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**Sketches Of The History Of Man**

In Two Volumes

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Chap. I. Existence of a Deity.

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## S K E T C H    I I I .

## Principles and Progress of THEOLOGY.

**A**S no branch of knowledge can vie with theology, either in dignity or importance, it justly claims to be a favourite study with every person endued with true taste and solid judgment. From the time that writing was invented, natural religion has employ'd pens without number; and yet in no language is there found a complete history of it. That task is far above my abilities: I propose only a slight sketch; which I shall glory in, however imperfect, if it excite any one of superior talents to undertake a task so arduous.

## C H A P. I.

## Existence of a DEITY.

**T**Hat there are beings, one or many, powerful above men, has been generally believed among the various tribes of men: I may say universally believed, notwithstanding what is reported of some gross savages; for reports repugnant to the common nature of man, require more able vouchers than a few illiterate voyagers. Among many savage tribes, there are no words  
but

but for objects of external sense: is it surprising, that such people are incapable to express their religious perceptions, or any perception of internal sense? and from their silence can it be fairly presumed, that they have no such perception \*? The belief of superior powers, in every country where there are words to express it, is so well vouched, that in fair reasoning it ought to be taken for granted among the few tribes where language is deficient. Even the grossest idolatry affords to me evidence of that belief. No nation can be so brutish as to worship a stock or a stone, merely as such. The visible object is always imagined to be connected with some invisible power; and the worship paid to the former, is as representing the latter, or as in some manner connected with it. Every family among the ancient Lithuanians, entertained a real serpent as a household god; and the same practice is at present universal, among the negroes in the kingdom of Whidah: it is not the serpent that is worshipped, but some deity imagined to reside in it. The ancient Egyptians were not idiots, to pay divine honours to a bull or a cat, as such: the divine honours were paid to a deity, as residing in these animals. The sun is to man a familiar object: as it is frequently obscured by clouds, and totally eclipsed during night, a savage readily conceives it to be a great fire, sometimes flaming bright, sometimes obscured, and sometimes extinguished. Whence then sun-worship, once universal among savages? Plainly from the same cause: it is not properly the sun that is worshipped, but a deity who is supposed to dwell in that luminary.

\* In the language even of Peru, there is not a word for expressing an abstract idea, such as *time*, *endurance*, *space*, *existence*, *substance*, *matter*, *body*. It is no less defective in expressing moral ideas, such as *virtue*, *justice*, *gratitude*, *liberty*. The Yameos, a tribe on the river Oroonoko, described by Condamine, use the word *poettarraroincourseac* to express the number three, and have no word for a greater number. The Brazilian language is nearly as barren.

Taking



Taking it then for granted, that our belief of superior powers has been long universal, the important question is, From what cause it proceeds. A belief so universal, and so permanent, cannot proceed from chance, but must have a cause operating constantly and invariably upon all men in all ages. Philosophers, who believe the world to be eternal and self-existent, and imagine it to be the only deity, tho' without intelligence, endeavour to account for our belief of superior powers, from the terror that thunder and other elementary convulsions raise in savages; and thence conclude that such belief is no evidence of a deity. Thus Lucretius,

Præterea, cui non animus formidine divum  
 Contrahitur? cui non conripunt membra pavore,  
 Fulminis horribili cum plaga torrida tellus  
 Contremittit, et magnum percurrunt murmura cœlum \* (a) †

And Petronius Arbiter,

Primus in orbe deos fecit timor : ardua cœlo  
 Fulmina quum caderent discussaque mœnia flammis,  
 Atque ictus flagraret Athos †.

Man, during infancy a defenceless animal, is endued on that ac-

\* What man can boast, that firm undaunted soul,  
 That hears, unmov'd, when thunder shakes the pole;  
 Nor shrinks with fear of an offended pow'r,  
 When lightnings flash, and storms and tempests roar?

† When dread convulsions rock'd the lab'ring earth,  
 And livid clouds first gave the thunder birth,  
 Instinctive fear within the human breast  
 The first ideas of a God impress'd.

(a) Lib. 5.

count



count with a large portion of fear. Savages, grossly ignorant of causes and effects, take fright at every unusual appearance, and recur to some malignant power as the cause. Now, if the authors quoted mean only, that the first perception of deity among savages is occasioned by fear, I heartily subscribe to their opinion. But if it was their meaning, that such perceptions proceed from fear solely, without having any other cause, I wish to be informed, from what source is derived the belief we have of superior benevolent beings. Fear cannot be the source: and it will be seen anon, that tho' malevolent deities were first recognised among savages; yet that in the progress of society, the existence of benevolent deities was universally believed. The fact is certain; and therefore fear is not the sole cause of our believing the existence of superior beings.

