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Chap. II. Progress of Opinions with respect of Deity.

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whose power and wisdom are fully adequate to that arduous task.

Many gross and absurd conceptions of Deity that have prevailed among rude nations, are urged by some writers as another objection against a sense of Deity. That objection shall not be overlooked; but it will be answered to better purpose, after these gross and absurd conceptions are examined; which shall be done in the chapter immediately following.

The proof of a Deity from the innate sense here explained, differs materially from what is contained in essays on morality and natural religion (*a*). The proof there given is founded on a chain of reasoning, altogether independent on the innate sense of Deity. Both equally produce conviction; but as a sense operates intuitively without reasoning, the sense of Deity is made a branch of human nature, in order to enlighten those who are incapable of a long chain of reasoning; and to such, who make the bulk of mankind, it is more convincing, than the most perspicuous reasoning to a philosopher.

## C H A P. II.

### Progress of Opinions with respect to DEITY.

**T**HE sense of Deity, like many other delicate senses, is in favours so faint and obscure as easily to be biased from truth. Among them, the belief of many superior beings, is universal. And two causes join to produce that belief. The first is, that be-

(*a*) Part 2. sect. 7.



ingaccustomed to a plurality of visible objects, men, mountains, trees, cattle, and such like, they are naturally led to imagine the same plurality in things not visible; and from that slight bias, slight indeed but natural, is partly derived the system of Polytheism, universal among savages. The other is, that savages know little of the connection between causes and effects, and still less of the order and government of this world: every event that is not familiar, appears to them singular and extraordinary; and if such event exceed human power, it is without hesitation ascribed to a superior being. But as it occurs not to a savage, nor to any person who is not a philosopher, that the many various events exceeding human power and seemingly unconnected, may all proceed from the same cause; they are readily ascribed to different beings. Pliny ascribes Polytheism to another cause, viz. the consciousness men have of their imbecility: "Our powers are confined within narrow bounds: we do not readily conceive powers in the Deity much more extensive; and we supply by number what is wanting in power." Polytheism, thus founded, is the first stage in the progress of theology; for it is embraced by the rudest savages, who have neither capacity nor inclination to pierce deeper into the nature of things.

The next stage is distinguishable from others, by a belief that all superior beings are malevolent. Man, by nature weak and helpless, is prone to fear, dreading every new object and every unusual event. Savages, having no protection against storms, tempests, or other external accidents, and having no pleasures but in gratifying hunger, thirst, and animal love, have much to fear, and little to hope. In that disconsolate condition, they attribute the bulk of their distresses to invisible beings, who in their opinion must be malevolent. This seems to have been the opinion of the Greeks in the days of Solon; as appears in a conversation between him and Cræsus King of Lydia, mentioned by Herodotus

Herodotus in the first book of his history. " Cræsus, said Solon, you ask me about human affairs; and I answer as one who thinks that all the gods are envious, and disturbers of mankind." The negroes on the coast of Guinea, dread their deities as tyrants and oppressors: having no conception of a good deity, they attribute the few blessings they receive, to the soil, to the rivers, to the trees, and to the plants. The Lithuanians continued Pagans down to the fourteenth century; and worshipped in gloomy woods, where their deities were held to reside. Their worship probably was prompted by fear, which is allied to gloominess or darkness. The people of Kamskatka acknowledge to this day many malevolent deities, having little or no notion of a good deity. They believe the air, the water, the mountains, and the woods, to be inhabited by malevolent spirits, whom they fear and worship. The savages of Guiana ascribe to the devil even their most common diseases; nor do they ever think of another remedy, but to apply to a forcerer to drive him away. Such negroes as believe in the devil, paint his images white.

Conviction of superior beings, who, like men, are of a mixed nature, sometimes doing good, sometimes mischief, constitutes the third stage. This came to be the system of theology in Greece. The introduction of writing among the Greeks, while they were little better than savages, produced a compound of character and manners, that has not a parallel in any other nation. They were acute in science, skilful in fine arts, extremely deficient in morals, gross beyond conception in theology, and superstitious to a degree of folly; a strange jumble of exquisite sense and absurd nonsense. They held their gods to resemble men in their external figure, and to be corporeal. In the 21st book of the Iliad, Minerva with a huge stone beats Mars to the ground, whose monstrous body covered seven broad acres. As corporeal beings, they were supposed



to require the nourishment of meat, drink, and sleep. Homer mentions more than once the inviting of gods to a feast: and Pausanias reports, that in the temple of Bacchus at Athens, there were figures of clay, representing a feast given by Amphyction to Bacchus and other deities. The inhabitants of the island Java are not so gross in their conceptions, as to think that the gods eat the offerings presented to them: but it is their opinion, that a deity brings his mouth near the offering, sucks out all its savour, and leaves it tasteless like water\*. The Grecian gods, as described by Homer, dress, bathe, and anoint, like mortals. Venus, after being detected by her husband in the embraces of Mars, retires to Paphos,

Where to the pow'r an hundred altars rise,  
 And breathing odours scent the balmy skies:  
 Conceal'd she bathes in consecrated bow'rs,  
 The Graces unguents shed, ambrosial show'rs,  
 Unguents that charm the gods! She last assumes  
 Her wondrous robes; and full the goddess blooms.

ODYSSEY, book 8.

Juno's dress is most poetically described, Iliad, book 14. It was also universally believed, that the gods were fond of women, and had many children by them. The ancient Germans thought more sensibly, that the gods were too high to resemble men in any degree, or to be confined within the walls of a temple. Led by the same impressions of deity, the Greeks seem to have thought, that the gods did not much exceed themselves in knowledge. When Agefilaus journeyed with his private retinue, he usually lodged in

\* All Greek writers, and those in their neighbourhood, form the world out of a chaos. They had no such exalted notion of a deity as to believe, that he could make the world out of nothing.



a temple; making the gods witnesses, says Plutarch, of his most secret actions. The Greeks thought, that a god, like a man, might know what passed within his own house; without knowing any thing passing at a greater distance. Agamemnon, in Eschylus, putting off his travelling habit, and dressing himself in splendid purple, is afraid of being seen and envied by some jealous god. We learn from Seneca, that people strove for the seat next to the image of the deity, that their prayers might be the better heard. But what we have chiefly to remark upon this head, is, that the Grecian gods were, like men, held capable of doing both good and ill. Jupiter, their highest deity, was a ravisher of women, and a notorious adulterer. In the second book of the Iliad, he sends a lying dream to deceive Agamemnon. Mars seduces Venus by bribes to commit adultery (*a*). In the Rhesus of Euripides, Minerva, disguised like Venus, deceives Paris by a gross lie. The ground-work of the tragedy of Xuthus is a lying oracle, declaring Ion, son of Apollo and Creusa, to be the son of Xuthus. Orestes in Euripides, having slain his mother Clytemnestra, excuses himself as having been misled by Apollo to commit the crime. "Ah!" says he, "had I consulted the ghost of my father, he would have dissuaded me from a crime that has proved my ruin, without doing him any good." He concludes with observing, that having acted by Apollo's command, Apollo is the only criminal. In a tragedy of Sophocles, Minerva makes no difficulty to cheat Ajax, by promising to be his friend, while underhand she is serving Ulysses, his bitter enemy. Mercury, in revenge for the murder of his son Myrtilus, entails curses on Pelops the murderer, and on all his race \*. In general, the gods, every

(*b*) Odysses, book 8.

