

A DISCOURSE UPON GOD'S BEING A SPIRIT.

God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.—JOHN IV. 24.

THE words are part of the dialogue between our Saviour and the Samaritan woman. Christ, intending to return from Judea to Galilee, passed through the country of Samaria, a place inhabited not by Jews, but a mixed company of several nations,* and some remainders of the posterity of Israel, who escaped the captivity and were returned from Assyria, and being weary with his journey, arrived about the sixth hour, or noon (according to the Jews' reckoning the time of the day), at a well that Jacob had digged, which was of great account among the inhabitants for the antiquity of it, as well as the usefulness of it, in supplying their necessities. He being thirsty, and having none to furnish him wherewith to draw water, at last comes a woman from the city, whom he desires to give him some water to drink. The woman, perceiving him by his language or habit to be a Jew, wonders at the question, since the hatred the Jews bore the Samaritans was so great, that they would not vouchsafe to have any commerce with them, not only in religious but civil affairs, and common offices belonging to mankind. Hence our Saviour takes occasion to publish to her the doctrine of the gospel, and excuseth her rude answer by her ignorance of him; and tells her, that if she had asked him a greater matter, even that which concerned her eternal salvation, he would readily have granted it, notwithstanding the rooted hatred between the Jews and Samaritans, and bestowed a water of a greater virtue, the 'water of life,' ver. 10, or 'living water.' The woman is no less astonished at his reply than she was at his first demand. It was strange to hear a man speak of giving living water to one of whom he had begged the water of that spring, and had no vessel to draw any to quench his own thirst. She therefore demands whence he could have this water that he speaks of, ver. 11, since she conceived him not greater than Jacob, who had digged that well and drunk of it. Our Saviour, desirous to make a progress in that work he had begun, extols the water he spake of above this of the well, from its particular virtue, fully to refresh those that drank of it, and be as a cooling and comforting fountain within them, of more efficacy than that without, ver. 13, 14. The woman, conceiving a good opinion of our Saviour, desires to partake of this

* Amiran, Paraph. sur Jean.

water, to save her pains in coming daily to the well, not apprehending the spirituality of Christ's discourse to her, ver. 15. Christ finding her to take some pleasure in his discourse, partly to bring her to a sense of her sin before he did communicate the excellency of his grace, bids her return back to the city and bring her husband with her to him, ver. 16. She freely acknowledges that she had no husband, whether having some check of conscience at present for the unclean life she led, or loath to lose so much time in the gaining this water so much desired by her. Our Saviour takes occasion from this to lay open her sin before her, and to make her sensible of her own wicked life, ver. 17, and the prophetic excellency of himself, and tells her that she had had five husbands, to whom she had been false, and by whom she was divorced; and the person she now dwelt with was not her lawful husband, and in living with him she violated the rights of marriage, and increased guilt upon her conscience, ver. 18. The woman, being affected with this discourse, and knowing him to be a stranger, that could not be certified of those things but in an extraordinary way, begins to have a high esteem of him as a prophet, ver. 19; and upon this opinion she esteems him able to decide a question which had been canvassed between them and the Jews about the place of worship, ver. 20, their fathers worshipping in that mountain, and the Jews affirming Jerusalem to be a place of worship. She pleads the antiquity of the worship in this place, Abraham having built an altar there, Gen. xii. 7, and Jacob upon his return from Syria. And surely, had the place been capable of an exception, such persons as they, and so well acquainted with the will of God, would not have pitched upon that place to celebrate their worship.

Antiquity hath too, too often bewitched the minds of men, and drawn them from the revealed will of God. Men are more willing to imitate the outward actions of their famous ancestors, than conform themselves to the revealed will of their Creator. The Samaritans would imitate the patriarchs in the place of worship, but not in the faith of the worshippers.

Christ answers her, that this question would quickly be resolved by a new state of the church which was near at hand, and neither Jerusalem, which had not* the precedency, nor that mountain, should be of any more value in that concern than any other place in the world, ver. 21. But yet, to make her sensible of her sin and that of her countrymen, tells her that their worship in that mountain was not according to the will of God, he having, long after the altars built in this place, fixed Jerusalem as the place of sacrifices; besides, they had not the knowledge of that God which ought to be worshipped by them, but the Jews had the true object of worship and the true manner of worship, according to the declaration God had made of himself to them, ver. 22. But all that service shall vanish, the veil of the temple shall be rent in twain, and that carnal worship give place to one more spiritual; shadows shall fly before substance, and truth advance itself above figures, and the worship of God shall be with the strength of the Spirit. Such a worship, and such worshippers, doth the Father seek: ver. 23, 'For God is a Spirit: and those that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.' The design of our Saviour is to declare that God is not taken with external worship invented by men, no, nor commanded by himself; and that upon this reason, because he is a spiritual essence, infinitely above gross and corporeal matter, and is not taken with that pomp which is a pleasure to our earthly imaginations.

Πνεῦμα ὁ Θεός. Some translate it just as the words lie, 'Spirit is God;'[†] but it is not unusual, both in the Old and New Testament languages, to put

* Qu. 'now'?—ED.

† Vulgar Lat. Illyric. Slav.

the predicate before the subject; as Ps. v. 9, 'Their throat is an open sepulchre,' in the Hebrew, 'A sepulchre open their throat;' so Ps. cxi. 3, 'His work is honourable and glorious;' *Hebr.*, 'Honour and glory his work.' And there wants not one example in the same evangelist: John i. 1, 'And the Word was God;' Greek, 'And God was the Word.' In all the predicate, or what is ascribed, is put before the subject to which it is ascribed.

One tells us, and he an head of a party that hath made a disturbance in the church of God,* that this place is not aptly brought to prove God to be a Spirit. And the reason of Christ runs not thus, God is of a spiritual essence, and therefore must be worshipped with a spiritual worship; for the essence of God is not the foundation of his worship, but his will; for then we were not to worship him with a corporeal worship, because he is not a body, but with an invisible and eternal worship, because he is invisible and eternal.

But the nature of God is the foundation of worship, the will of God is the rule of worship; the matter and manner is to be performed according to the will of God. But is the nature of the object of worship to be excluded? No; as the object is, so ought our devotion to be, spiritual as he is spiritual. God in his commands for worship respected the discovery of his own nature; in the law, he respected the discovery of his mercy and justice, and therefore commanded a worship by sacrifices. A spiritual worship without those institutions would not have declared those attributes, which was God's end to display to the world in Christ. And though the nature of God is to be respected in worship, yet the obligations of the creature are to be considered. God is a Spirit, therefore must have a spiritual worship. The creature hath a body as well as a soul, and both from God; and therefore ought to worship God with the one as well as the other, since one as well as the other is freely bestowed upon him.

The spirituality of God was the foundation of the change from the Judaical carnal worship to a more spiritual and evangelical.

'God is a Spirit.' That is, he hath nothing corporeal, no mixture of matter; not a visible substance, a bodily form.† He is a Spirit, not a bare spiritual substance, but an understanding, willing Spirit; holy, wise, good, and just. Before Christ spake of the Father, ver. 23, the first person in the Trinity, now he speaks of God essentially. The word *Father* is personal, the word *God* essential. So that our Saviour would render a reason, not from any one person in the blessed Trinity, but from the divine nature, why we should worship in spirit; and therefore makes use of the word God, the being a spirit being common to the other persons with the Father.

This is the reason of the proposition, ver. 23, of a spiritual worship. Every nature delights in that which is like it, and distastes that which is most different from it. If God were corporeal, he might be pleased with the victims of beasts, and the beautiful magnificence of temples, and the noise of music; but being a Spirit, he cannot be gratified with carnal things. He demands something better and greater than all those, that soul which he made, that soul which he hath endowed, a spirit of a frame suitable to his nature. He indeed appointed sacrifices and a temple, as shadows of those things which were to be most acceptable to him in the Messiah, but they were imposed only 'till the time of reformation,' Heb. ix. 10.

'Must worship him.' Not they *may*, or it would be more agreeable to God to have such a manner of worship, but they *must*. It is not exclusive

* *Episcop. Institut. lib. iv. cap. 3.*

† *Melancthon.*

of bodily worship, for this were to exclude all public worship in societies, which cannot be performed without reverential postures of the body.* The gestures of the body are helps to worship and declarations of spiritual acts. We can scarcely worship God with our spirits without some tincture upon the outward man. But he excludes all acts merely corporeal, all resting upon an external service and devotion, which was the crime of the Pharisees, and the general persuasion of the Jews as well as heathens, who used the outward ceremonies, not as signs of better things, but as if they did of themselves please God, and render the worshippers accepted with him, without any suitable frame of the inward man.† It is as if he had said, Now you must separate yourselves from all carnal modes to which the service of God is now tied, and render a worship chiefly consisting in the affectionate motions of the heart, and accommodated more exactly to the condition of the object, who is a Spirit.