It is beside to me evident, that the belief even of malevolent deities, once universal among all the tribes of men, cannot be accounted for from fear solely. I observe, first, That there are many men, to whom an eclipse, an earthquake, and even thunder, are unknown: Egypt in particular, tho' the country of superstition, is little or not at all acquainted with the two latter. Nor do such appearances strike terror into every one who is acquainted with them. The universality of the belief, must then have some cause more universal than fear. I observe next, That if the belief were founded solely on fear, it would die away gradually as men improve in the knowledge of causes and effects. Instruct a savage, that thunder, an eclipse, an earthquake, proceed from natural causes, and are not threatenings of an incensed deity; his fear of malevolent beings will vanish; and with it his belief in them, if founded solely on fear. Yet the direct contrary is true: in proportion as the human understanding ripens, our belief of superior powers, or of a Deity, turns more and more firm and authoritative;

tive; which will be made evident in the chapter immediately following.

Philosophers of more enlarged views, and of deeper penetration, may possibly think, that the operations of nature, and the government of this world, which loudly proclaim a Deity, may be sufficient to open the eyes of the grossest savages, and to convince them that there is a Deity. And to give due weight to the argument, I shall relate a conversation between a Greenlander and a Danish missionary, mentioned by Crantz in his history of Greenland. "It is true," says the Greenlander, "we were ignorant Heathens, and knew little of a God, till you came. But you must not imagine, that no Greenlander thinks about these things. A kajak (*a*), with all its tackle and implements, cannot exist but by the labour of man; and one who does not understand it, would spoil it. But the meanest bird requires more skill than the best kajak; and no man can make a bird. There is still more skill required to make a man: by whom then was he made? He proceeded from his parents, and they from their parents. But some must have been the first parents: whence did they proceed? Common report says, that they grew out of the earth: if so, why do not men still grow out of the earth? And from whence came the earth itself, the sun, the moon, the stars? Certainly there must be some being who made all these things, a being more wise than the wisest man." The reasoning here from effects to their causes, is stated with great precision; and were all men equally penetrating with the Greenlander, such reasoning might perhaps be sufficient to account for the belief of Deity, universally spread among all savages. But such penetration is a rare quality among savages;

(*a*) A Greenland boat.



ges ; and yet the belief of superior powers is universal, not excepting even the grossest savages, who are altogether incapable of reasoning like our Greenland philosopher. Natural history has made so rapid a progress of late years, and the finger of God is so visible to us in the various operations of nature, that we do not readily conceive how even savages can be ignorant : but it is a common fallacy in reasoning, to judge of others by what we feel in ourselves. And to give juster notions of the condition of savages, I take liberty to introduce the Wogultzoi, a people in Siberia, as exhibiting a striking picture of savages in their natural state. That people were baptized at the command of Prince Gagarin, governor of the province ; and Laurent Lange, in his relation of a journey from Petersburg to Pekin ann. 1715, gives the following account of their conversion. “ I had curiosity,” says he, “ to question them about their worship before they embraced Christianity. They said, that they had an idol hung upon a tree, before which they prostrated themselves, raising their eyes to heaven, and howling with a loud voice. They could not explain what they meant by howling ; but only, that every man howled in his own fashion. Being interrogated, Whether, in raising their eyes to heaven, they knew that a god is there, who sees all the actions, and even the thoughts of men ; they answered simply, That heaven is too far above them to know whether a god be there or not ; and that they had no care but to provide meat and drink. Another question was put, Whether they had not more satisfaction in worshipping the living God, than they formerly had in the darkness of idolatry ; they answered, We see no great difference ; and we do not break our heads about such matters.” Judge how little capable such ignorant savages are, to reason from effects to their causes, and to trace a Deity from the operations of nature. And it may be added with great certainty, that could they be made in any degree



gree to conceive such reasoning, yet so weak and obscure would their conviction be, as to rest there without moving them to any sort of worship; which however among savages goes hand in hand with the belief of superior powers.