\* The English translator of that tragedy, observes it to be remarkable in the Grecian creed, that the gods punish the crimes of men upon their innocent posterity.

where



where in Greek tragedies, are partial, unjust, tyrannical, and revengeful. The Greeks accordingly have no reserve in maltreating their gods. In the tragedy of Prometheus, Jupiter, without the least ceremony, is accused of being an usurper. Eschylus proclaims publicly on the stage, that Jupiter, a jealous, cruel, and implacable tyrant, had overturned every thing in heaven; and that the other gods were reduced to be his slaves. In the Iliad, book 13. Menelaus addresses Jupiter in the following words: "O father Jove! in wisdom, they say, thou excellest both men and gods. Yet all these ills proceed from thee; for the wicked thou dost aid in war. Thou art a friend to the Trojans, whose souls delight in force, who are never glutted with blood." The gods were often treated with a sort of contemptuous familiarity, and employed in very low offices. Nothing is more common, than to introduce them as actors in Greek tragedies; frequently for trivial purposes: Apollo comes upon the stage most courteously to acquaint the audience with the subject of the play. Why is this not urged by our critics, as classical authority against the rule of Horace, *Nec deus interfit nisi dignus vindice nodus* \*. Homer makes very useful servants of his gods. Minerva, in particular, is a faithful attendant upon Ulysses. She acts the herald, and calls the chiefs to council (a). She marks the place where a great stone fell that was thrown by Ulysses (b). She assists Ulysses to hide his treasure in a cave (c), and helps him to wrestle with the beggar (d). Ulysses being tost with cares in bed, she descends

\* Nor let a god in person stand display'd,  
Unless the labouring plot deserve his aid.

FRANCIS.

(a) Odyssey, book 8.

(b) Book 8.

(c) Book 13.

(d) Book 18.

from



from heaven to make him fall asleep (*a*). This last might possibly be squeez'd into an allegory, if Minerva were not frequently introduced where there is no place for an allegory. Jupiter, book 17. of the Iliad, is introduced comforting the steeds of Achilles for the death of Patroclus. It appears from Cicero (*b*), that when Greek philosophers began to reason about the deity, their notions were wonderfully crude. One of the hardest morsels to digest in Plato's philosophy, was his doctrine, That God is incorporeal; which by many was thought absurd, for that, without a body, he could not have senses, nor prudence, nor pleasure. The religious creed of the Romans seems to have been little less impure than that of the Greeks. It was a ceremony of theirs, in besieging a town, to evocate the tutelar deity, and to tempt him by a reward to betray his friends and votaries. In that ceremony, the name of the tutelar deity was thought of importance; and for that reason, the tutelar deity of Rome was a profound secret\*. Appian

of

(*a*) Odyssæy, book 20.

(*b*) Lib. 1. De natura deorum.

\* The form of the *evocatio* follows. "Tuo ductu, inquit, Pythie Apollo, tuoque numine instinctus, pergo ad delendam urbem Veios: tibi que hinc decimam partem prædæ voveo. Te simul, Juno Regina, quæ nunc Veios colis, precor, ut nos victores in nostram tuamque mox futuram urbem sequere: ubi te, dignum amplitudine tua, templum accipiat." *Titus Livius, lib. 5. cap. 21.* — [*In English thus:* "Under thy guidance and divine inspiration, O Pythian Apollo, I march to the destruction of *Veii*; and to thy shrine I devote a tenth of the plunder. Imperial Juno, guardian of *Veii*, deign to prosper our victorious arms, and a temple shall be erected to thy honour, suitable to the greatness and majesty of thy name."] — But it appears from Macrobius, that they used a form of evocation even when the name of the tutelar deity was unknown to them. "Si deus, si dea est, cui populus civitasque Carthaginiensis est in tutela, teque maxime ille qui urbis hujus populique tutelam recipisti, precor, venerorque, veniamque a vobis peto, ut vos populum civitatemque Carthaginiensem deferatis, loca, templa, sacra, urbemque eorum relinquatis, absque his abeatis, eique populo,





of Alexandria, in his book of the Parthian war, reports, that Anthony, reduced to extremity by the Parthians, lifted up his eyes to heaven, and besought the gods, that if any of them were jealous of his former happiness, they would pour their vengeance upon his head alone, and suffer his army to escape. The story of Paris and the three goddesses gives no favourable impression, either of the morals or religion of the Romans. Juno and her two sister-deities submit their dispute about beauty to the shepherd Paris, who conscientiously pronounces in favour of Venus. But

————— *manet alta mente repostum*  
*Judicium Paridis, spreteque injuria formæ.*

Juno, not satisfied with wreaking her malice against the honest shepherd, declares war against his whole nation. Not even Eneas, tho' a fugitive in foreign lands, escapes her fury. Their great god Jupiter is introduced on the stage by Plautus, to deceive Alcmena, and to lie with her in the shape of her husband. Nay, it was the opinion of the Romans, that this play made much for the honour of Jupiter; for in times of national troubles and calamities, it was commonly acted to appease his anger;—a most

“pulo, civitatie metum, formidinem, oblivionem injiciatis, proditique Romam  
“ad me meosque veneatis, nostraque vobis loca, templa, sacra, urbs, acceptior  
“probatorque fit, mihi que populoque Romano militibusque meis prepositi fitis,  
“ut sciamus intelligamusque. Si ita feceritis, voveo vobis templa ludosque factu-  
“rum.” *Saturnal. lib. 3. cap. 9.* — [*In English thus: “That divinity, whether  
“god or goddess, who is the guardian of the state of Carthage, that divinity I in-  
“voke, I pray and supplicate, that he will desert that perfidious people. Honour  
“not with thy presence their temples, their ceremonies, nor their city, abandon  
“them to all their fears, leave them to infamy and oblivion. Fly hence to Rome,  
“where, in my country, and among my fellow-citizens, thou shalt have nobler  
“temples, and more acceptable sacrifices; thou shalt be the tutelar deity of this  
“army, and of the Roman state. On this condition, I here vow to erect temples  
“and institute games to thine honour.”]*

pregnant



pregnant instance of the gross conceptions of that warlike people in morality, as well as in religion.

A division of invisible beings into benevolent and malevolent, without any mixture of these qualities, makes the fourth stage. The talents and feelings of men, refine gradually under good government: social amusements begin to make a figure: benevolence is highly regarded; and some men are found without gall. Having thus acquired a notion of pure benevolence, and finding it exemplified in some persons, it was an easy step in the progress of theological opinions, to bestow the same character upon some superior beings. This led men to distinguish their gods into two kinds, essentially different; one entirely benevolent, another entirely malevolent; and the difference between good and ill, which are diametrically opposite, favoured that distinction. Fortunate events out of the common course of nature, were accordingly ascribed to benevolent deities; and unfortunate events of that kind, to malevolent. In the time of Pliny the elder, malevolent deities were worshipped at Rome. He mentions a temple dedicated to *Bad Fortune*, another to the disease termed a *Fever*. The Lacedemonians worshipped *Death* and *Fear*; and the people of Cadiz *Poverty* and *Old Age*; in order to deprecate their wrath. Such gods were by the Romans termed *Averrunci*, as putting away evil.

Conviction of one supreme benevolent Deity, and of inferior deities, some benevolent, some malevolent, is the fifth stage. Such conviction, which gains ground in proportion as morality ripens, arises from a remarkable difference between gratitude and fear. Willing to show my gratitude for some kindness proceeding from an unknown hand, several persons occur to my conjectures; but I always fix at last upon one person as the most likely. Fear is of an opposite nature: it expands itself upon every suspicious person, and blackens them all equally. Thus, upon providential good fortune above the power of man, we naturally



turally rest upon one benevolent Deity as the cause; and to him we confine our gratitude and veneration. When, on the other hand, we are struck with an uncommon calamity, every thing that possibly may be the cause, raises terror in us. Hence the propensity in savages to multiply objects of fear; but to confine their gratitude and veneration to a single object. Gratitude and veneration, at the same time, are of such a nature, as to raise a high opinion of the person, who is their object; and when a single invisible being is understood to pour out blessings with a liberal hand, good men, inflamed with gratitude, put no bounds to the power and benevolence of that being. And thus one supreme benevolent Deity comes to be recognised among the more enlightened savages. With respect to malevolent deities, as they are supposed to be numerous, and as there is no natural impulse for elevating one above another, they are all of them held to be of an inferior rank, subordinate to the supreme Deity.