'In spirit and truth.' The evangelical service now required has the advantage of the former, that was a shadow and figure, this the body and truth.‡ Spirit, say some,§ is here opposed to the legal ceremonies, truth to hypocritical services; or ||rather truth is opposed to shadows, and an opinion of worth in the outward action. It is principally opposed to external rites; because our Saviour saith, ver. 23, 'The hour comes, and now is,' &c. Had it been opposed to hypocrisy, Christ had said no new thing; for God always required truth in the inward parts, and all true worshippers had served him with a sincere conscience and single heart. The old patriarchs did worship God in Spirit and truth, as taken for sincerity. Such a worship was always and is perpetually due to God, because he always was and eternally will be a Spirit.¶ And it is said, 'The Father seeks such to worship him;' not *shall* seek, he always sought it, it always was performed to him by one or other in the world. And the prophets had always rebuked them for resting upon their outward solemnities, Isa. lviii. 7 and Micah vi. 8. But a worship without legal rites was proper to an evangelical state and the times of the gospel, God having then exhibited Christ, and brought into the world the substance of those shadows and the end of those institutions; there was no more need to continue them when the true reason of them was ceased. All laws do naturally expire when the true reason upon which they were first framed is changed.

Or by spirit may be meant such a worship as is kindled in the heart by the breath of the Holy Ghost. Since we are dead in sin, a spiritual light and flame in the heart, suitable to the nature of the object of our worship, cannot be raised in us without the operation of a supernatural grace. And though the fathers could not worship God without the Spirit, yet in the gospel times, there being a fuller effusion of the Spirit, the evangelical state is called 'the administration of the Spirit,' and the 'newness of the Spirit,' in opposition to the legal economy, entitled the 'oldness of the letter,' 2 Cor. iii. 8, Rom. vii. 6. The evangelical state is more suited to the nature of God than any other. Such a worship God must have, whereby he is acknowledged to be the true sanctifier and quickener of the soul. The nearer God doth approach to us, and the more full his manifestations are, the more spiritual is the worship we return to God. The gospel pares off the rugged parts of the law, and heaven shall remove what is material in the gospel, and change the ordinances of worship into that of a spiritual praise.

In the words there is,

* Terniti.

† Amyrald in loc.

‡ Amyrald in loc.

§ Muscul.

|| Chemnit.

¶ Muscul.

1. A proposition: 'God is a Spirit,' the foundation of all religion.
 2. An inference: 'they that worship him,' &c.
- As God, a worship belongs to him; as a Spirit, a spiritual worship is due to him. In the inference we have,
1. The manner of worship: 'in spirit and in truth.'
 2. The necessity of such a worship: 'must.'
- The proposition declares the nature of God; the inference, the duty of man.

The observations lie plain.

Obs. 1. God is a pure spiritual being; he is a Spirit.

2. The worship due from the creature to God must be agreeable to the nature of God, and purely spiritual.

3. The evangelical state is suited to the nature of God.

For the first,

Doct. God is a pure spiritual being.

It is the observation of one,* that the plain assertion of God's being a Spirit is found but once in the whole Bible, and that is in this place; which may well be wondered at, because God is so often described with hands, feet, eyes, and ears, in the form and figure of a man. The spiritual nature of God is deducible from many places; but not anywhere, as I remember, asserted *totidem verbis* but in this text. Some allege that place, 2 Cor. iii. 17, 'The Lord is that Spirit,' for the proof of it, but that seems to have a different sense. In the text, the nature of God is described; in that place, the operations of God in the gospel. 'It is not the ministry of Moses, or that old covenant, which communicates to you that Spirit it speaks of; but it is the Lord Jesus, and the doctrine of the gospel delivered by him, whereby this Spirit and liberty is dispensed to you. He opposes here the liberty of the gospel to the servitude of the law.'† It is from Christ that a divine virtue diffuseth itself by the gospel; it is by him, not by the law, that we partake of that Spirit.

The spirituality of God is as evident as his being.‡ If we grant that God is, we must necessarily grant that he cannot be corporeal, because a body is of an imperfect nature. It will appear incredible to any that acknowledge God the first being and creator of all things, that he should be a massy, heavy body, and have eyes and ears, feet and hands, as we have.

For the explication of it.

1. Spirit is taken various ways in Scripture. It signifies sometimes an aerial substance, as Ps. xi. 6, 'A horrible tempest;' Heb., 'A spirit of tempest;' sometimes the breath, which is a thin substance: Gen. vi. 17, 'All flesh wherein is the breath of life;' Heb., 'Spirit of life.' A thin substance, though it be material and corporeal, is called spirit; and in the bodies of living creatures, that which is the principle of their actions is called spirits, the animal and vital spirits; and the finer parts extracted from plants and minerals we call spirits, those volatile parts separated from that gross matter wherein they were immersed, because they come nearest to the nature of an incorporeal substance. And from this notion of the word, it is translated to signify those substances that are purely immaterial, as angels and the souls of men. Angels are called spirits, Ps. civ. 4; 'Who makes his angels spirits,' Heb. i. 14. And not only good angels are so called, but evil angels, Mark i. 27. Souls of men are called spirits, Eccles. xii., and the soul of Christ is called so, John xix. 30, whence God is called 'the God of the spirits of all flesh,' Numb. xvi. 22: and spirit is opposed to flesh:

* Episcop. Institut. l. iv. c. 3.

† Suarez. de Deo, vol. i. p. 9, col. 2.

‡ Amyrald *in loc.*

Isaiah xxxi. 3, 'The Egyptians* are flesh, and not spirit.' And our Saviour gives us the notion of a spirit to be something above the nature of a body, Luke xxiv. 39; not having flesh and bones, extended parts, loads of gross matter. It is also taken for those things which are active and efficacious, because activity is of the nature of a spirit. Caleb had 'another spirit,' Numb. xiv. 24, an active affection. The vehement motions of sin are called spirit, Hos. iv. 12, 'The spirit of whoredoms,' in that sense that Prov. xxix. 11, 'A fool utters all his mind,' 'all his spirit;' he knows not how to restrain the vehement motions of his mind. So that the notion of a spirit is, that it is a fine immaterial substance, an active being, that acts itself and other things. A mere body cannot act itself, as the body of man cannot move without the soul, no more than a ship can move itself without wind and waves.

So God is called a Spirit, as being not a body, not having the greatness, figure, thickness or length of a body, wholly separate from anything of flesh and matter. We find a principle within us nobler than that of our bodies, and therefore we conceive the nature of God according to that which is more worthy in us, and not according to that which is the vilest part of our natures. God is a most spiritual spirit, more spiritual than all angels, all souls (*μονοτρεδπωτ*).† As he exceeds all in the nature of being, so he exceeds all in the nature of spirit. He hath nothing gross, heavy, material in his essence.

2. When we say God is a Spirit, it is to be understood by way of negation. There are two ways of knowing or describing God: by way of affirmation, affirming that of him in a way of eminency which is excellent in the creature, as when we say God is wise, good. The other by way of negation, when we remove from God in our conceptions what is tainted with imperfection in the creature.‡ The first ascribes to him whatsoever is excellent, the other separates from him whatsoever is imperfect. The first is like a limning, which adds one colour to another to make a comely picture; the other is like a carving, which pares and cuts away whatsoever is superfluous, to make a complete statue. This way of negation is more easy; we better understand what God *is not*, than what he *is*, and most of our knowledge of God is by this way. As when we say God is infinite, immense, immutable, they are negatives; he hath no limits, is confined to no place, admits of no change.§ When we remove from him what is inconsistent with his being, we do more strongly assert his being, and know more of him when we elevate him above all, and above our own capacity. And when we say God is a Spirit, it is a negation; he is not a body; he consists not of various parts, extended one without and beyond another. He is not a spirit so as our souls are, to be the form of any body; a spirit, not as angels and souls are, but infinitely higher. We call him so because, in regard of our weakness, we have not any other term of excellency to express or conceive of him by. We transfer it to God in honour, because spirit is the highest excellency in our nature. Yet we must apprehend God above any spirit, since his nature is so great, that he cannot be declared by human speech, perceived by human sense, or conceived by human understanding.

The second thing, that God is a Spirit.

Some among the heathens|| imagined God to have a body; some thought him to have a body of air, some a heavenly body, some a human

* This is not said of the Egyptians, but of their horses.—ED.

† Gerhard.

‡ Coccei. Sum. Theol., cap. 8.

§ Gamacheus, tom. i. q. 3, cap. i. p. 42.

|| Thes. Sedan., part ii. p. 1000.

body;* and many of them ascribed bodies to their gods, but bodies without blood, without corruption; bodies made up of the finest and thinnest atoms; such bodies, which, if compared with ours, were as no bodies. The Sadducees also, who denied all spirits, and yet acknowledged a God, must conclude him to be a body, and no spirit. Some among Christians have been of that opinion. Tertullian is charged by some, and excused by others; and some monks of Egypt were so fierce for this error, that they attempted to kill one Theophilus, a bishop, for not being of that judgment.

