

THE
PRESBYTERIAN MAGAZINE.

JANUARY, 1821.

Communications.

Revelation accordant with Reason.

Paganism in ancient and modern times, is equally calculated to enhance the guilt, and multiply the miseries of men. Mahometanism, though grafted upon revelation, is a monstrous corruption, evidently aiming at political subjugation, and the debasement of the human mind. The philosophy of Zeno had little influence upon the world; and that of Epicurus rendered its votaries addicted to the vilest practices. The schemes of modern infidelity have derived their lustre from light purloined from the gospel; they are, in all their forms, the offspring of prejudice and pride, and exist by excluding the truth.

Having the idea of God, our reason can establish the truth of his existence, ascertain many of his perfections, natural and moral, discern our dependance on and obligations to him, and discover outlines of his law, or rules of moral conduct, which we ought to pursue. Those, who are not able to think, or speak clearly of the nature of virtue, and the origin of vice, can nevertheless distinguish right from wrong, and feel a sense or consciousness of guilt, as well as infer from their miseries, a state of opposition to the Creator. In apostasy, it is fit we should be separated from holy and happy beings, and deprived of the sensible presence of the perfectly pure and holy God.

The degradation of an innocent creature implies losses which are immense. Immured in the dark prison of the body, we are excluded from intercourse with separate spirits, and justly treated as convicts, banished from the presence of the Judge. Repentance and faith are at best an imperfect righteousness, and accompanied by propensities to sin, which deserve misery and death.

Against death, the probable evidence of immortality affords, to mere human reason, very slight grounds of comfort. Without a hereafter, man is indeed a mystery; justice has failed; the idea of a future life a tantalizing evil; the faculties of the human mind are misplaced and useless. Yet immortality admitted, a future state, without a revelation, must fill the mind with fearful apprehensions. For although justice requires a distinction to be made between characters, yet the universality of guilt, and the strictness of the claims of justice, seem to exclude hope.

Reason admits, that he who formed the mind, can reveal himself to it; and that he may, if he chooses, remove our uncertainties and fears. The goodness of the Creator, evinced by our present comforts, and even the miseries of man warrant some expectation, that he would do this. The books, which claim the character of a revelation, receive the fullest support from the history of past ages, the manners and languages of the nations. The simplicity of their unadorned narratives, their impar-

tiality, their purity, and tendency to promote holiness, the accomplishment of their prophecies, the miracles which they have recorded, their influence upon the hearts, lives and hopes of men, all lead to the duty of giving them a strict and fair examination. When we explore by candid and diligent investigation their real meaning, they give those views both of God and man, which our reason must approve, and which neither the writers of those books, had they been left to themselves, nor any other set of men, would have been able to have furnished. Whilst they represent true religion, the same thing in every period of the world, they also exhibit it in the different forms, which divine wisdom had adapted to the times and ignorance of the respective ages. A pompous worship was long in use, the rites of which being but the images of good things to come, were superseded by the presence of the things themselves; and when the whole plan of salvation had been opened, the same worship of the heart, which had always been demanded, was required also as the religion of the gospel. We are now taught, that salvation is from the mercy of God in Christ, and that none are saved, unless made meet for heaven. The gospel exhibits the pardon of sin, without which we could have no hope; and promises the aids of the Spirit, which, though sovereign and gratuitous, are all important to us in the work of opposing our own corruptions. The doctrines of the resurrection, and the judgment, excite the languishing energies of the feeble saint, animate to further efforts, and fire his zeal. That the work of judgment should be committed to him, who bore our likeness and obeyed for us; that he who assumed the work of a Redeemer should possess the divine nature, and be thus able to procure for his people eternal life, is highly consolatory to the humble disciple. That there might be full

reliance upon him, the earliest intimations were given of him. Prophecies of his family, the time and circumstances of his advent, the particulars of his birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension, had been given and were fulfilled. His resurrection has been confirmed by numerous and credible witnesses. His doctrines have had the effects, which he foretold. And the opposition to them has been such, as he described. The poverty, obscurity, and want of education in his disciples; the prevalence of the truth against the wisdom, learning, power and malice of the world; and the influence of their doctrines and manners upon the nations, all show that this salvation was of God. Truth requires neither artifice nor violence to support it; but spiritual truth, though shown by the strongest evidence, is nevertheless effectually resisted by the heart of man, until changed, in some unknown manner, by the same Power by which it was at first created.

The gospel exhibits at the same time the indefectible rectitude, and astonishing mercy of the divine character, and their reconciliation, in the redemption of guilty man; evincing, to the surprise of angelic natures, that God can maintain his justice, support the dignity of his government, and yet save the guilty believer. It discovers full scope to have been given to moral agency, and that nevertheless all the glory of man's salvation belongs to God. It breathes peace, promotes the love of God and man, casts a light upon the path of life, and gives a solid ground of hope, opening to our view an eternity of happiness, and rendering even death itself a victory.

J. P. WILSON.

On proclaiming and hearing the Gospel.

A religion without moral purity, can neither please the righteous Governor of the universe, nor secure