Unity in the supreme being hath, among philosophers, a more solid foundation, viz. unity of design and of order in the creation and government of this world\*. At the same time, the passion of gratitude, which leads even savages to the attribute of unity in the supreme being, prepares the mind for relishing the proof of that unity, founded on the unity of his works.

The belief of one supreme benevolent Deity, and of subordinate deities benevolent and malevolent, is and has been more universal than any other religious creed. I confine myself to a few in-

\* All things in the universe are evidently of a piece. Every thing is adjusted to every thing; one design prevails through the whole: and this uniformity leads the mind to acknowledge one author; because the conception of different authors without distinction of attributes or operations, serves only to perplex the imagination, without bestowing any satisfaction on the understanding. *Natural history of Religion, by David Hume, Esquire.*

stances;



stances ; for a complete enumeration would be endless. The different savage tribes in Dutch Guiana, agree pretty much in their articles of faith. They hold the existence of one supreme Deity, whose chief attribute is benevolence ; and to him they ascribe every good that happens. But as it is against his nature to do ill, they believe in subordinate malevolent beings, like our devil, who occasion thunder, hurricanes, earthquakes, and who are the authors of death, diseases, and of every misfortune. To these devils, termed in their language *Yowaboos*, they direct every supplication, in order to avert their malevolence ; while the supreme Deity is entirely neglected : so much more powerful among savages, is fear than gratitude. The North-American savages have all of them a notion of a supreme Deity, creator and governor of the world, and of inferior deities, some good, some ill. These are supposed to have bodies, and to live much as men do, but without being subjected to any distress. The same creed prevails among the negroes of Benin and Congo, among the people of New Zeland, among the inhabitants of Java, of Madagascar, of the Molucca islands, and of the Caribbee islands. The Chingulese, a tribe in the island of Ceylon, acknowledge one God creator of the universe, with subordinate deities who act as his deputies : agriculture is the peculiar province of one, navigation of another. The creed of the Tonquinese is nearly the same. The inhabitants of Otaheite, termed *King George's island*, believe in one supreme Deity ; and in inferior deities without end, who preside over particular parts of the creation. They pay no adoration to the supreme Deity, thinking him too far elevated above his creatures to concern himself with what they do. They believe the stars to be children of the sun and moon, and an eclipse to be the time of copulation. According to Arnobius, certain Roman deities presided over the various operations of men. Venus presided over carnal copulation ; Puta assisted at pruning trees ; and



Peta in requesting benefits ; Nemeſtrinus was god of the woods, Nodutus ripened corn, and Terenſis helped to thresh it ; Vibilia aſſiſted travellers ; orphans were under the care of Orbona, and dying perſons, of Nænia ; Oſſilago hardened the bones of infants ; and Mellonia protected bees, and beſtow'd ſweetneſs on their honey. The inhabitants of the iſland of Formoſa recogniſe two ſupreme deities in company ; the one a male, god of the men, the other a female, goddeſs of the women. The bulk of their inferior deities are the ſouls of upright men, who are conſtantly doing good, and the ſouls of wicked men, who are conſtantly doing ill. The inland negroes acknowledge one ſupreme being, creator of all things ; attributing to him infinite power, infinite knowledge, and ubiquity. They believe that the dead are converted into ſpirits, termed by them *Iananini*, or protectors, being appointed to guard their parents and relations. The ancient Goths, and ſeveral other northern nations, acknowledged one ſupreme being ; and at the ſame time worſhipped three ſubordinate deities ; Thor, reputed the ſame with Jupiter ; Oden, or Woden, the ſame with Mars ; and Friga, the ſame with Venus \*. Socrates, taking the cup of poiſon from the executioner, held it up toward heaven, and pouring out ſome of it as an oblation to the ſupreme Deity, pronounced the following prayer : “ I implore the immortal God “ that my tranſlation hence may be happy.” Then turning to Crito, ſaid, “ O Crito ! I owe a cock to Eſculapius, pay it.” From this incident we find that Socrates, ſoaring above his countrymen, had attained to the belief of a ſupreme benevolent Deity. But in that dark age of religion, ſuch purity is not to be expected from

\* *Regnator omnium Deus, cætera ſubjecta atque parentia ; Tacitus de moribus Germanorum, cap. 39. [In Engliſh thus : “ One God the ruler of all ; the reſt “ inferior and ſubordinate.”]*

Socrates

Socrates himself, as to have rejected subordinate deities, even of the mercenary kind.

Different offices being assigned to the gods, as above mentioned, proper names followed of course. And when a god was ascertained by a name, the busy mind would naturally proceed to trace his genealogy.

As unity in the Deity was not an established doctrine in the countries where the Christian religion was first promulgated, Christianity could not fail to prevail over Paganism; for improvements in the mental faculties lead by sure steps, tho' slow, to one God.

The sixth stage is, the belief of one supreme benevolent Deity, as in that immediately foregoing, with many inferior benevolent deities, and one only who is malevolent. As men improve in natural knowledge, and become skilful in tracing causes from effects, they find much less malice and ill-design than was imagined: humanity at last prevails, which, in connection with improved knowledge, banishes the suspicion of ill-design, in every case where an event can possibly be explained without it. In a word, a settled opinion of good prevailing in the world, produced conviction among some nations, less ignorant than their neighbours, and less brutal, that there is but one malevolent subordinate deity, and good subordinate deities without number. The ancient Persians acknowledged two principles; one all good and all powerful, named *Hormuz*, and by the Greeks corruptly *Oromazes*; the other evil, named *Abariman*, and by the Greeks *Arimanes*. Some authors assert, that the Persians held these two principles to be co-eternal: others, that *Oromazes* first subsisted alone, that he created both light and darkness, and that he created *Arimanes* out of darkness. That the latter was the opinion of the ancient Persians, appears from their Bible, termed the *Sadder*; which teaches, That there is one God supreme over all, many good angels, and but one



one evil spirit. Plutarch acquaints us, that Hormuz and Ahari-man, for ever at variance, formed, each of them, creatures of their own stamp; that the former created good genii, such as goodness, truth, wisdom, justice; and that the latter created evil genii, such as infidelity, falsehood, oppression, theft. This system of theology, commonly termed the *Manichean system*, is said to be also the religious creed of Pegu, with the following addition, that the evil principle only is to be worshipped; which is abundantly probable, as fear is a predominant passion in barbarians. The people of Florida believe a supreme benevolent Deity, and a subordinate deity that is malevolent: neglecting the former, who, they say, does no harm, they bend their whole attention to soften the latter, who, they say, torments them day and night. The inhabitants of Darien acknowledge but one evil spirit, of whom they are desperately afraid. The Hottentots, mentioned by some writers as altogether destitute of religion, are, on the contrary, farther advanced toward its purity, than some of their neighbours. Their creed is, That there is a supreme being, who is goodness itself; of whom they have no occasion to stand in awe, as he is incapable by his nature to hurt them; that there is also a malevolent spirit, subordinate to the former, who must be served and worshipped in order to avert his malice. The Epicurean doctrine with respect to the gods in general, That being happy in themselves, they extend not their providential care to men, differs not widely from what the Hottentot believes with respect to the supreme being.