But the wiser heathens† were of another mind, and esteemed it an unholy thing (ὄυκ ὁσιον) to have such imaginations of God. And some Christians have thought God only to be free from anything of body; because he is omnipresent, immutable, he is only incorporeal and spiritual: all things else, even the angels, are clothed with bodies, though of a neater matter, and a more active frame than ours; a pure spiritual nature they allowed to no being but God. Scripture and reason meet together to assert the spirituality of God. Had God had the lineaments of a body, the Gentiles had not fallen under that accusation of 'changing his glory into that of a corruptible man,' Rom. i. 23.

This is signified by the name God gives himself: Exod. iii. 14, 'I am that I am,' a simple, pure, uncompounded being, without any created mixture; as infinitely above the being of creatures as above the conceptions of creatures: Job xxxvii. 23, 'Touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out.' He is so much a Spirit that he is the 'Father of spirits,' Heb. xii. 9. The Almighty Father is not of a nature inferior to his children. The soul is a spirit; it could not else exert actions without the assistance of the body, as the act of understanding itself and its own nature, the act of willing, and willing things against the incitements and interest of the body. It could not else conceive of God, angels, and immaterial substances. It could not else be so active as with one glance to fetch a compass from earth to heaven, and by a sudden motion to elevate the understanding from an earthly thought to the thinking of things as high as the highest heavens. If we have this opinion of our souls, which in the nobleness of their acts surmount the body, without which the body is but a dull inactive piece of clay, we must needs have a higher conception of God than to clog him with any matter, though of a finer temper than ours. We must conceive of him by the perfections of our souls, without the vileness of our bodies. If God made man according to his image, we must raise our thoughts of God according to the noblest part of that image, and imagine the exemplar or copy not to come short, but to exceed the thing copied by it. God were not the most excellent substance if he were not a Spirit. Spiritual substances are more excellent than bodily, the soul of man more excellent than other animals, angels more excellent than men. They contain in their own nature whatsoever dignity there is in the inferior creatures. God must have, therefore, an excellency above all those, and therefore is entirely remote from the conditions of a body.

It is a gross conceit, therefore, to think that God is such a spirit as the air is;‡ for that is to be a body as the air is, though it be a thin one; and if God were no more a spirit than that, or than angels, he would not be the most simple being. Yet some§ think that the spiritual Deity was represented by the air in the ark of the testament. It was unlawful to represent him by any image that God had prohibited. Everything about the ark had

* Vossius Idolol., lib. ii. cap. i. Forbes, Instrument, l. i. c. 36.

† Plutarch, incorporalis ratio; divinus spiritus, Seneca.

‡ Calov. Socin. Proflig., p. 129, 130.

§ Amyrald sup., Heb. ix. p. 146, &c.

a particular signification. The gold and other ornaments about it signified something of Christ, but were unfit to represent the nature of God. A thing purely invisible, and falling under nothing of sense, could not represent him to the mind of man. The air in the ark was the fittest; it represented the invisibility of God, air being imperceptible to our eyes. Air diffuseth itself through all parts of the world, it glides through secret passages into all creatures, it fills the space between heaven and earth; there is no place wherein God is not present.

To evidence this;—

1. If God were not a Spirit, he could not be Creator. All multitude begins in, and is reduced to, unity. As above multitude there is an absolute unity, so above mixed creatures there is an absolute simplicity. You cannot conceive number without conceiving the beginning of it in that which was not number, viz., a unit. You cannot conceive any mixture but you must conceive some simple thing to be the original and basis of it. The works of art, done by rational creatures, have their foundation in something spiritual. Every artificer, watchmaker, carpenter, hath a model in his own mind of the work he designs to frame. The material and outward fabric is squared according to an inward and spiritual idea. A spiritual idea speaks a spiritual faculty as the subject of it. God could not have an idea of that vast number of creatures he brought into being if he had not a spiritual nature.* The wisdom whereby the world was created could never be the fruit of a corporeal nature; such natures are not capable of understanding and comprehending the things which are within the compass of their nature, much less of producing them; and therefore beasts, which have only corporeal faculties, move to objects by the force of their sense, and have no knowledge of things as they are comprehended by the understanding of man. All acts of wisdom speak an intelligent and spiritual agent. The effects of wisdom, goodness, power, are so great and admirable, that they bespeak him a more perfect and eminent being than can possibly be beheld under a bodily shape. Can a corporeal substance 'put wisdom in the inward parts, and give understanding to the heart'? Job xxxviii. 36.

2. If God were not a pure Spirit, he could not be one. If God had a body consisting of distinct members, as ours, or all of one nature, as the water and air are, yet he were then capable of division, and therefore could not be entirely one. Either those parts would be finite or infinite: if finite, they are not parts of God, for to be God and finite is a contradiction; if infinite, then there are as many infinities as distinct members, and therefore as many deities. Suppose this body had all parts of the same nature, as air and water hath, every little part of air is as much air as the greatest, and every little part of water is as much water as the ocean; so every little part of God would be as much God as the whole, as many particular deities to make up God as little atoms to compose a body. What can be more absurd? If God had a body like a human body, and were compounded of body and soul, of substance and quality, he could not be the most perfect unity; he would be made up of distinct parts, and those of a distinct nature, as the members of a human body are. Where there is the greatest unity, there must be the greatest simplicity; but God is one. As he is free from any change, so he is void of any multitude: Deut. vi. 4, 'The Lord our God is one Lord.'

3. If God had a body as we have, he would not be invisible. Every material thing is not visible: the air is a body, yet invisible, but it is sensible; the cooling quality of it is felt by us at every breath, and we know it by our

* Amyral. moral, tom. i. p. 282.

touch, which is the most material sense. Every body, that hath members like to bodies, is visible; but God is invisible.* The apostle reckons it amongst his other perfections: 1 Tim. i. 17, 'Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible.' He is invisible to our sense, which beholds nothing but material and coloured things; and incomprehensible to our understanding, that conceives nothing but what is finite. God is therefore a Spirit incapable of being seen, and infinitely incapable of being understood. If he be invisible, he is also spiritual. If he had a body, and hid it from our eyes, he might be said not to be seen, but could not be said to be invisible. When we say a thing is visible, we understand that it hath such qualities which are the object of sense, though we may never see that which in its own nature is to be seen. God hath no such qualities as fall under the perception of our sense. His works are visible to us, but not his Godhead, Röm. i. 20. The nature of a human body is to be seen and handled; Christ gives us such a description of it: Luke xxiv. 39, 'Handle me and see, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as you see me have;' but man hath been so far from seeing God, that it is impossible he can see him, 1 Tim. vi. 16. There is such a disproportion between an infinite object and a finite sense and understanding, that it is utterly impossible either to behold or comprehend him; but if God had a body more luminous and glorious than that of the sun, he would be as well visible to us as the sun, though the immensity of that light would dazzle our eyes, and forbid any close inspection into him by the virtue of our sense. We have seen the shape and figure of the sun, but no man hath ever seen the shape of God, John v. 37. If God had a body he were visible, though he might not perfectly and fully be seen by us;† as we see the heavens, though we see not the extension, latitude, and greatness of them. Though God hath manifested himself in a bodily shape, Gen. xviii. 1, and elsewhere Jehovah appeared to Abraham, yet the substance of God was not seen, no more than the substance of angels was seen in their apparitions to men. A body was formed to be made visible by them, and such actions done in that body, that spake the person that did them to be of a higher eminency than a bare corporeal creature. Sometimes a representation is made to the inward sense and imagination, as to Micaiah, 1 Kings xx. 19, and to Isaiah, chap. vi. 1; but they saw not the essence of God, but some images and figures of him proportioned to their sense or imagination. The essence of God no man ever saw, nor can see, John i. 18.

Nor doth it follow that God hath a body,‡ because Jacob is said to 'see God face to face,' Gen. xxxii. 30; and Moses had the like privilege, Deut. xxxiv. 10. This only signifies a fuller and clearer manifestation of God, by some representations offered to the bodily sense, or rather to the inward spirit; for God tells Moses he could not see his face, Exod. xxxiii. 20; and that none ever saw the similitude of God, Deut. iv. 15. Were God a corporeal substance, he might in some measure be seen by corporeal eyes.

4. If God were not a Spirit, he could not be infinite. All bodies are of a finite nature: every body is material, and every material thing is terminated. The sun, a vast body, hath a bounded greatness: the heavens, of a mighty bulk, yet have their limits. If God had a body, he must consist of parts; those parts would be bounded and limited, and whatsoever is limited is of a finite virtue, and therefore below an infinite nature. Reason therefore tells us, that the most excellent nature, as God is, cannot be of a corporeal condition, because of the limitation and other actions which belong

* Daille in Tim.

‡ Goulart. de Dieu. p. 95, 96.

