's perfections and the uses of them, must be made clear and pleasing to the human mind. We

We need a particular and special knowledge of GOD, such as will produce and cherish a peculiar love and veneration for him; general notions, however extensive, are not sufficient. To conceive, on the whole, that GOD is the BEST and the GREATEST, is not enough for our special purposes and vast affairs with GOD. We must, in every sort of actions, have a peculiar eye to GOD, as ever present, ever attentive to our souls : yea, in each particular action, we need such knowledge of GOD as may influence, guide, and animate us to that regard which is due to him in that kind of actions, or that particular action we are performing before him.

We want a large and comprehensive knowledge of GOD, in order to answer the grand ends of religion, wisdom, and happiness. Religion is not confined to one particular sort of actions, but must run through all our temper at all times, and through all our conduct in all places : and, therefore, there must be a knowledge not merely of one or two perfections of the divine nature, but we must have a real sense and conception of all the natural attributes, and the glorious and beautiful properties which constitute GOD's lovely MORAL CHARACTER.

'Tis true, indeed, GOD cannot be comprehended in all or in any of his perfections : but we must have a just sense and a clear idea of those attributes

attributes and rights of God, which require our regard in our particular actions, so far as these glorious properties are the ground of our veneration and devout affection. As for instance ; to engage me to trust or confide in God, I must know something of his omnipresence and his almighty power, his special care of me, and his minute attention to all my affairs and wants, with his faithfulness to all his promises. To excite me at any time to pray to God, I must be persuaded of his vast knowledge, his perfect wisdom, and his abundant willingness to hear my prayers and attend to the ardent emotions of my heart : I must know his unwearied power and active affection to assist me in the petitions I offer to him. To allure and persuade me to love God, I must know the beauty of his character, as the most excellent being ; his fitness to do me good, as a bountiful rewarder of them that diligently seek him ; his fitness and worthiness to receive all good, as he is the best of beings ; and I must feel his intimate and kind relations to my soul. To engage me to yield a cordial obedience to him, I must know his authority over me, feel my dependence upon his will and absolute dominion ; and that he, as the ever-present God, determines my existence, powers, actions, and happiness, from moment to moment. I I must see the nature and reasonableness of the law

laws he has stamped with his majesty, and inscribed with his adorable dignity: and that he has fixed a law to all the inmost powers of my nature; a law to all the particular actions of my life. Thus 'tis clear as the light of the meridian sun, that different actions require different views of GOD, in order to their just and beautiful regulation: and as all a man's actions are under the rule of GOD, so there must be a large and comprehensive knowledge of GOD to guide, regulate, and urge him forward in the whole course of action, to the glory of GOD, and his own final happiness. *

We need *durable* conceptions of GOD, or *abiding* knowledge on the soul. Our minds are exceedingly weak to receive just and amiable ideas of GOD, weak to discern his transcendent beauty, and weak to retain the pleasing notices of a GOD: we have need, therefore, of perpetual impressions, and new representations of GOD every hour. No man can gain these new impressions but from the word and spirit of GOD.

We are under an indispensable necessity to have renewed impressions of the spirituality, simplicity and immutability of the divine nature. That he is infinite in essence, called omnipresence; infinite in duration, called eternity; as an active, and operative spirit, in a state of active existence, styled the life of GOD and omnipotence. We

G g

have

* Halyburton against Deists, p. 48—50.

have need of an incessant idea of God, as a rational and understanding spirit; a being of omniscience and wisdom, exercising freedom and independency in all his actions, stiled sovereignty and dominion.

We are under an indispensable necessity to have a deep and durable impression of the grandeur and beauty of the affections of God, as a spirit of love, grace, mercy, hatred, anger, wrath, and forbearance.

And a deep and durable sense of the lovely qualities and glorious virtues of God, which render him most beautiful and attractive to the souls of serious christians, is absolutely needful to keep the will in a state of attachment to him. Such are his goodness, holiness, justice, truth, sincerity, and faithfulness; and the completion of his whole character as an all-sufficient God, full of glory, blessedness, and joy, with the delight of God in his own wonderful manner of subsistence.