Having traced the sense of deity, from its dawn in the grossest savages, to its approaching maturity among enlightened nations, we proceed to the last stage of the progress, which makes the true system of theology; and that is, conviction of a supreme being, boundless in every perfection, without any subordinate deities, benevolent or malevolent. Savages learn early to trace the chain  
of

of causes and effects, with respect to ordinary events: they know that fasting produces hunger, that labour occasions weariness, that fire burns, that the sun and rain contribute to vegetation. But when they go beyond such familiar events, they lose sight of cause and effect: the changes of weather, of winds, of heat and cold, impress them with a notion of chance: earthquakes, hurricanes, storms of thunder and lightning, which fill them with terror, are ascribed to malignant beings of greater power than man. In the progress of knowledge, light begins to break in upon them: they discover, that such phenomena, however tremendous, come under the general law of cause and effect, and that there is no ground for ascribing them to malignant spirits. At the same time, our more refined senses ripen by degrees: social affections come to prevail, and morality makes a deep impression. In maturity of sense and understanding, benevolence appears more and more; and beautiful final causes are discovered in many of nature's productions, that formerly were thought useless, or perhaps destructive: and the time may come, we have solid ground to hope that it will come, when doubts and difficulties about the government of Providence, will all of them be cleared up; and every event be found conducive to the general good. Such views of Providence banish malevolent deities; and we settle at last in a most comfortable opinion; either that there are no such beings; or that, if they exist and are permitted to perpetrate any mischief, it is in order to produce greater good. Thus, through a long maze of errors, man arrives at true religion, acknowledging but one Being, supreme in power, intelligence, and benevolence, who created all other beings, to whom all other beings are subjected, and who directs every event to answer the best purposes. This system is true theology\*.

Having

\* Pliny seems to relish the doctrine of unity in the Deity; but is at a loss about forming





Having gone through the different stages of religious belief, in its gradual progress toward truth and purity, I proceed to a very important article, viz. The history of tutelar deities. The belief of tutelar deities preceded indeed several of the stages mentioned, witness the tutelar deities of Greece and Rome; but as it is not connected with any one of them exclusive of the rest, the clearness of method required it to be postponed to all of them. This belief, founded on selfishness, made a rapid progress after property in the goods of fortune was established. The Greeks, the Romans, and indeed most nations that were not mere savages, appropriated to themselves tutelar deities, who were understood to befriend them upon all occasions; and, in particular, to fight for them against their enemies. The Iliad of Homer is full of miraculous battles between the Greeks and Trojans, the tutelar deities mixing with the contending parties, and partaking of every disaster, death only excepted, which immortals could not suffer. The *lares*, *penates*, or household-gods, of Indostan, of Greece, and of Rome, bear witness, that every family, perhaps every person, was thought to be under the protection of a tutelar deity. Alexander ab Alexandro gives a list of tutelar deities. Apollo and Minerva were the tutelar deities of Athens; Bacchus and Hercules of the Bœotian Thebes; Juno of Carthage, Samos, Sparta, Argos, and Mycené; Venus of Cyprus; Apollo of Rhodes, and of Delphos; Vulcan of Lemnos; Bacchus of Naxos; Neptune of Tenedos, &c. The poets testify, that even individuals had tutelar deities:

Mulciber in Trojam, pro Troja stabat Apollo:

Æqua Venus Teucris, Pallas iniqua fuit.

Oderat Æneam, propior Saturnia Turno;

Ille tamen Veneris numine tutus erat.

forming any just conception of him, sometimes considering the world to be our only deity, sometimes the sun.

Sæpe



Sæpe ferox cautum petiit Neptunus Ulyssæm ;  
Eripuit patruo sæpe Minerva suo \* (a).

Though the North-American savages recognise a supreme Being, wise and benevolent, and also subordinate benevolent beings who are intrusted with the government of the world ; yet as the great distance of these subordinate beings, and the full occupation they have in general government, are supposed to make them overlook individuals, every man has a tutelar deity of his own, termed *Manitou*, who is constantly invoked during war to give him victory over his enemies. The Natches, bordering on the Mississippi, offer up the skulls of their enemies to their god, and deposit them in his temple. They consider that being as their tutelar deity who assists them against their enemies, and to whom therefore the skull of an enemy must be an acceptable offering. Tho' they worship the sun, who impartially shines on all mankind ; yet such is their partiality, that they consider themselves as his chosen people, and that their enemies are his enemies.

A belief so absurd shows woful imbecility in human nature. Is it not obvious, that the great God of heaven and earth, governs the world by inflexible laws, from which he never can swerve in any case, because they are the best possible in every case ? To suppose any family or nation to be an object of his peculiar love, is no less impious, than to suppose any family or nation to be an

- \* “ The rage of Vulcan, and the martial maid,  
“ Pursu'd old Troy ; but Phœbus' love repay'd.  
“ Æneas safe, defy'd great Juno's hate,  
“ For Venus guards her favour'd offspring's fate :  
“ In vain Ulysses Neptune's wrath assails,  
“ O'er winds and waves Minerva's power prevails.”

(a) Ovid. Trist. lib. 1. eleg. 2.



object of his peculiar hatred: they equally arraign Providence of partiality. Even the Goths had more just notions of the Deity. Totila, recommending to his people justice and humanity, says, “ Quare sic habete, ea quæ amari ab hominibus solent ita vobis  
 “ falva fore, si justitiæ reverentiam fervaveritis. Si transitis in  
 “ mores alios, etiam Deum ad hostes transiturum. Neque enim  
 “ ille, aut omnibus omnino hominibus, aut uni alicui genti, ad-  
 “ dicit se socium \*.”

That God was once the tutelar deity of the Jews, is true; but not in the vulgar acceptation of that term, importing a deity chosen by a people to be their patron and protector. The orthodox faith is, “ That God chose the Jews as his peculiar people, not  
 “ from any partiality to them, but that there might be one nation  
 “ to keep alive the knowledge of one supreme Deity; which should  
 “ be prosperous while they adhered to him, and unprosperous when  
 “ they declined to idolatry; not only in order to make them persevere  
 “ in the true faith, but also in order to exemplify to all nations the  
 “ conduct of his Providence.” It is certain, however, that the perverse Jews claimed God Almighty as their tutelar deity, in the vulgar acceptation of the term. And this error throws light upon an incident related in the Acts of the Apostles. There was a prophecy firmly believed by the Jews, that the Messiah would come among them in person to restore their kingdom. The Christians gave a different sense to the prophecy, viz. that the kingdom promised was not of this world. And they said, that Christ was sent to pave

\* “ Be assured of this, that while ye preserve your reverence for justice, ye will  
 “ enjoy all the blessings which are estimable among mankind. If ye refuse to obey  
 “ her dictates, and your morals become corrupted, God himself will abandon you,  
 “ and take the part of your enemies. For altho’ the benevolence of that power  
 “ is not partially confined to tribe or people, yet in the eye of his justice all men  
 “ are not equally the objects of his approbation.”

the



the way to their heavenly kingdom, by obtaining forgiveness of their sins. At the same time, as the Jews held all other nations in abhorrence, it was natural for them to conclude, that the Messiah would be sent to them only, God's chosen people; for which reason, even the apostles were at first doubtful about preaching the gospel to any but to the Jews (*a*). But the apostles reflecting, that it was one great purpose of the mission, to banish from the Jews their groveling and impure notion of a tutelar deity, and to proclaim a state of future happiness to all who believe in Christ, they proceeded to preach the gospel to all men: "Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive, that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation, he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him (*b*)."  
The foregoing reasoning, however, did not satisfy the Jews: they could not digest the opinion, that God sent his Messiah to save all nations; and that he was the God of the Gentiles as well as of the Jews. They stormed against Paul in particular for inculcating that doctrine (*c*).