To sum up this argument: As fear is a cause altogether insufficient for the belief of Deity, universal among all tribes; and as reasoning from effects to their causes can have no influence upon ignorant savages; what cause remains but nature itself? To make this belief universal, the image of the Deity must be stamp'd upon the mind of every human being, the ignorant equally with the knowing: nothing less is sufficient. And the perception we have of Deity must proceed from an internal cause, which may be termed the *sense of Deity*.

Included in the sense of Deity, is the duty we are under to worship him. And to enforce that duty, the principle of devotion is made a part of our nature. All men accordingly agree in worshipping superior beings, however they may differ in the mode of worship. And the universality of such worship, proves devotion to be an innate principle.

The perception we have of being accountable beings, arises from another branch of the sense of Deity. We expect approbation from the Deity when we do right; and dread punishment from him when guilty of any crime; not excepting the most occult crimes, hid from every mortal eye. From what cause can dread proceed in that case, but from belief of a superior being, avenger of wrongs? That dread, when immoderate, disorders the mind, and makes every unusual misfortune pass for a punishment inflicted by an invisible hand. “ And they said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear: therefore is this distress come upon us. And Reuben answered them, saying, Spake I not unto you, saying,

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“ Do not sin against the child; and ye would not hear? therefore behold also his blood is required (a).” Alphonfus King of Naples, was a cruel and tyrannical prince. He drove his people to despair with oppressive taxes, treacherously assassinated several of his barons, and loaded others with chains. During prosperity, his conscience gave him little disquiet; but in adversity, his crimes star’d him in the face, and made him believe that his distresses proceeded from the hand of God, as a just punishment. He was terrified to distraction, when Charles VIII. of France approached with a numerous army: he deserted his kingdom; and fled to hide himself from the face of God and man.

But admitting a sense of Deity, is it evidence to us that a Deity actually exists? The answer is, That it is complete evidence. So framed is man as to rely on the evidence of his senses (b); which evidence it is not in his power to reject, were he even disposed to be a sceptic. And experience confirms our belief; for our senses, when in order, never deceive us.

The foregoing sense of Deity is not the only evidence we have of his existence: there is additional evidence from other branches of our nature. Inherent in the nature of man are two passions, devotion, of which the Deity is the immediate and only object; and dread of punishment, when one is guilty of any crime. These passions would be idle and absurd, were there no Deity to be worshipped or to be dreaded: they would be illusory passions, having no object: they would be the single instance of such irregularity; and grossly irregular it would be, to be endued with passions or principles contrived for no end or purpose. Man makes a capital figure; and is the most perfect being that inhabits this earth: how then is it possible to believe, that he should be endued with passions

(a) Genesis xlii. 21. 22.

(b) See *Essays on Morality and Natural Religion*, part 2. sect. 3.

contradictory



contradictory to the regular and beautiful laws which govern all other things here? It is not credible. The passions mentioned, both of them, direct us to a Deity, and afford us irresistible evidence of his existence.

Thus our Maker leaves no work of his imperfect: he has revealed himself to us, in a way perfectly analagous to our nature: in the mind of every human creature, he has lighted up a lamp, which renders him visible even to the weakest sight. Nor ought it to escape observation, that here, as in every other case, the conduct of Providence to man, is uniform. It leaves him to be directed by reason, where liberty of choice is permitted: but in matters of duty, he is provided with guides less fallible than reason: in performing his duty to man, he is guided by the moral sense; in performing his duty to God, he is guided by the sense of Deity. In these mirrors, he perceives his duty intuitively.

It is no slight support to this doctrine, that if there really be a Deity, it is highly presumable, that he will reveal himself to man, fitted by nature to adore and worship him. To other animals, the knowledge of a Deity is of no importance: to man, it is of high importance. Were we totally ignorant of a Deity, this world would appear to us a mere chaos: under the government of a wise and benevolent Deity, chance is excluded; and every event, the result of established laws, is perceived to be the best on the whole. Good men submit to whatever happens, without repining, trusting that every event is ordered by divine Providence: they submit with entire resignation; and such resignation is a sovereign balsam to every misfortune.