These are the grand things of God which we need to have immediately present every moment with our minds: and thanks be to God, that a rich and an abundant provision is made in the glorious gospel for this precious, this excellent, this divine and delicate sense of things.

O! thou most wise, wonderful, and adorable LORD GOD, what do we owe thee for the discoveries

coveries of thy gospel ! We will here give what I would stile

The sublime and beautiful CHARACTER of GOD.

GOD is a spirit. John iv. 24. Thou art the same. Pf. 102. I change not. Malachi iii. 6. In him is no variableness or shadow of turning. James i. 17. He is of one mind, and who can turn him. Job xxiii. 13. He is not far from every one of us : in him we live, move, and have our being. Acts xvii. Whither shall I go from thy presence ? Pf. 139. Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him, do not I fill heaven and earth, saith the LORD ? Jer. xxiii. 24. The everlasting GOD. Gen. xxi. The king eternal, immortal. 1 Tim. i. 17. From everlasting to everlasting, thou art GOD. Pf. xc. The living GOD, and stedfast for ever. Dan. vi. 26. The life of GOD. Eph. iv. The living GOD. Deut. v. 26. I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever. Dan. iv. 34. With thee is the fountain of life. Pf. xxxvi. 9. The almighty GOD. Gen. xvii. 1. He is stiled the ALMIGHTY thirty times in the book of Job only ; and seventy times in the whole Bible. Great is our LORD, and of great power : his understanding is infinite. Pf. cxlvii. 5. All things are naked and open to the eyes of him with whom we have to do. Heb. iv. Thou, GOD, seest me. Gen. xvi. 13. Known unto GOD are all his works, from

eternity. Acts xv. 18. (The original) I, the LORD, search the heart ; I try the reins. Jer. xvii. 10. The only wise God. Rom. xvi. 27. He charged his angels with folly. Job. iv. 18. O! the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! Rom. xi. 33. The most high God, possessor of heaven and earth. Gen. xiv. 19. He doth according to his will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth : none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What dost thou? Dan. iv. 35. He giveth not account of any of his matters. Job xxxiii. 13. He worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will. Eph. i. 11. God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. 1. John i. 5. God is love. 1. John iv. 8. The exceeding riches of his grace. Eph. ii. 7. God who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us. Eph. ii. 4. The LORD God, gracious and merciful, abundant in goodness and truth. Exod. xxxiv. 6. 7. The riches of his goodness, forbearance, and long-suffering : the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance. Rom. ii. 4. God is angry with the wicked every day. Ps. vii. 11. The heat of his great anger. Deut. xxix. 24. The indignation of his anger. Isai. xxx. 30. The fury of his anger. Isai. xlii. 25. The fierceness of mine anger. Hof. xi. 9. God is willing to shew his wrath. Rom. ix. 22. God is jealous,
and

and the LORD revengeth : the LORD revengeth—
 he will take vengeance on his adversaries, and
 reserveth wrath for his enemies. Nahum i. 2—8.
 This is one of the most sublime and awful pas-
 sages in the book of God ! Thou hatest all
 workers of iniquity. Ps. v. 5. Let none imagine
 evil—love no false oath : for all these are things
 that I hate, saith the LORD. Zech. viii. 17.
 O ! do not this abominable thing that I hate.
 Jer. xlv. 4. Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of
 hosts ; the whole earth is full of his glory.
 Isa. vi. 3. Glorious in holiness. Exod. xv.
 The BEAUTY of holiness. 2 Chron. xx. 21. He
 is stiled the HOLY ONE of Israel twenty-two times
 in Isaiah only. Holy, holy, holy LORD GOD
 Almighty. Rev. iv. O ! LORD my GOD, mine
 holy one—thou art of purer eyes than to behold
 evil : and canst not look on iniquity. Habak. i.
 12, 13. None holy as the LORD. 1 Sam. ii. 2.
 I will be jealous for my holy name. Ezek. xxxix.
 25. N. B. Jealousy denotes resentment for the
 dearest thing : and it is altogether impossible,
 that God should not love, in the tenderest man-
 ner, both himself, and his majesty, holiness, and
 glory : he cannot conceal or deny his own per-
 fections, nor will he endure to look like a sinner
 for one moment to eternity.—Shall not the judge
 of all the earth do right ? Gen. xviii. 25. The
 LORD is just : I and my people are wicked.
 Exod.