† Goulart. de Dieu, p. 94.

to every body. God is infinite, for 'the heaven of heavens cannot contain him,' 2 Chron. ii. 6. The largest heavens, and those imaginary spaces beyond the world, are no bounds to him. He hath an essence beyond the bounds of the world, and cannot be included in the vastness of the heavens. If God be infinite, then he can have no parts in him; if he had, they must be finite, or infinite: finite parts can never make up an infinite being. A vessel of gold of a pound weight cannot be made of the quantity of an ounce. Infinite parts they cannot be, because then every part would be equal to the whole, as infinite as the whole, which is contradictory. We see in all things every part is less than the whole bulk that is composed of it. As every member of a man is less than the whole body of man, if all the parts were finite, then God in his essence were finite; and a finite God is not more excellent than a creature: so that if God were not a Spirit, he could not be infinite.

5. If God were not a Spirit, he could not be an independent being. Whatsoever is compounded of many parts, depends either essentially or integrally upon those parts; as the essence of a man depends upon the conjunction and union of his two main parts, his soul and body; when they are separated, the essence of a man ceaseth, and the perfection of a man depends upon every member of the body; so that if one be wanting, the perfection of the whole is wanting. As if a man hath lost a limb, you call him not a perfect man, because that part is gone upon which his perfection, as an entire man, did depend. If God, therefore, had a body, the perfection of the Deity would depend upon every part of that body; and the more parts he were compounded of, the more his dependency would be multiplied according to the number of those parts of the body; for that which is compounded of many parts is more dependent than that which is compounded of fewer.

And because God would be a dependent being if he had a body, he could not be the first being; for the compounding parts are in order of nature before that which is compounded by them, as the soul and body are before the man which results from the union of them. If God had parts and bodily members as we have, or any composition, the essence of God would result from those parts, and those parts be supposed to be before God; for that which is a part is before that whose part it is. As in artificial things you may conceive it, all the parts of a watch or clock are in time before that watch, which is made by setting those parts together. In natural things, you must suppose the members of a body framed before you can call it a man; so that the parts of this body are before that which is constituted by them. We can conceive no other of God, if he were not a pure, entire, unmixed Spirit: if he had distinct parts, he would depend upon them; those parts would be before him: his essence would be the effect of those distinct parts, and so he would not be absolutely and entirely the first being. But he is so: Isa. xlv. 6, 'I am the first, and I am the last.' He is the first; nothing is before him: whereas, if he had bodily parts, and those finite, it would follow, God is made up of those parts which are not God; and that which is not God, is in order of nature before that which is God. So that we see, if God were not a Spirit, he could not be independent.

6. If God were not a Spirit, he were not immutable and unchangeable. His immutability depends upon his simplicity. He is unchangeable in his essence, because he is a pure and unmixed spiritual being. Whatsoever is compounded of parts, may be divided into those parts, and resolved into those distinct parts which make up and constitute the nature. Whatsoever is compounded, is changeable in its own nature, though it should never be changed. Adam, who was constituted of body and soul, had he stood in

innocence, had not died ; there had been no separation made between his soul and body whereof he was constituted, and his body had not resolved into those principles of dust from whence it was extracted ; yet in his own nature he was dissoluble into those distinct parts whereof he was compounded. And so the glorified saints in heaven, after the resurrection, and the happy meeting of their souls and bodies in a new marriage knot, shall never be dissolved ; yet in their own nature they are mutable and dissoluble, and cannot be otherwise, because they are made up of such distinct parts that may be separated in their own nature, unless sustained by the grace of God. They are immutable by will, the will of God, not by nature. God is immutable by nature as well as will ; as he hath a necessary existence, so he hath a necessary unchangeableness ; Mal. iii. 6, ' I the Lord change not.' He is as unchangeable in his essence, as in his veracity and faithfulness. They are perfections belonging to his nature ; but if he were not a pure Spirit, he could not be immutable by nature.

7. If God were not a pure Spirit, he could not be omnipresent. He is ' in heaven above, and the earth below,' Deut. iv. 39. He ' fills heaven and earth,' Jer. xxiii. 24. The divine essence is at once in heaven and earth ; but it is impossible a body can be in two places at one and the same time. Since God is everywhere, he must be spiritual. Had he a body, he could not penetrate all things ; he would be circumscribed in place. He could not be everywhere but in parts, not in the whole ; one member in one place, and another in another ; for to be confined to a particular place is the property of the body, but since he is diffused through the whole world, ' higher than heaven, deeper than hell, longer than the earth, broader than the sea,' Job xi. 8, he hath not any corporeal matter. If he had a body wherewith to fill heaven and earth, there could be no body besides his own. It is the nature of bodies to bound one another, and hinder the extending of one another. Two bodies cannot be in the same place, in the same point of earth : one excludes the other ; and it will follow hence that we are nothing, no substances, mere illusions ; there could be no place for any body else.* If his body were as big as the world, as it must be, if with that he filled heaven and earth, there would not be room for him to move a hand or a foot, or extend a finger ; for there would be no place remaining for the motion.

8. If God were not a Spirit, he could not be the most perfect being. The more perfect anything is in the rank of creatures, the more spiritual and simple it is, as gold is the more pure and perfect, that hath least mixture of other metals. If God were not a Spirit, there would be creatures of a more excellent nature than God, as angels and souls, which the Scripture calls spirits, in opposition to bodies. There is more of perfection in the first notion of a spirit, than in the notion of a body. God cannot be less perfect than his creatures, and contribute an excellency of being to them which he wants himself. If angels and souls possess such an excellency, and God want that excellency, he would be less than his creatures, and excellency of the effect would exceed the excellency of the cause ; but every creature, even the highest creature, is infinitely short of the perfection of God ; for whatsoever excellency they have is finite and limited : it is but a spark from the sun, a drop from the ocean ; but God is unboundedly perfect in the highest manner, without any limitation ; and therefore above spirits, angels, the highest creatures that were made by him. An infinite sublimity, a pure act, to which nothing can be added, from which nothing can be taken. ' In him there is light and no darkness,' 1 John i. 5 ; spirituality without any matter, perfection without any shadow or taint of imperfection ; light pierceth

* Gamacheus Theol. tom. i. quest. 3, cap. 1.

into all things, preserves its own purity, and admits of no mixture of anything else with it.

Quest. It may be said, if God be a Spirit, and it is impossible he can be otherwise than a Spirit, how comes God so often to have such members as we have in our bodies ascribed to him ; not only a soul, but particular bodily parts, as heart, arms, hands, eyes, ears, face, and back-parts ? And how is it that he is never called a Spirit in plain words, but in this text by our Saviour ?

Ans. It is true many parts of the body and natural affections of the human nature are reported of God in Scripture : head, Dan vii. 9 ; eyes and eyelids, Ps. xi. 4 ; apple of the eye, mouth, &c. ; our affections also, grief, joy, anger, &c. But it is to be considered,

1. That this is in condescension to our weakness.* God being desirous to make himself known to man, whom he created for his glory, humbles as it were his own nature to such representations as may suit and assist the capacity of the creature. Since by the condition of our nature nothing erects a notion of itself in our understanding, but as it is conducted in by our sense, God hath served himself of those things which are most exposed to our sense, most obvious to our understandings, to give us some acquaintance with his own nature, and those things which otherwise we were not capable of having any notion of. As our souls are linked with our bodies, so our knowledge is linked with our sense, that we can scarce imagine anything at first but under a corporeal form and figure, till we come, by great attention to the object, to make, by the help of reason, a separation of the spiritual substance from the corporeal fancy, and consider it in its own nature. We are not able to conceive a spirit without some kind of resemblance to something below it, nor understand the actions of a spirit without considering the operations of a human body in its several members. As the glories of another life are signified to us by the pleasures of this, so the nature of God, by a gracious condescension to our capacities, is signified to us by a likeness to our own. The more familiar the things are to us which God uses to this purpose, the more proper they are to teach us what he intends by them.

Ans. 2. All such representation are to signify the acts of God, as they bear some likeness to those which we perform by those members he ascribes to himself. So that those members ascribed to him rather note his visible operations to us, than his visible nature, and signify that God doth some works like to those which men do by the assistance of those organs of their bodies.† So the wisdom of God is called his eye, because he knows that with his mind which we see with our eyes. The efficiency of God is called his hand and arm, because, as we act with our hands, so doth God with his power. The divine efficacies are signified. By his eyes and ears we understand his omniscience ; by his face, the manifestation of his favour ; by his mouth, the revelation of his will ; by his nostrils, the acceptance of our prayers ; by his bowels, the tenderness of his compassion ; by his heart, the sincerity of his affections ; by his hand, the strength of his power ; by his feet, the ubiquity of his presence. And in this he intends instruction and comfort : by his eyes, he signifies his watchfulness over us ; by his ears, his readiness to hear the cries of the oppressed, Ps. xxxiv. 15 ; by his arm his power,—an arm to destroy his enemies, and an arm to relieve his people, Isa. li. 9 ; all those attributed to God to signify divine actions, which he doth without bodily organs, as we do with them.