Considering that religion in its purity was established by the gospel, is it not amazing, that even Christians fell back to the worship of tutelar deities? They did not indeed adopt the absurd opinion, that the supreme Being was their tutelar deity: but they held, that there are divine persons subordinate to the Almighty, who take under their care nations, families, and even individuals; an opinion that differs not essentially from that of tutelar deities among the Heathens. That opinion, which flatters self-love, took root in the fifth century, when the deification of saints was introduced, similar to the deification of heroes among the an-

(*a*) See the 10th and 11th chapters of the Acts of the Apostles.

(*b*) Acts of the Apostles, x. 34.

(*c*) Acts of the Apostles, chap. 13.



cients. With regard to matters spiritual, as well as temporal, people are fond of friends to be their intercessors; and with regard to the Deity, deified saints were thought the properest intercessors. Temples were built and dedicated to them, and solemn rites of worship instituted to render them propitious. It was imagined, that the souls of deified saints are at liberty to roam where they list, and that they love the places where their bodies are interred; which accordingly made the sepulchres of the saints a common rendezvous of supplicants. What paved the way to notions so absurd, was the gross ignorance that clouded the Christian world after the northern barbarians became masters of Europe. In the seventh century, the bishops were so illiterate, as to be indebted to others for the shallow sermons they preached; and the very few of that order who had any learning, satisfied themselves with composing insipid homilies, collected from the writings of Augustin and Gregory. In the ninth century, matters grew worse and worse; for these saints, held at first to be mediators for Christians in general, were now converted into tutelar deities in the strictest sense. An opinion prevailed, that such saints as are occupied about the souls of Christians in general, have little time for individuals; which led every church, and every private Christian, to elect for themselves a particular saint, as their peculiar patron or tutelar deity. That practice made it necessary to deify saints without end, in order to furnish a tutelar deity to every individual. The dubbing of saints, became a new source of abuses and frauds in the Christian world: lying wonders were invented and fabulous histories composed, to celebrate exploits that never were performed, and to glorify persons that never had a being. And thus religion among Christians, sunk down into as low a state as it had been among Pagans.

There still remains upon hand a capital branch of our history; and that is idolatry, which properly signifies the worshipping visible

fible objects as deities. But as idolatry evidently sprung from religious worship, corrupted by the ignorant and brutish, it will make its appearance with more advantage in the next section, of which religious worship is the subject.

We have thus traced with wary steps, the gradual progress of theology through many stages, corresponding to the gradual openings and improvements of the human mind. But tho' that progress in almost all countries appears uniform with respect to the order of succession, it is far otherwise with respect to the quickness of succession: nations, like individuals, make a progress from infancy to maturity; but they advance not with an equal pace, some making a rapid course toward perfection in knowledge and in religion, while others remain ignorant barbarians. The religion of Hindostan, if we credit history or tradition, had advanced to a considerable degree of purity and refinement, at a very early period. The Hindostan Bible, termed *Chatabbhade* or *Shastab*, gives an account of the creation, lapse of the angels, and creation of man; instructs us in the unity of the Deity, but denies his prescience as being inconsistent with free-will in man; all of them profound doctrines of an illuminated people; to establish which a long course of time must have been requisite, after wandering through errors without number. Compared with the Hindows in theology, even the Greeks were mere savages. The Grecian gods were held to be little better than men, and their history, as above mentioned, corresponds to the notion entertain'd of them.

In explaining the opinions of men with respect to Deity, I have confined my view to such opinions as are suggested by principles or biases that make a part of common nature; omitting many whimsical notions, no better than dreams of a roving imagination. The plan delineated shows wonderful uniformity in the progress of religion through all nations. That the whimsical notions



tions mentioned are far otherwise, is not wonderful. Take the following specimen. The Kamskatkans are not so stupidly ignorant, as to be altogether void of curiosity. They sometimes think of natural appearances.—Rain, say they, is some deity pissing upon them; and they imagine the rainbow to be a party-coloured garment, put on by him in preparing for that operation. They believe wind to be produced by a god shaking his long hair about his head with violence. Such tales will scarce amuse children in the nursery. The inhabitants of the island Celebes formerly acknowledged no gods but the sun and the moon, which were held to be eternal. Ambition for superiority made them fall out. The moon being wounded in flying from the sun, was delivered of the earth.

Hitherto of the gradual openings of the human mind with respect to Deity. I close this section with an account of some un-found notions concerning the conduct of Providence, and concerning some speculative matters. I begin with the former.

In days of ignorance, the conduct of Providence is very little understood. Far from having any notion, that the government of this world is carried on by general laws, which are inflexible because they are the best possible, every important event is attributed to an immediate interposition of the Deity. As the Grecian gods were thought to have bodies like men, and like men to require nourishment; they were imagined to act like men, forming short-sighted plans of operation, and varying them from time to time according to exigencies. Even the wise Athenians, had an utter aversion at philosophers who attempted to account for effects by general laws: such doctrine they thought tended to fetter the gods, and to prevent them from governing events at their pleasure. An eclipse being held to be a prognostic given by the gods of some grievous calamity, Anaxagoras was accused of Atheism for attempting to explain the eclipse of the moon by natural causes:

ses: he was thrown into prison, and with difficulty was relieved by the influence of Pericles. Protagoras was banished Athens for maintaining the same doctrine. Procopius overflows with signal interpositions of Providence; and Agathias, beginning at the battle of Marathon, sagely maintains, that from that time downward, there was not a battle lost, but by an immediate judgment of God, for the sins of the commander, or of his army, or of one person or other. Our Saviour's doctrine with respect to those who suffered by the fall of the tower of Siloam, ought to have opened their eyes; but superstitious eyes are never opened by instruction. At the same time, it is deplorable that such belief has no good influence on manners: on the contrary, never doth wickedness so much abound as in dark times. A curious fact is related by Procopius (*a*) with respect to that sort of superstition. When Rome was besieged by the Goths, and in danger of destruction, a part of the town-wall, declining from the perpendicular, was in a tottering condition. Belisarius, proposing to fortify it, was opposed by the citizens, affirming, that it was guarded by St Peter. Procopius observes, that the event answered expectation; for that the Goths, during a tedious siege, never once attempted that weak part. He adds, that the wall remained in the same ruinous state at the time of his writing. Here is a curious conceit:—Peter created a tutelar deity, able and willing, for the sake of his votaries, to counteract the laws by which God governs the material world. And for what mighty benefit to them? Only to save them five or fifty pounds in rebuilding the crazy part of the wall.

It is no less inconsistent with the regular course of Providence, to believe, as many formerly did, that in all doubtful cases the Almighty, when appealed to, never fails to interpose in favour of

(*a*) *Historia Gothica*, lib. 1.





the right side. The inhabitants of Constantinople, ann. 1284, being split into parties about two contending patriarchs, the Emperor ordered a fire to be made in the church of St Sophia, and a memorial from each party to be thrown into it; never doubting, but that God would save from the flames the memorial of the party whose cause he espoused. But, to the utter astonishment of all beholders, the flames paid not the least regard to either of the memorials. The same absurd opinion gave birth to the trial by fire, by water, and by singular battle. And it is not a little remarkable, that such trials were common among many nations that had no intercourse one with another: even the enlightened people of Indostan try crimes by dipping the hand of a suspected person in boiling oil.—Such uniformity is there with respect even to superstitious opinions. Pope Gregory VII. insisting, that the Kings of Castile and Aragon should lay aside their Gothic liturgy for the Romish, the matter was put to trial by singular battle; and two champions were chosen, to declare by victory the opinion of God Almighty. The Emperor Otho I. observing the doctors to differ about a point of law, viz. the right of representation in land-estates, appointed a duel; and the right of representation gain'd the victory. If any thing can render such a doctrine palatable, it is the believing in a tutelar deity, who with less absurdity may interpose in behalf of a favourite opinion, or of a favourite people. Appian gravely reports, that when the city of Rhodes was besieged by Mithridates, a statue of the goddess Isis was seen to dart flames of fire upon a bulky engine, raised by the besiegers to overtop the wall.