Exod. ix. 27. The LORD is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works. Pf. cxlv. 17. Righteous art thou, O LORD! when I plead with thee. Jer. xii. 1. O Lord! the great and dreadful God—righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces. Dan. ix. 4—7. There is no unrighteousness in him. Pf. xcii. 15. Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. Rom. ix. 14. Is GOD unrighteous who taketh vengeance? GOD forbid. Rom. iii. 5. GOD is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love. Heb. vi. 10. It is a righteous thing with GOD to render tribulation to them that trouble his people. 2 Thes. i. 6. GOD is just, and the justifier of him that believes in Jesus. Rom. iii. GOD is just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John i. 9. Let GOD be true, and every man a liar. Rom. iii. 4. Abundant in truth. Exod. xxxiv. 6. The only true GOD. John xvii. 3. A GOD of truth. Deut. xxxii. 4. or in the original, GOD THE TRUTH. The words of GOD are pure words, purified seven times. Pf. xii. 6. A faithful GOD. Deut. vii. 9. Great is thy faithfulness. Lam. iii. 23. The faithful creator. 1 Pet. iv. 19. GOD is faithful. 1 Thes. v. 24. He is faithful to forgive us our sins. 1 John i. 9. GOD cannot lie. Titus i. 2. 'Tis impossible for GOD to lie. Heb. vi. 18. Not one thing hath failed
of

of all the good things which the LORD your GOD spake concerning you : all are come to pass unto you ; not one thing hath failed thereof. Josh. xxiii. 14. There hath not failed one word of all his GOOD PROMISES. 1 Kings viii. 56. GOD is self-existent, self-sufficient, self-satisfied, and all-sufficient, for the happiness of his creatures. Can a man be profitable to GOD ? Is it any gain to him. Job xxii. 2, 3. xxxv. 7, 8. He needeth nothing. He giveth life and breath, and all things. Acts xvii. 25. Your father is perfect. Math. v. 48. GOD, blessed for ever. Rom. i. 25. The blessed and only potentate, dwelling in that light which no man hath seen or can see. 1 Tim. vi. 15.

GOD IS AN HAPPY BEING ; pleased with himself, and rejoicing in his own perfections. Every thing that can make a happy being is to be found in GOD. He must be infinitely blessed and happy, and nothing can impair his blessedness. Think of every thing that can constitute happiness, and it is to be found in GOD, in its full perfection. *

1. Does happiness lie in grandeur and dominion ? His empire is universal and eternal.

2. Does it lie in wealth and riches ? All the riches of the universe are in his possession.

3. Does it consist in wisdom and knowledge ? There are all the oceans of wisdom in GOD.

4. Does

* Dr. Gill's Body of Divinity, vol. 1. p. 211.

4. Does it lie in might, power, and strength? Incomparable and immense power belongs to GOD.

5. Does happiness lie in pleasure, joy, and unbounded delights? In GOD's presence is fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore.

6. Does happiness consist in the highest honour, dignity, and eternal fame? GOD's honour is infinite, his dignity is undiminishable, and his fame increasing to eternity. All the best and brightest beings in the universe incessantly behold and celebrate his glory, whilst GOD himself feels the highest joy in his own existence, and delights in the prospects of the everlasting happiness of his saints and angels.

Let me intreat you, my dear reader, to stand still and consider the beautiful character of this lovely and adorable GOD, a most pure spirit, unbounded by time, and therefore eternal; unbounded by space, and therefore omnipresent; unbounded in power, and therefore omnipotent; having a presence of power which no force can withstand, a presence of wisdom which no craft can deceive, and a presence of goodness, love, and bounty, which all the immortal capacities of men and angels can never exhaust. A living self-active spirit, a spirit of infinite life without limits, of eternal life without end, immutable life without change, and of perfect life without defect.