Ans. 3. Consider also that only those members which are the instruments

* Loquitur lex secundum linguam filiorum hominum.

† Amyral. de Trin. p. 218, 219.

of the noblest actions, and under that consideration, are used by him to represent a notion of him to our minds. Whatsoever is perfect and excellent is ascribed to him, but nothing that savours of imperfection.* The heart is ascribed to him, it being the principle of vital actions, to signify the life that he hath in himself. Watchful and discerning eyes, not sleepy and lazy ones; a mouth to reveal his will, not to take in food. To eat and sleep are never ascribed to him, nor those parts that belong to the preparing or transmitting nourishment to the several parts of the body, as stomach, liver, reins, nor bowels under that consideration, but as they are significant of compassion; but only those parts are ascribed to him whereby we acquire knowledge, as eyes and ears, the organs of learning and wisdom; or to communicate it to others, as the mouth, lips, tongue, as they are instruments of speaking, not of tasting. Or those parts which signify strength and power, or whereby we perform the actions of charity for the relief of others. Taste and touch, senses that extend no further than to corporeal things, and are the grossest of all the senses, are never ascribed to him.

It were worth consideration,† whether this describing God by the members of an human body were so much figuratively to be understood, as with respect to the incarnation of our Saviour, who was to assume the human nature and all the members of a human body.

Asaph, speaking in the person of God: Ps. lxxviii. 2, 'I will open my mouth in parables.' In regard of God it is to be understood figuratively, but in regard of Christ literally, to whom it is applied, Mat. xiii. 34, 35. And that apparition, Isa. vi., which was the appearance of Jehovah, is applied to Christ, John xii. 40, 41.

After the report of the creation, and the forming of man, we read of God's speaking to him, but not of God's appearing to him in any visible shape.‡ A voice might be formed in the air to give man notice of his duty; some way of information he must have what positive laws he was to observe, besides that law which was engraven in his nature, which we call the law of nature; and without a voice the knowledge of the divine will could not be so conveniently communicated to man. Though God was heard in a voice, he was not seen in a shape; but after the fall we several times read of his appearing in such a form. Though we read of his *speaking* before man's committing of sin, yet not of his *walking*, which is more corporeal, till afterwards, Gen. iii. 8. Though God would not have man believe him to be corporeal, yet he judged it expedient to give some pre-notice of that divine incarnation which he had promised.§

5. Therefore we must not conceive of the visible Deity, according to the letter of such expressions, but the true intent of them. Though the Scripture speaks of his eyes and arms, yet it denies them to be arms of flesh, Job x. 4, 2 Chron. xxxii. 8. We must not conceive of God according to the letter, but the design of the metaphor. When we hear things described by metaphorical expressions, for the clearing them up to our fancy, we conceive not of them under that garb, but remove the veil by an act of our reason. When Christ is called a sun, a vine, bread, is any so stupid as to conceive him to be a vine with material branches and clusters, or be of the same nature with a loaf? But the things designed by such metaphors are obvious to the conception of a mean understanding. If we would conceive God to have a body like a man, because he describes himself so, we may conceit him to be like a bird, because he is mentioned with wings, Ps. xxxvi. 7, or like

* Episcop. Institut. l. 4, sect. 3, cap. 3.

† It is Zanchy's observation, tom. 2, de natura Dei, lib. i. cap. 4, thes. 9.

‡ Amyrald. Moral. tom. i. p. 293, 294.

§ Amyrald.

a lion or leopard, because he likens himself to them in the acts of his strength and fury, Hosea xiii. 7, 8. He is called a rock, a horn, fire, to note his strength and wrath. If any be so stupid as to think God to be really such, they would make him not only a man, but worse than a monster.

Onkelos,* the Chaldee paraphrast, upon parts of the Scripture, was so tender of expressing the notion of any corporiety in God, that, when he meets with any expressions of that nature, he translates them according to the true intent of them, as when God is said to 'descend,' Gen. xi. 5, which implies a local motion, a motion from one place to another, he translates it 'and God revealed himself.' We should conceive of God according to the design of the expressions. When we read of his eyes, we should conceive his omniscience; of his hand, his power; of his sitting, his immutability; of his throne, his majesty; and conceive of him as surmounting not only the grossness of bodies, but the spiritual excellency of the most dignified creatures, something so perfect, great, spiritual, as nothing can be conceived higher and purer.

Christ, saith one,† is truly *Deus figuratus*, and for his sake was it more easily permitted to the Jews to think of God in the shape of a man.

Use. If God be a pure spiritual being, then,

1. Man is not the image of God, according to his external bodily form and figure. The image of God in man consisted not in what is seen, but in what is not seen; not in the conformation of the members, but rather in the spiritual faculties of the soul, or, most of all, in the holy endowments of those faculties: Eph. iv. 24, 'That ye put on the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness,' Col. iii. 10. The image, which is restored by redeeming grace, was the image of God by original nature. The image of God cannot be in that part which is common to us with beasts, but rather in that wherein we excel all living creatures, in reason, understanding, and an immortal spirit. God expressly saith, that none 'saw a similitude' of him, Deut. iv. 15, 16, which had not been true if man in regard of his body had been the image and similitude of God, for then a figure of God had been seen every day, as often as we saw a man or beheld ourselves; nor would the apostle's argument stand good: Acts xvii. 29, that 'the Godhead is not like to stone graven by art' if we were not the offspring of God, and bore the stamp of his nature in our spirits rather than our bodies.‡ It was a fancy of Eugubinus that, when God set upon the actual creation of man, he took a bodily form for an exemplar of that which he would express in his work, and, therefore, that the words of Moses, Gen. i. 26, are to be understood of the body of man, because there was in man such a shape which God had then assumed. To let alone God's forming himself a body for that work as a groundless fancy, man can in no wise be said to be the image of God in regard of the substance of his body, but beasts may as well be said to be made in the image of God, whose bodies have the same members as the body of man for the most part, and excel men in the acuteness of the senses and swiftness of their motion, agility of body, greatness of strength, and in some kind of ingenuities also wherein man hath been a scholar to the brutes and beholden to their skill. The soul comes nearest the nature of God as being a spiritual substance, yet, considered singly in regard of its spiritual substance, cannot well be said to be the image of God. A beast, because of its corporiety, may as well be called the image of a man, for there is a greater similitude between man and a brute in the rank of bodies than there can be between God and the highest angels in the rank of spirits. If it doth not consist in the substance of the soul, much less can

* Maimon. More Nevoc. part i. cap. 27. † More's Conjectura Cabalistica, p. 127.

‡ Petav. Theol. Dog. tom. i. lib. ii. cap. i. p. 104.

it in any similitude of the body. This image consisted partly in the state of man as he had dominion over the creatures, partly in the nature of man as he was an intelligent being, and thereby was capable of having a grant of that dominion, but principally in the conformity of the soul with God in the frame of his spirit and the holiness of his actions; not at all in the figure and form of his body physically, though morally there might be, as there was a rectitude in the body, as an instrument to conform to the holy motions of the soul, as the holiness of the soul sparkled in the actions and members of the body. If man were like God because he hath a body, whatsoever hath a body hath some resemblance to God, and may be said to be in part his image; but the truth is, the essence of all creatures cannot be an image of the immense essence of God.

2. If God be a pure Spirit, it is unreasonable to frame any image or picture of God.* Some heathens have been wiser in this than some Christians. Pythagoras forbade his scholars to engrave any shape of him upon a ring, because he was not to be comprehended by sense, but conceived only in our minds; our hands are as unable to fashion him as our own eyes to see him.† The ancient Romans worshipped their gods one hundred and seventy years before any material representations of them,‡ and the ancient idolatrous Germans thought it a wicked thing to represent God in a human shape; yet some, and those no Romanists, labour to defend the making images of God in the resemblance of man; because he is so represented in Scripture, he may be,§ saith one, conceived so in our minds and figured so to our sense. If this were a good reason, why may he not be pictured as a lion, horn, eagle, rock, since he is under such metaphors shadowed to us? The same ground there is for the one as for the other. What though man be a nobler creature, God hath no more the body of a man than that of an eagle, and some perfections in other creatures represent some excellencies in his nature and actions which cannot be figured by a human shape, as strength by the lion, swiftness and readiness by the wings of the bird. But God hath absolutely prohibited the making any image whatsoever of him, and that with terrible threatenings: Exod. xx. 5, 'I the Lord am a jealous God, visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon their children,' and Deut. v. 8, 9. After God had given the Israelites the commandment wherein he forbade them to have any God before him, he forbids all figuring of him by the hand of man; not only images, but any likeness of him either by things in heaven, in the earth, or in the water. How often doth he discover his indignation by the prophets, against them that offer to mould him in a creature form! This law was not to serve a particular dispensation, or to endure a particular time, but it was a declaration of his will, invariable in all places and all times, being founded upon the immutable nature of his being, and therefore agreeable to the law of nature; otherwise, not chargeable upon the heathens. And, therefore, when God had declared his nature and his works in a stately and majestic eloquence, he demands of them, to whom they would liken him, or what likeness they would compare unto him, Isa. xl. 18; where they could find anything that would be a lively image and resemblance of his infinite excellency? Founding it upon the infiniteness of his nature, which necessarily implies the spirituality of it. God is infinitely above any statue, and those that think to draw God by a stroke of a pencil, or form him by the engravings of art, are more stupid than the statues themselves.