Historians mention an incident that happened in the island Celebes, founded on a belief of the same kind with that above mentioned. About two centuries ago, some Christian and some Mahometan missionaries made their way to that island. The chief king, struck with the fear of hell taught by both, assembled



a general council; and extending his hands toward heaven, addressed the following prayer to the supreme being. "Great God, from thee I demand nothing but justice, and to me thou owest it. Men of different religions have come to this island, threatening eternal punishment to me and my people if we disobey thy laws. What are thy laws? Speak, O my God, who art the author of nature: thou knowest the bottom of our hearts, and that we can never intentionally disobey thee. But if it be unworthy of thy essence to employ the language of men, I call upon my whole people, the sun which gives me light, the earth which bears me, the sea which surrounds my empire, and upon thee thyself, to bear witness for me, that in the sincerity of my heart I wish to know thy will; and this day I declare, that I will acknowledge as the depositaries of thy oracles, the first ministers of either religion that shall land on this island."

It is equally erroneous to believe, that certain ceremonies will protect one from mischief. In the dark ages of Christianity, the signing with the figure of a cross, was held not only to be an antidote against the snares of malignant spirits, but to inspire resolution for supporting trials and calamities: for which reason no Christian in those days undertook any thing of moment, till he had used that ceremony. It was firmly believed in France, that a gold or silver coin of St Louis, hung from the neck, was a protection against all diseases: and we find accordingly a hole in every remaining coin of that king, for fixing it to a riband. In the minority of Charles VIII. of France, the three estates, ann. 1484, supplicated his Majesty, that he would no longer defer the being anointed with the holy oil, as the favour of Heaven was visibly connected with that ceremony. They affirmed, that his grandfather Charles VII. never prospered till he was anointed; and that Heaven afterward fought on his side, till the English were expelled out of his kingdom. The high altar of St Margaret's



church in the island of Icolmkill, was covered with a plate of blue marble finely veined; which has suffered from a superstitious conceit, that the smallest bit of it will preserve a ship from sinking. It has accordingly been carried off piece-meal; and at present there is scarce enough left to make an experiment. In the Sadder, certain prayers are enjoined when one sneezes or pisses, in order to chase away the devil. Cart-wheels in Lisbon, are composed of two boards clumsily cut in a circular form, and nailed together. Tho' the noise is intolerable, yet the axles are never greased, because the noise, say they, frightens the devil from hurting their oxen.

Nay, so far has superstition been carried, as to found a belief, that the devil by magic can control the course of Providence. A Greek bishop having dreamed, that a certain miracle had failed by magic, the supposed magician and his son were condemned to die, without the least evidence but the dream. Montesquieu collects a number of circumstances, each of which, tho' all extremely improbable, ought to have been clearly made out, in order to prove the crime (a). The Emperor Theodore Lascaris, imagining magic to be the cause of his distemper, put the persons suspected to the trial of holding a red-hot iron without being burnt. In the capitularies of Charlemagne, in the canons of several councils, and in the ancient laws of Norway, punishments are enacted against those who are supposed able to raise tempests, termed *Tempestarii*. During the time of Catharine de Medicis, in the court of France there was a jumble of politics, gallantry, luxury, debauchery, superstition, and Atheism. It was common to take the resemblance of enemies in wax, in order to torment them by roasting the figure at a slow fire, and pricking it with needles. If

(a) L'Esprit des loix, lib. 12. ch. 5.



an enemy happened in one instance of a thousand to pine and die, the charm was established for ever. Sorcery and witchcraft were so universally believed in England, that in a preamble to a statute of Henry VIII. ann. 1511, it is set forth, "That smiths, weavers, and women, boldly take upon them great cures, in which they partly use forcery and witchcraft." The first printers, who were Germans, having carried their books to Paris for sale, were condemned by the parliament to be burnt alive as forcerers; and did not escape punishment but by a precipitant flight. It had indeed much the appearance of forcery, that a man could write so many copies of a book, without the slightest variation.

There are many examples of extraordinary virtue being attributed to certain things, in themselves of no significancy. The Hungarians were possessed of a golden crown, sent from heaven with the peculiar virtue, as they believed, of bestowing upon the person who wore it, an undoubted title to be their king.

But the most extraordinary effort of absurd superstition, is a persuasion, that one may control the course of Providence, by making a downright bargain with God Almighty to receive from him *quid pro quo*. A herd of Tartars in Siberia, named by the Russians *Baravinskoi*, have in every hut a wooden idol, termed in their language *Sheitan*, about eighteen inches high, to which they address their prayers for plenty of game in hunting, promising to give it, if successful, a new coat or a new bonnet: a sort of bargain abundantly brutish; and yet more excusable in mere savages, than what is made with the Virgin Mary by enlightened Roman Catholics; who, upon condition of her relieving them from distress, promise her a waxen taper to burn on her altar. Philip II. of Spain made a vow, that, upon condition of gaining the battle of St. Quintin, he would build the monastery of Escorial; as if an establishment for some idle monks, could be a motive with



the great God to vary the course of his Providence \*. Beside the absurdity of thinking that such vows can have the effect to alter the established laws of Providence, they betray a most contemptible notion of the Deity, as if his favours, like a horse or a cow, could be purchased with money.

But however loose and disjointed, events appear to the ignorant, when viewed as past, or as passing, future events take on a very different appearance. The doctrine of prognostics is evidently founded upon a supposition, that future events are unalterably fixed; for otherwise that doctrine would appear absurd, even to the most ignorant. There is no bias in human nature that has greater influence, than curiosity about futurity; which in dark ages governs without control: men with no less folly than industry have ransacked the earth, the sea, the air, and even the stars, for prognostics of future events. The Greeks had their oracles, the Romans their augurs, and all the world their omens. The Grecian oracles and the Roman auguries are evidently built upon their belief of tutelar deities; and the numberless omens that influence weak people in every country, seem to rest upon the same foundation †. Ancient histories are stuffed with omens, prodig-

\* Having gained the battle of St Quintin on the festival of St Laurence, Philip reckoned himself obliged to the saint for this victory, no less than to God Almighty; and accordingly, he not only built the monastery he had vowed, but also a church for the saint and a palace for himself, all under one roof: and what is not a little ludicrous, the edifice is built in resemblance of a gridiron, which, according to the legend, was the instrument of Laurence's martyrdom.

† It is no wonder that the Romans were superstitiously addicted to omens and auguries: like mere savages, they put no value upon any science but that of war; and, for that reason, they banished all philosophers, as useless members of society. Thus, that nation, so fierce and so great in war, surrendered themselves blindly to superstition, and became slaves to imaginary evils. Even their gravest historians were deeply tainted with that disease.