defect. A spirit that can produce the most astonishing effects in a moment through heaven, earth, and hell ; and can make, or move, or destroy, a world with a thought. A spirit that has the keenest abhorrence of all moral impurity, and a complacency in the righteousness and goodness of his own nature, and a delight in every rational creature that hath any degree of beautiful resemblance to himself. A spirit who wills and operates according to the shining purity of his divine perfections. A spirit who hath an invariable will to communicate good to the upright, and inflict evil on the wicked ; who has a will to punish sin with shame, and pain, and death ; who has denounced the most dreadful threatenings that he will do it, and will terribly display the actual executions of his wrath. A spirit that scorns all dissimulation and disguises, that can neither deceive nor be deceived. A spirit of the most upright intentions of heart, who gives the most fair representations of his mind without any reserve, who hath no duplicity of conduct, and preserves one uniform character to eternity. A spirit of absolute dominion over all worlds, who has a right to make what creatures he pleases, has a right to govern all the creatures he has made, and hath a right to dispose of all the creatures he doth govern. A spirit of great long-suffering with provoking

sinners, but whose patience will have an end in the sinner's happiness or final destruction. A spirit who exercises a providence over all his creatures; and this providence is nothing but the infinite wisdom, invariable rectitude, immense goodness, almighty power, and inviolable truth and sincerity of GOD, displayed in the preservation and government of all the worlds of creatures which he hath brought into existence.

This is such a character of GOD that (if any thing less than special grace were sufficient) would teach an atheist to admire, and make a devil adore.

This is the lovely idea of GOD's beautiful character in Scripture, and what man of sense and integrity is there to be found who is not astonished and delighted with it! what book, besides the Bible, ever exhibited such a picture of consummate beauty and loveliness! But we will endeavour to shew, from Scripture itself, that, in the REDEMPTION of man, GOD has made an astonishing ADVANCEMENT ON THE BEAUTY AND GLORY of his OWN CHARACTER, and has rendered himself more venerable, more amiable, more adorable, than he could have been in heaven, in the eyes of the angels of GOD, to eternity: yea, we will advance a step farther, and dare to affirm, that if GOD had called into existence a thousand more worlds, stocked with creatures of

the highest order of rational powers, and the greatest splendor of holiness, still he could not have been known in all the glories of his character in the manner he has now discovered himself in the REDEMPTION of man.

Here, and no where else, we see the lost prospects of GOD's moral perfections restored with additional splendor and beauty, beyond all that reason, in a state of innocence, ever knew.

You see WISDOM beam forth in all its glory in the redemption of lost man ! See here the opposite demands of justice and mercy reconciled and gratified : both gratified to the very uttermost ! See here the honour and righteousness of the law asserted and vindicated in all its pure precepts and dreadful penalties. We see the precepts all obeyed, and the penalties all executed in their fullest terror and glory. *

Here you see GOD displaying two opposite affections at the same moment and in the same act ; that is to say, the keenest hatred and indignation at sin, and the most ardent love to the sinner.

You see here the powers of darkness vanquished, and the subtilty of hell defeated, by the same nature that Satan had ruined, and in a method quite above the capacity of the devil to understand, or even for one moment to imagine : this strips him of the pride of his understanding,
and

* See Charnock on Wisdom.

and lays his craft and malice open to eternal contempt and abhorrence.

You see the wisdom of GOD, in this most glorious method of salvation, giving us the surest ground of consolation, and the most pungent motives to holy obedience. Here we have STRONG CONSOLATION, that is *victorious* to conquer all opposition and triumph over every discouragement, and *durable* to outlive all decay, and survive the ruins of the universe. We have here the most pungent motives to the most shining purity of holiness, arising from the tender mercies of GOD, the redeeming blood of Christ, and the vital presence of the spirit of GOD in the soul—motives addressed to all the most lively springs of action and gratitude in the heart.

You see here the wisdom of GOD in ordering the fittest way of enjoying all the blessings of salvation; not by meer speculative and barren knowledge, which would produce no fruits of gratitude, love, zeal, and obedience; not in the way of a covenant of works, to be performed by man as the condition of eternal happiness—this would puff a fallen creature up with pride, or sink him in utter despair; it would eclipse the glory of absolute grace, and render the sinner's happiness precarious, yea, indeed, impossible. But GOD has appointed vital faith of his operation and gift, as the general receiver of all GOD's blessings;