To shew the unreasonableness of it, consider,

* Jamblyc. protrept, cap. 21, symb. 24.

† Austin de Civitat. Dei. lib. iv. cap. 31, out of Varro.

‡ Tacitus.

§ Gerhard Loc. Commun. vol. iv.; Exegesis de natura Dei, cap. 8, sect. 1.

(1.) It is impossible to fashion any image of God. If our more capacious souls cannot grasp his nature, our weaker sense cannot frame his image; it is more possible of the two, to comprehend him in our minds, than to frame him in an image to our sense. He inhabits inaccessible light; as it is impossible for the eye of man to see him, it is impossible for the art of man to paint him upon walls, and carve him out of wood. None knows him but himself, none can describe him but himself.* Can we draw a figure of our own souls, and express that part of ourselves wherein we are most like to God? Can we extend this to any bodily figure, and divide it into parts? How can we deal so with the original copy, whence the first draught of our souls was taken, and which is infinitely more spiritual than men or angels? No corporeal thing can represent a spiritual substance; there is no proportion in nature between them; God is a simple, infinite, immense, eternal, invisible, incorruptible being. A statue is a compound, finite, limited, temporal, visible, and corruptible body. God is a living Spirit; but a statue nor sees, nor hears, nor perceives anything. But suppose God had a body, it is impossible to mould an image of it in the true glory of that body. Can the statue of an excellent monarch represent the majesty and air of his countenance, though made by the skilfullest workman in the world? If God had a body in some measure suited to his excellency, were it possible for man to make an exact image of him, who cannot picture the light, heat, motion, magnitude, and dazzling property of the sun? The excellency of any corporeal nature of the least creature, the temper, instinct, artifice, are beyond the power of a carving tool, much more is God.

(2.) To make any corporeal representation of God is unworthy of God. It is a disgrace to his nature. Whosoever thinks a carnal corruptible image to be fit for a representation of God, renders God no better than a carnal and corporeal being. It is a kind of debasing an angel, who is a spiritual nature, to represent him in a bodily shape, who is as far removed from any fleshliness as heaven from earth; much more to degrade the glory of the divine nature to the lineaments of a man. The whole stock of images is but a lie of God: Jer. x. 8, 14, 'A doctrine of vanities and falsehood.' It represents him in a false garb to the world, and sinks his glory into that of a corruptible creature, Rom. i. 23, 25. It impairs the reverence of God in the minds of men, and by degrees may debase men's apprehensions of God, and be a means to make them believe he is such a one as themselves, and that not being free from the figure, he is not also free from the imperfections of their bodies. Corporeal images of God were the fruits of base imaginations of him; and as they sprung from them, so they contribute to a greater corruption of the notions of the divine nature. The heathens began their first representations of him by the image of a corruptible man, then of birds, till they descended, not only to four-footed beasts, but creeping things, even serpents, as the apostle seems to intimate in his enumeration, Rom. i. 23. It had been more honourable to have continued in human representation of him, than have sunk so low as beasts and serpents, the baser images, though the first had been infinitely unworthy of him, he being more above a man, though the noblest creature, than man is above a worm, a toad, or the most despicable creeping thing upon the earth. To think we can make an image of God of a piece of marble, or an ingot of gold, is a greater debasing of him than it would be of a great prince, if you should represent him in the statue of a frog. When the Israelites represented God by a calf, it is said, 'They sinned a great sin,' Exod. xxxii. 31. And the sin of Jeroboam, who intended only a representation of God by the calves at Dan and Bethel, is

* Cocceius, Sum. Theol., cap. 9, p. 47, sec. 35.

called more emphatically, Hosea x. 15, רַעַת רַעְתְּכֶם, 'the wickedness of your wickedness,' the very scum and dregs of wickedness. As men debased God by this, so God debased men for this; he degraded the Israelites into captivity under the worst of their enemies, and punished the heathens with spiritual judgments, as uncleanness, through the lusts of their own hearts, Rom. i. 24, which is repeated again in other expressions, ver. 26, 27, as a meet recompence for their disgracing the spiritual nature of God. Had God been like to man, they had not offended in it; but I mention this to shew a probable reason of those base lusts which are in the midst of us, that have scarce been exceeded by any nation, viz., the unworthy and unspiritual conceits of God, which are as much a debasing of him as material images were when they were more rife in the world, and may be as well the cause of those spiritual judgments upon men as the worshipping molten and carved images were the cause of the same upon the heathen.

(3.) Yet this is natural to man. Wherein we may see the contrariety of man to God. Though God be a Spirit, yet there is nothing man is more prone to than to represent him under a corporeal form. The most famous guides of the heathen world have fashioned him, not only according to the more honourable images of men, but bestialised him in the form of a brute. The Egyptians, whose country was the school of learning to Greece, were notoriously guilty of this brutishness, in worshipping an ox for an image of their god; and the Philistines their Dagon, in a figure composed of the image of a woman and a fish.* Such representations were ancient in the oriental parts. The gods of Laban, that he accuseth Jacob of stealing from him, are supposed to be little figures of men, Gen. xxxi. 30, 34. Such was the Israelites' golden calf; their worship was not terminated on the image, but they worshipped the true God under that representation. They could not be so brutish to call a calf their deliverer, and give to him a great title, — 'These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt,' Exod. xxxii. 4,—or that which they knew belonged to the true God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They knew the calf to be formed of their earrings, but they had consecrated it to God as a representation of him. Though they chose the form of the Egyptian idol, yet they knew that Apis, Osiris, and Isis, the gods the Egyptians adored in that figure, had not wrought their redemption from bondage, but would have used their force, had they been possessed of any, to have kept them under the yoke, rather than have freed them from it. The feast also which they celebrated before that image is called by Aaron the feast of the Lord: ver. 5, 'A feast to Jehovah,' the incommunicable name of the Creator of the world. It is therefore evident, that both the priest and the people pretended to serve the true God, not any false divinity of Egypt; that God who had rescued them from Egypt with a mighty hand, divided the Red Sea before them, destroyed their enemies, conducted them, fed them by miracle, spoken to them from mount Sinai, and amazed them by his thunderings and lightnings when he instructed them by his law, a God they could not so soon forget. And with this representing God by that image, they are charged by the psalmist: Ps. cvi. 19, 20, 'They made a calf in Horeb, and changed their glory into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass.' They changed their glory; that is, God the glory of Israel; so that they took this figure for the image of the true God of Israel, their own God, not the God of any other nation in the world. Jeroboam intended no other by his calves, but symbols of the presence of the true God, instead of the ark and the propitiatory which remained among the Jews. We see the inclinations of our natures in the

* Daille, super, Cor. i. 10, Ser. 3.

practice of the Israelites, a people chosen out the whole world to bear up God's name, and preserve his glory ; and in that the images of God were so soon set up in the Christian church, and to this day the picture of God in the shape of an old man is visible in the temples of the Romanists. It is prone to the nature of man.

(4.) To represent God by a corporeal image, and to worship him in and by that image, is idolatry. Though the Israelites did not acknowledge the calf to be God, nor intended a worship to any of the Egyptian deities by it, but worshipped that God in it who had so lately and miraculously delivered them from a cruel servitude, and could not in natural reason judge him to be clothed with a bodily shape, much less to be like an ox that eateth grass, yet the apostle brings no less a charge against them than that of idolatry, 1 Cor. x. 7. He calls them idolaters, who before that calf kept a feast to Jehovah, citing Exod. xxxii. 5. Suppose we could make such an image of God as might perfectly represent him, yet since God hath prohibited it, shall we be wiser than God ? He hath sufficiently manifested himself in his works without images ; he is seen in the creatures, more particularly in the heavens, which declare his glory. His works are more excellent representations of him, as being the works of his own hands, than anything that is the product of the art of man. His glory sparkles in the heavens, sun, moon, and stars, as being magnificent pieces of his wisdom and power, yet the kissing the hand to the sun or the heavens, as representative of the excellency and majesty of God, is idolatry in Scripture account, and a denial of God, Job xxxi. 26-28, a prostituting the glory of God to a creature. Either the worship is terminated on the image itself,* and then it is confessed by all to be idolatry, because it is a giving that worship to a creature which is the sole right of God ; or not terminated in the image, but in the object represented by it ; it is then a foolish thing ; we may as well terminate our worship on the true object, without as with an image. An erected statue is no sign or symbol of God's special presence, as the ark, tabernacle, temple were. It is no part of divine institution, has no authority of a command to support it, no cordial of a promise to encourage it ; and the image being infinitely distant from, and below the majesty and spirituality of God, cannot constitute one object of worship with him. To put a religious character upon any image formed by the corrupt imagination of man, as a representation of the invisible and spiritual Deity, is to think the Godhead to be like silver and gold, or stone graven by art and man's device, Acts xvii. 29.