gies,



gies, and prognostics: Livy overflows with fooleries of that kind. Endless are the adverse omens reported by Appian of Alexandria, that are said to have given warning of the defeat of Crassus by the Parthians; and no fewer in number are those which happened at the death of the Emperor Hadrian, if we believe Spartianus. Lampridius, with great gravity, recites the omens which prognosticated that Alexander Severus would be Emperor: he was born the same day on which Alexander the Great died: he was brought forth in a temple dedicated to Alexander the Great: he was named *Alexander*; and an old woman gave to his mother, a pigeon's egg of a purple colour produced on his birthday. A comet is an infallible prognostic of the death of a king. But of what king? Why, of the king who dies next. Suetonius, with the solemnity of a pulpit-instructor, informs us, that the death of the Emperor Claudius was predicted by a comet; and of Tiberius, by the fall of a tower during an earthquake. Such opinions, which indeed have some foundation in our nature, take fast hold of the mind, when invigorated by education and example. Even philosophy is not sufficient to eradicate them but by slow degrees: witness Tacitus, the most profound of all historians, who cannot forbear to usher in the death of the Emperor Otho, with a foolish account of a strange unknown bird appearing at that time. He indeed, with decent reserve, mentions it only as a fact reported by others; but from the warm style of his narrative it is evident, that the story had made an impression upon him. The ancient Germans drew many of their omens from horses: " *Proprium gentis, equorum*  
 " *presagia ac monitus experiri. Publice aluntur iisdem nemo-*  
 " *ribus ac lucis, candide, et nullo mortali opere contacti, quos*  
 " *pressos sacro curru, sacerdos, ac rex, vel princeps civitatis, comi-*  
 " *tantur, hinnitusque ac fremitus observant. Nec ulli auspicio*  
 " *major fides, non solum apud plebem, sed apud proceres, apud*  
 " *sacerdotes*

“ facerdotes \* (a).” There is scarce a thing seen or imagined, but what the inhabitants of Madagascar consider as a prognostic of some future event. The Hindows rely on the augury of birds, precisely as the old Romans did. Tho’ there is not the slightest probability, that an impending misfortune was ever prevented by such prognostics; yet the desire of knowing future events is so deeply rooted in our nature, that omens will always prevail among the vulgar, in spite of the clearest light of philosophy †.

With respect to prophecies in particular, one apology may be made for them, that no other prognostic of futurity is less apt to do mischief. What Procopius (b) observes of the Sybilline oracles, is equally applicable to prophecies in general, “ That it is above the sagacity of man to explain any of them before the event happen.” After perusing many, he gives the following reason. “ Matters are there handled,” says he, “ not in any order, nor in a continued discourse: but after mentioning the distresses of Africa, for example, they give a slight touch at the Persians, the Romans, the Assyrians; then returning to the Romans, they

\* “ It is peculiar to that people, to deduce omens and presages from horses. These animals are maintained at the public expence, in groves and forests, and are not allowed to be polluted with any work for the use of man; but being yoked in the sacred chariot, the priest, and the king, or chief of the state, attend them, and carefully observe their neighings. The greatest faith is given to this method of augury, both among the vulgar and the nobles.”

† Is it not mortifying to human pride, that a great philosopher [Bacon] should think like the vulgar upon this subject? Mentioning great rejoicings in London upon the daughter of Henry VII. of England being married to James IV. of Scotland, he adds, “ not from any affection to the Scots, but from a secret instinct and inspiration of the advantages that would accrue from the match.”

(a) Tacitus, De moribus Germanorum, cap. 10.

(b) Gothica Historia, lib. 1.

“ fall



“fall flap-dash upon the calamities of Britain.” A curious example of this observation, is a book of prophecies composed in Scotland by Thomas Learmont, commonly called *Thomas the Rhymor*, because the book is in rhyme. Plutarch, in the life of Cicero, reports, that a spectre appeared to Cicero’s nurse, and foretold, that the child would become a great support to the Roman state; and most innocently he makes the following reflection: “This might have passed for an idle tale, had not Cicero demonstrated the truth of the prediction;” which in effect is saying, that if a prediction happen to prove true, it is a real prophecy; if otherwise, that it is an idle tale. There have been prophecies not altogether so well guarded as the Sybilline oracles. Napier, inventor of the logarithms, found the day of judgement predicted in the Revelation; and named the very day; which unfortunately he survived. He made another prediction, but prudently named a day so distant, as to be in no hazard of blushing a second time. Michel Stifels, a German clergyman, spent most of his life in attempting to discover the day of judgement; and at last announced to his parishioners, that it would happen within a year. The parishioners, resolving to make the best of a bad bargain, spent their time merrily, taking no care to lay up provisions for another year; and so nice was their calculation, as at the end of the year to have not a morsel remaining, either of food or of industry. The famous Jurieu has shown great ingenuity in explaining prophecies; of which take the following instance. In his book, intitled, *Accomplishment of the prophecies*, he demonstrates, that the beast in the Apocalypse, which held the *poculum aureum plenum abominationum* \*, is the Pope; and his reason is, that the initial letters of these four Latin words compose the word *papa*; a very singular prophecy indeed, that is a prophecy

\* “The golden cup full of abominations.”





in Latin, but in no other language. The candid reader will advert, that such prophecies as relate to our Saviour, and tend to ascertain the truth of his mission, fall not under the foregoing reasoning; for they do not anticipate futurity, by producing foreknowledge of future events. They were not understood till our Saviour appeared among men; and then they were clearly understood as relative to him.

There is no end of superstition in its various modes. It was believed universally in dark times, that by certain forms and invocations, the spirits of the dead could be called upon to reveal future events. A lottery in Florence, gainful to the government, and ruinous to the people, gives great scope to superstition. The purchaser of tickets, in order to be successful, must fast six and thirty hours, must repeat a certain number of Ave Marias and Pater Nosters, must not speak to a living creature, must not go to bed, must continue in prayer to the Virgin, and to saints, till some propitious saint appear and declare the numbers that are to be successful. The ticket-holder, fatigued with fasting, praying, and expectation, falls asleep. Occupied with the thoughts he had when awake, he dreams that a saint appears, and mentions the numbers that are to be successful. If he be disappointed, he is vexed at his want of memory; but trusts in the saint as an infallible oracle. Again he buys tickets, again falls asleep, again sees a vision, and again is disappointed.

Lucky and unlucky days, which were so much rely'd on as even to be marked in the Greek and Roman calendars, make an appendix to prophecies. The Tartars never undertake any thing of moment on a Wednesday, being held by them unlucky. The Nogayan Tartars hold every thirteenth year to be unlucky: they will not even wear a sword that year, believing that it would be their death; and they maintain, that none of their warriors ever returned who went upon an expedition in one of these years. They pass

pass that time in fasting and prayer, and during it never marry. The inhabitants of Madagascar have days fortunate and unfortunate with respect to the birth of children: they destroy without mercy every child that is born on an unfortunate day.

I close this important article with a reflection that ought to make an impression upon every rational mind. The knowledge of future events, as far as it tends to influence our conduct, is inconsistent with a state of trial, such as Providence has allotted to man in this life. It would deprive him of hopes and fears, and leave him nothing to deliberate upon, nor any end to prosecute. In a word, it would put an end to his activity, reduce him to be merely a passive being. Providence therefore has wisely drawn a veil over future events, affording us no light for prying into them but sagacity and experience.

These are a few of the numberless absurd opinions about the conduct of Providence, that have prevailed among Christians, and still prevail among some of them. Many opinions no less absurd have prevailed about speculative points. I confine myself to one or two instances; for to make a complete list would require a volume. The first I shall mention, and the most noted, is transubstantiation; which, tho' it has not the least influence on practice, is reckoned so essential to salvation, as to be placed above every moral duty. The following text is appealed to as the sole foundation of that article of faith. " And as they were eating, Jesus  
" took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the  
" cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye  
" all of it: for this is my blood of the new testament, which is  
" shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you,  
" I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that  
" day when I drink it new with you in my Father's king-



“dom (a).” That this is a metaphor, must strike every one: the passage cannot even bear a literal meaning, considering the final clause; for surely the most zealous Roman believes not, that Christians are to drink new wine with their Saviour in the kingdom of heaven. At the same time, it is not so much as insinuated, that there was here any miraculous transubstantiation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of our Saviour; nor is it insinuated, that the apostles believed they were eating the flesh of their master, and drinking his blood. St John, the favourite apostle, mentions not a word of this ceremony, which he certainly would not have omitted, had he imagined it an essential article of faith.