The sense of Deity resembles our other senses, which lie dormant till a proper object present itself. When all is silent about us, the sense of hearing is dormant; and if from infancy a man were confined to a dark room, he would be as ignorant of the sense



sense of seeing, as one born blind. Among savages, the objects that rouse the sense of Deity, are uncommon events above the power of man; an earthquake, for example, a hurricane, a total eclipse of the sun, a sudden swell of a river that prevents their escape from an impending enemy. A savage, if he be acquainted with no events but what are familiar, has no perception of superior powers; but thunder rattling in his ears, or the convulsion of an earthquake, rouses in him the sense of Deity, and directs him to some superior being as the cause of these dreadful effects. The savage, it is true, errs in ascribing to the immediate operation of a Deity, things that have a natural cause: his error however is evidence that he has a sense of Deity, no less pregnant, than when he more justly attributes to the immediate operation of Deity, the formation of man, of this earth, of all the world.

The sense of Deity, like the moral sense, makes no capital figure among savages; the perceptions of both senses being in them faint and obscure. But in the progress of nations to maturity, these senses turn more and more vigorous, so as among enlightened nations to acquire a commanding influence; leaving no doubt about right and wrong, and as little about the existence of a Deity.

The obscurity of the sense of Deity among savages, has encouraged some sceptical philosophers to deny its existence. It has been urged, That God does nothing by halves; and that if he intended to make himself known to man, the sense of Deity would produce equal conviction with that of seeing or hearing. When we argue thus about the purposes of the Almighty, we tread on slippery ground, where we seldom fail to stumble. What if it be the purpose of the Deity, to afford us but an obscure glimpse of his being and attributes? We have reason from analogy to conjecture, that this may be the case. From some particulars mentioned

mentioned above (*a*), it appears at least probable, that entire submission to the moral sense, would be ill-suited to man in his present state; and would prove more hurtful than beneficial. And to me it appears evident, that to be conscious of the presence of the Great God, as I am of a friend whom I hold by the hand, would be inconsistent with the part that Providence has destined me to act in this life. Reflect only on the restraint one is under, in presence of a superior, suppose the King himself: how much greater our restraint with the same lively impression of God's awful presence! Humility and veneration would leave no room for other passions: man would be no longer man; and the system of our present state would be totally subverted. Take another instance: Such a conviction of future rewards and punishments as to overcome every inordinate desire, would reduce us to the condition of a traveller in a paltry inn, having no wish but for day-light to prosecute his journey. For that very reason, it appears agreeable to the plan of Providence, that we should have but an obscure glimpse of futurity. As the same plan of Providence is visible in all, I conclude with assurance, that a certain degree of obscurity, weighs nothing against the sense of Deity, more than against the moral sense, or against a future state of rewards and punishments. Whether all men might not have been made angels, and whether more happiness might not have resulted from a different system, lie far beyond the reach of human knowledge. From what is known of the conduct of Providence, we have reason to presume, that our present state is the result of wisdom and benevolence. So much we know with certainty, that the sense we have of Deity and of moral duty, correspond accurately to the nature of man as an imperfect being; and that these senses, were they absolutely perfect, would unhinge his nature, and convert him into a very different being.

(*a*) Book 2. sketch 1.



A theory espoused by several writers ancient and modern, must not be overlooked; because it pretends to compose the world without a Deity; which would reduce the sense of Deity to be delusive, if it have any existence. The theory is, That the world, composed of animals, vegetables, and brute matter, is self-existent and eternal; and that all events happen by a necessary chain of causes and effects. In this theory, tho' wisdom and benevolence are conspicuous in every part, yet the great work of planning and executing the whole, is understood to have been done blindly without intelligence or contrivance. It is scarce necessary to remark, that this theory, assumed at pleasure, is highly improbable, if not absurd; and yet that it is left naked to the world without the least cover or support. But what I chiefly insist on is, that the endless number of wise and benevolent effects, display'd every where on the face of this globe, afford to us complete evidence of a wise and benevolent cause; and as these effects are far above the power of man, we necessarily ascribe them to some superior being, or in other words to the Deity (*a*). And this is sufficient to remove the present objection against the existence of a sense of Deity. But I am not satisfied with this partial victory. I proceed to observe, that nothing more is required but the proof of a Deity, to overturn the supposition of self-existence in a world composed of many heterogeneous parts, and of a chain of causes and effects framed without intelligence or foresight, tho' full of wisdom and contrivance in every part. For if a Deity exist, wise and powerful above all other beings, self-existence ought to be his peculiar attribute; and no person of rationality will have any hesitation in rejecting the self-existence of such a world, when so natural a supposition lies in view, as that the whole is the operation of the truly self-existent being,

(*a*) First sketch of this third book, sect. 1.

whose