3. This doctrine will direct us in our conceptions of God as a pure, perfect spirit, than which nothing can be imagined more perfect, more pure, more spiritual.

(1.) We cannot have an adequate or suitable conception of God. He dwells in inaccessible light ; inaccessible to the acuteness of our fancy, as well as the weakness of our sense. If we could have thoughts of him as high and excellent as his nature, our conceptions must be as infinite as his nature. All our imaginations of him cannot represent him, because every created species is finite ; it cannot, therefore, represent to us a full and substantial notion of an infinite being. We cannot speak or think worthily enough of him who is greater than our words, vaster than our understandings. Whatsoever we speak or think of God is handed first to us by the notice we have of some perfection in the creature, and explains to us some particular excellency of God, rather than the fulness of his essence. No creature, nor all creatures together, can furnish us with such a magnificent notion of God as can give us a clear view of him. Yet God in his word is pleased to

* Lawson, Body of Divin., p. 161.

step below his own excellency, and point us to those excellencies in his works, whereby we may ascend to the knowledge of those excellencies which are in his nature. But the creatures, whence we draw our lessons, being finite, and our understandings being finite, it is utterly impossible to have a notion of God commensurate to the immensity and spirituality of his being. 'God is not like to visible creatures, nor is there any proportion between him and the most spiritual.'* We cannot have a full notion of a spiritual nature, much less can we have of God, who is a Spirit above spirits. No spirit can clearly represent him. The angels, that are great spirits, are bounded in their extent, finite in their being, and of a mutable nature.

Yet though we cannot have a suitable conception of God, we must not content ourselves without any conception of him. It is our sin not to endeavour after a true notion of him ; it is our sin to rest in a mean and low notion of him, when our reason tells us we are capable of having higher ; but if we ascend as high as we can, though we shall then come short of a suitable notion of him, this is not our sin, but our weakness. God is infinitely superior to the choicest conceptions, not only of a sinner, but of a creature. If all conceptions of God below the true nature of God were sin, there is not a holy angel in heaven free from sin, because though they are the most capacious creatures, yet they cannot have such a notion of an infinite being as is fully suitable to his nature, unless they were infinite as he himself is.

(2.) But, however, we must by no means conceive of God under a human or corporeal shape. Since we cannot have conceptions honourable enough for his nature, we must take heed we entertain not any which may debase his nature. Though we cannot comprehend him as he is, we must be careful not to fancy him to be what he is not. It is a vain thing to conceive him with human lineaments. We must think higher of him than to ascribe to him so mean a shape. We deny his spirituality when we fancy him under such a form. He is spiritual, and between that which is spiritual and that which is corporeal there is no resemblance.† Indeed, Daniel saw God in a human form : Dan. vii. 9, 'The Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hairs of his head like pure wool : ' he is described as coming to judgment. It is not meant of Christ probably ; because Christ, ver. 13, is called the Son of man coming near to the Ancient of days. This is not the proper shape of God, for no man hath seen his shape. It was a vision wherein such representations were made, as were accommodated to the inward sense of Daniel. Daniel saw him in a rapture or ecstasy, wherein outward senses are of no use. God is described, not as he is in himself, of a human form, but in regard of his fitness to judge. White denotes the purity and simplicity of the divine nature ; Ancient of days, in regard of his eternity ; white hair, in regard of his prudence and wisdom, which is more eminent in age than youth, and more fit to discern causes and to distinguish between right and wrong. Visions are riddles, and must not be understood in a literal sense. We are to watch against such determinate conceptions of God. Vain imaginations do easily infest us ; tinder will not sooner take fire, than our natures kindle into wrong notions of the divine majesty. We are very apt to fashion a god like ourselves. We must therefore look upon such representations of God as accommodated to our weakness, and no more think them to be literal descriptions of God, as he is in himself, than we will think the image of the sun in the water to be the true sun in the heavens. We may indeed conceive of Christ as man, who hath in heaven the vestment of our nature, and is *Deus figuratus*, though we cannot conceive the Godhead under a human shape.

* Amyrall, Moral., tom. i. p. 289.

† Episc. Institut., lib. iv. sec 2, c. 17.

[1.] To have such a fancy is to disparage and wrong God. A corporeal fancy of God is as ridiculous in itself, and as injurious to God, as a wooden statue. The capricious of our imagination are often more monstrous than the images which are the works of art. It is as irreligious to measure God's essence by our line, his perfections by our imperfections, as to measure his thoughts and actings by the weakness and unworthiness of our own. This is to limit an infinite essence, and pull him down to our scanty measures, and render that which is unconceivably above us equal with us. It is impossible we can conceive God after the manner of a body, but we must bring him down to the proportion of a body, which is to diminish his glory, and stoop him below the dignity of his nature. God is a pure Spirit; he hath nothing of the nature and tincture of a body. Whosoever, therefore, conceives of him as having a bodily form, though he fancy the most beautiful and comely body, instead of owning his dignity, detracts from the super-eminent excellency of his nature and blessedness. When men fancy God like themselves in their corporeal nature, they will soon make a progress, and ascribe to him their corrupt nature; and while they clothe him with their bodies, invest him also in the infirmities of them. God is a jealous God, very sensible of any disgrace, and will be as much incensed against an inward idolatry, as an outward. That command, *Exod. xx. 4*, which forbade corporeal images, would not indulge carnal imaginations, since the nature of God is as much wronged by unworthy images erected in the fancy, as by statues carved out of stone or metals. One, as well as the other, is a deserting of our true spouse and committing adultery, one with a material image, and the other with a carnal notion of God. Since God humbles himself to our apprehensions, we should not debase him in thinking him to be that in his nature, which he makes only a resemblance of himself to us.

[2.] To have such fancies of God, will obstruct and pollute our worship of him. How is it possible to give him a right worship, of whom we have so debasing a notion? We shall never think a corporeal deity worthy of a dedication of our spirits. The hating instruction, and casting God's word behind the back, is charged upon the imagination they had, that God was 'such a one as themselves,' *Ps. l. 17, 21*. Many of the wiser heathens did not judge their statues to be their gods, or their gods to be like their statues, but suited them to their politic designs, and judged them a good invention to keep people within the bounds of obedience and devotion by such visible figures of them, which might imprint a reverence and fear of those gods upon them. But these were false measures. A despised and undervalued god is not an object of petition or affection. Who would address seriously to a god he has low apprehensions of? The more raised thoughts we have of him, the viler sense we shall have of ourselves. They would make us humble and self-aborrent in our supplications to him: *Job xlii. 6*, 'Wherefore I abhor myself,' &c.

(3.) Though we must not conceive of God, as of a human or corporeal shape, yet we cannot think of God without some reflection upon our own being. We cannot conceive him to be an intelligent being, but we must make some comparison between him and our own understanding nature, to come to a knowledge of him. Since we are enclosed in bodies, we apprehend nothing but what comes in by sense, and what we in some sort measure by sensible objects. And in the consideration of those things which we desire to abstract from sense, we are fain to make use of the assistances of sense and visible things. And therefore, when we frame the highest notion, there will be some similitude of some corporeal thing in our fancy; and though we would spiritualise our thoughts, and aim at a more abstracted and raised

understanding, yet there will be some dregs of matter sticking to our conceptions; yet we still judge, by argument and reasoning, what the thing is we think of under those material images. A corporeal image will follow us, as the shadow doth the body.* While we are in the body and surrounded with fleshly matter, we cannot think of things without some help from corporeal representations. Something of sense will interpose itself in our purest conceptions of spiritual things, for the faculties which serve for contemplation are either corporeal, as the sense and fancy, or so allied to them, that nothing passes into them but by the organs of the body,† so that there is a natural inclination to figure nothing but under a corporeal notion, till by an attentive application of the mind and reason to the object thought upon, we separate that which is bodily from that which is spiritual, and by degrees ascend to that true notion of that we think upon, and would have a due conception of in our mind. Therefore God tempers the declaration of himself to our weakness, and the condition of our natures. He condescends to our littleness and narrowness, when he declares himself by the similitude of bodily members; as the light of the sun is tempered, and diffuseth itself to our sense through the air and vapours, that our weak eyes may not be too much dazzled with it. Without it we could not know or judge of the sun, because we could have no use of our sense, which we must have before we can judge of it in our understanding; so we are not able to conceive of spiritual beings in the purity of their own nature, without such a temperament, and such shadows to usher them into our minds. And therefore we find the Spirit of God accommodates himself to our contracted and tethered capacities, and uses such expressions of God as are suited to us, in this state of flesh wherein we are; and therefore, because we cannot apprehend God in the simplicity of his own being and his undivided essence, he draws the representations of himself from several creatures, and several actions of those creatures: as sometimes he is said to be angry, to walk, to sit, to fly. Not that we should rest in such conceptions of him, but take our rise from this foundation, and such perfections in the creatures, to mount up to a knowledge of God's nature by those several steps, and conceive of him by those divided excellencies, because we cannot conceive of him in the purity of his own essence.‡ We cannot possibly think or speak of God, unless we transfer the names of created perfections to him; yet we are to conceive of them in a higher manner when we apply them to the divine nature, than when we consider them in the several creatures formally, exceeding those perfections and excellencies which are in the creature, and in a more excellent manner. As one§ saith: 'Though we cannot comprehend God without the help of such resemblances, yet we may, without making an image of him; so that inability of ours excuseth those apprehensions of him from any way offending against his divine nature.' These are not notions so much suited to the nature of God as the weakness of man. They are helps to our meditations, but ought not to be formal conceptions of him. We may assist ourselves in our apprehensions of him, by considering the subtilty and spirituality of air, and considering the members of a body, without thinking him to be air or to have any corporeal member. Our reason tells us that whatsoever is a body is limited and bounded, and the notion of infiniteness and bodiliness cannot agree and consist together; and therefore, what is offered by our fancy should be purified by our reason.