But supposing transubstantiation to be more clearly expressed in this text, than it really is; yet men of good understanding will be loth to admit a meaning that contradicts their five senses. They will reflect, that no man now living ever saw the original books of the New Testament; nor are they certain, that the editions we have, are copied directly from the originals. Every remove from them is liable to errors, which may justly create a suspicion of every text that contradicts reason and common sense. Add, that the bulk of Christians have not even a copy from the original to build their faith upon, but only a translation into another language.

And this leads to what chiefly determined me to select that instance. God and nature have bestowed upon us the faculty of reason, for distinguishing truth from falsehood. If by reasoning with candor and impartiality, we discover a proposition to be true or false, it is not in our power to remain indifferent: we must judge, and according to our judgement we must pronounce. I say more, to pronounce is a duty we owe to our Maker; for to

(a) St Matthew, xxvi. 26. &c.

what



what purpose has he bestow'd reason upon us, but in order to direct our belief? At the same time, we may depend on it as an intuitive truth, that God will never impose any belief on us, contradictory not only to our reason, but to our senses.

The following objection however will perhaps relish more with people of plain understanding. Transubstantiation is a very extraordinary miracle, reiterated every day and in every corner of the earth, by priests not always remarkable either for piety or for morality. Now I demand an answer to the following plain question: To what good end or purpose is such a profusion of miracles subservient? I see none. But I discover a very bad one, if they have any influence; which is, that they accustom the Roman Catholics to more cruelty and barbarity, than even the grossest savages are ever guilty of: some of them indeed devour the flesh of their enemies; but none of them, the flesh of their friends, especially of their greatest friend. But to do justice to people of that religion, I am confident, that this supposed miracle has no influence whatever upon their manners: to me it appears impossible for any man seriously to believe, that the bread and wine used at the Lord's supper, is actually converted into the body and blood of our Saviour. The Romish church requires the belief of transubstantiation; and a zealous Catholic, out of pure obedience, thinks he believes it. Convince once a man that salvation depends on belief, and he will believe any thing; that is, he will imagine that he believes: *Credo quia impossibile est* \*.

That

\* A traveller describing the Virgin Mary's house at Loretto, has the following reflection. "When there are so many saints endued with such miraculous powers, so many relics, and so many impregnated wells, each of them able to cure the most dangerous diseases; one would wonder, that physicians could live there, or others die. But people die here as elsewhere; and even churchmen, who preach upon the miracles wrought by relics, grow sick and die like other men." It is





“ nister, or in the action. First, in the matter. If the bread be  
“ not of wheat, or if there be so great a mixture of other grain  
“ that it cannot be called wheat-bread, or if any way corrupted,  
“ it does not make a sacrament. If it be made with rose-water,  
“ or any other distilled water, it is doubtful whether it make a  
“ sacrament or not. Tho’ corruption have begun, or tho’ it be  
“ leavened, it makes a sacrament, but the celebrator sins grievously.  
“ ly.

“ If the celebrator, before consecration, observe that the host  
“ is corrupted, or is not of wheat, he must take another host:  
“ if after consecration, he must still take another and swallow it,  
“ after which he must also swallow the first, or give it to another,  
“ or preserve it in some place with reverence. But if he have  
“ swallowed the first before observing its defects, he must nevertheless  
“ swallow also the perfect host; because the precept about  
“ the perfection of the sacrament, is of greater weight than that  
“ of taking it fasting. If the consecrated host disappear by an  
“ accident, as by wind, by a miracle, or by some animal, another  
“ must be consecrated.

“ If the wine be quite sour or putrid, or made of unripe grapes,  
“ or be mixed with so much water as to spoil the wine, it is no  
“ sacrament. If the wine have begun to sour or to be corrupted,  
“ or be quite new, or not mixed with water, or mixed with rose-  
“ water or other distilled water, it makes a sacrament, but the celebrator  
“ sins grievously.

“ If the priest, before consecration, observe that the materials  
“ are not proper, he must stop, if proper materials cannot be got;  
“ but after consecration, he must proceed, to avoid giving scandal.  
“ If proper materials can be procured by waiting, he must  
“ wait for them, that the sacrifice may not remain imperfect.

“ Second, in form. If any of the words of consecration be omitted,  
“ or any of them be changed into words of a different  
“ meaning,



“ meaning, it is no sacrament: if they be changed into words of  
 “ the same meaning, it makes a sacrament; but the celebrator  
 “ sins grievously.

“ Third, in the minister. If he does not intend to make a sa-  
 “ crament, but to cheat; if there be any part of the wine, or a-  
 “ ny wafer that he has not in his eye, and does not intend to  
 “ consecrate; if he have before him eleven wafers, and intends  
 “ to consecrate only ten, not determining what ten he intends:  
 “ in these cases the consecration does not hold, because intention  
 “ is requisite. If he think there are ten only, and intends to  
 “ consecrate all before him, they are all consecrated; therefore  
 “ priests ought always to have such intention. If the priest,  
 “ thinking he has but one wafer, shall, after the consecration,  
 “ find two sticking together, he must take them both. And he  
 “ must take off all the remains of the consecrated matter; for  
 “ they all belong to the same sacrifice. If in consecrating, the  
 “ intention be not actual by wandering of mind, but virtual in  
 “ approaching the altar, it makes a sacrament: tho’ priests  
 “ should be careful to have intention both virtual and actual.

“ Beside intention, the priest may be deficient in disposition of  
 “ mind. If he be suspended, or degraded, or excommunicated,  
 “ or under mortal sin, he makes a sacrament, but sins grievous-  
 “ ly. He may be deficient also in disposition of body. If he  
 “ have not fasted from midnight, if he have tasted water, or any  
 “ other drink or meat, even in the way of medicine, he cannot  
 “ celebrate nor communicate. If he have taken meat or drink  
 “ before midnight, even tho’ he have not slept nor digested it,  
 “ he does not sin. But on account of the perturbation of mind,  
 “ which bars devotion, it is prudent to refrain.

“ If any remains of meat, sticking in the mouth, be swallow-  
 “ ed with the host, they do not prevent communicating, provi-  
 “ ded they be swallowed, not as meat, but as spittle. The same

“ is

“ is to be said, if in washing the mouth a drop of water be swallowed, provided it be against our will.

“ Fourth, in the action. If any requisite be wanting, it is no sacrament; for example, if it be celebrated out of holy ground, or upon an altar not consecrated, or not covered with three napkins; if there be no wax candles; if it be not celebrated between day-break and noon; if the celebrator have not said matins with lauds; if he omit any of the sacerdotal robes; if these robes and the napkins be not blessed by a bishop; if there be no clerk present to serve, or one who ought not to serve, a woman, for example; if there be no chalice, the cup of which is gold, or silver, or pewter; if the vestment be not of clean linen adorned with silk in the middle, and blessed by a bishop; if the priest celebrate with his head covered; if there be no missal present, tho' he have it by heart.

“ If a gnat or spider fall into the cup after consecration, the priest must swallow it with the blood, if he can: otherwise, let him take it out, wash it with wine, burn it, and throw it with the washings into holy ground. If poison fall into the cup, the blood must be poured on tow or on a linen cloth, remain till it be dry, then be burnt, and the ashes be thrown upon holy ground. If the host be poisoned, it must be kept in a tabernacle till it be corrupted.

“ If the blood freeze in winter, put warm cloths about the cup: if that be not sufficient, put the cup in boiling water.

“ If any of Christ's blood fall on the ground by negligence, it must be licked up with the tongue, and the place scraped: the scrapings must be burnt, and the ashes buried in holy ground.

“ If the priest vomit the eucharist, and the species appear entire, it must be licked up most reverently. If a nausea prevent that to be done, it must be kept till it be corrupted. If the species

“ cies