(4.) Therefore we are to elevate and refine all our notions of God, and spiritualise our conceptions of him. Every man is to have a conception of

* Nazianzen.

† Lessius.

‡ Amyrald, Moral. tom. i. p. 180, &c.

§ Towerson on the Commandments, p. 112.

God, therefore he ought to have one of the highest elevation. Since we cannot have a full notion of him, we should endeavour to make it as high and as pure as we can. Though we cannot conceive of God, but some corporeal representations or images in our minds will be conversant with us, as motes in the air when we look upon the heavens, yet our conception may and must rise higher. As when we see the draught of the heavens and earth in a globe, or a kingdom in a map, it helps our conceptions, but doth not terminate them; we conceive them to be of a vast extent, far beyond that short description of them; so we should endeavour to refine every representation of God, to rise higher and higher, and have our apprehensions still more purified; separating the perfect from the imperfect, casting away the one and greating the other; conceive him to be a Spirit diffused through all, containing all, perceiving all. All the perfections of God are infinitely elevated above the excellencies of the creatures, above whatsoever can be conceived by the clearest and most piercing understanding. The nature of God, as a Spirit, is infinitely superior to whatsoever we can conceive perfect in the notion of a created spirit. Whatsoever God is, he is infinitely so. He is infinite wisdom, infinite goodness, infinite knowledge, infinite power, infinite spirit, infinitely distant from the weakness of creatures, infinitely mounted above the excellencies of creatures. As easy to be known that he is, as impossible to be comprehended what he is.

Conceive of him as excellent, without any imperfection. A Spirit without parts; great without quantity; perfect without quality; everywhere without place; powerful without members; understanding without ignorance; wise without reasoning; light without darkness; infinitely more excelling the beauty of all creatures, than the light in the sun pure and unviolated exceeds the splendour of the sun dispersed and divided through a cloudy and misty air. And when you have risen to the highest, conceive him yet infinitely above all you can conceive of spirit, and acknowledge the infirmity of your own minds. And whatsoever conception comes into your minds, say, This is not God, God is more than this. If I could conceive him, he were not God, for God is incomprehensibly above whatsoever I can say, whatsoever I can think and conceive of him.

Inference 4. If God be a Spirit, no corporeal thing can defile him. Some bring an argument against the omnipresence of God, that it is a disparagement to the divine essence to be everywhere, in nasty cottages as well as beautiful palaces and garnished temples. What place can defile a spirit? Is light, which approaches to the nature of spirit, polluted by shining upon a dunghill, or a sunbeam tainted by darting upon a quagmire? Doth an angel contract any soil, by stepping into a nasty prison to deliver Peter? What can steam from the most noisome body, to pollute the spiritual nature of God? As he is 'of purer eyes than to behold iniquity,' Hab. i. 13, so he is of a more spiritual substance than to contract any physical pollution from the places where he doth diffuse himself. Did our Saviour, who had a true body, derive any taint from the lepers he touched, the diseases he cured, or the devils he expelled? God is a pure Spirit, plungeth himself into no filth, is dashed with no spot by being present with all bodies. Bodies only receive defilement from bodies.

Inference 5. If God be a Spirit, he is active and communicative. He is not clogged with heavy and sluggish matter, which is cause of dulness and inactivity. The more subtle, thin, and approaching nearer the nature of a spirit anything is, the more diffusive it is. Air is a gliding substance, spreads itself through all religions,* pierceth into all bodies; it fills the

* Qu. 'regions'?—Ed.

space between heaven and earth, there is nothing but partakes of the virtue of it. Light, which is an emblem of spirit, insinuates itself into all places, refresheth all things. As spirits are fuller, so they are more overflowing, more piercing, more operative than bodies. The Egyptians' horses were weak things, because they were flesh and not spirit, Isa. xxxi. 3. The soul being a spirit, conveys more to the body than the body can to it. What cannot so great a Spirit do for us! What cannot so great a Spirit work in us! God being a Spirit above all spirits, can pierce into the centre of all spirits; make his way into the most secret recesses; stamp what he pleases. It is no more to him to turn our spirits, than to make a wilderness become waters, and speak a chaos into a beautiful frame of heaven and earth. He can act our souls with infinite more ease than our souls can act our bodies; he can fix in us what motions, frames, inclinations he pleases; he can come and settle in our hearts with all his treasures. It is an encouragement to confide in him, when we petition him for spiritual blessings. As he is a Spirit, he is possessed with spiritual blessings, Eph. i. 3. A spirit delights to bestow things suitable to its nature, as bodies do to communicate what is agreeable to theirs. As he is a Father of spirits, we may go to him for the welfare of our spirits; he being a Spirit, is as able to repair our spirits, as he was to create them.

As he is a Spirit, he is indefatigable in acting. The members of the body tire and flag; but who ever heard of a soul wearied with being active! Who ever heard of a weary angel! In the purest simplicity, there is the greatest power, the most efficacious goodness, the most reaching justice to affect the spirit, that can insinuate itself everywhere to punish wickedness without weariness, as well as to comfort goodness. God is active, because he is Spirit; and if we be like to God, the more spiritual we are, the more active we shall be.

Inference 6. God being a Spirit, is immortal. His being immortal and being invisible are joined together, 1 Tim. i. 17. Spirits are in their nature incorruptible; they can only perish by that hand that framed them. Every compounded thing is subject to mutation; but God being a pure and simple Spirit, is without corruption, without any shadow of change, James i. 17. Where there is composition, there is some kind of repugnancy of one part against the other; and where there is repugnancy, there is a capability of dissolution. God, in regard of his infinite spirituality, hath nothing in his own nature contrary to it; can have nothing in himself which is not himself. The world perishes, friends change and are dissolved, bodies moulder, because they are mutable. God is a Spirit in the highest excellency and glory of spirits; nothing is beyond him, nothing above him, no contrariety within him. This is our comfort, if we devote ourselves to him; this God is our God; this Spirit is our Spirit; this is our all, our immutable, our incorruptible support; a Spirit that cannot die and leave us.

Inference 7. If God be a Spirit, we see how we can only converse with him; by our spirits. Bodies and spirits are not suitable to one another; we can only see, know, embrace a spirit with our spirits. He judges not of us by our corporal actions, nor our external devotions, by our masks and disguises, he fixes his eye upon the frame of the heart, bends his ear to the groans of our spirits. He is not pleased with outward pomp, he is not a body; therefore the beauty of temples, delicacy of sacrifices, fumes of incense, are not grateful to him; by those or any external action we have no communion with him. A spirit, when broken, is his delightful sacrifice, Ps. li. 17; we must therefore have our spirits fitted for him, be 'renewed in the spirit of our mind,' Eph. iv. 23, that we may be in a posture to live

with him, and have an intercourse with him. We can never be united to God but in our spirits; bodies unite with bodies, spirits with spirits. The more spiritual anything is, the more closely doth it unite. Air hath the closest union, nothing meets together sooner than that when the parts are divided by the interposition of a body.

Inference 8. If God be a Spirit, he can only be the true satisfaction of our spirits. Spirit can only be filled with a spirit. Content flows from likeness and suitableness; as we have a resemblance to God in regard of the spiritual nature of our soul, so we can have no satisfaction but in him. Spirit can no more be really satisfied with that which is corporeal, than a beast can delight in the company of an angel; corporeal things can no more fill a hungry spirit than pure spirit can feed an hungry body; God, the highest Spirit, can only reach out a full content to our spirits. Man is lord of the creation; nothing below him can be fit for his converse, nothing above him offers itself to his converse but God. We have no correspondence with angels. The influence they have upon us, the protection they afford us, is secret and undiscerned; but God, the highest Spirit, offers himself to us in his Son, in his ordinances, is visible in every creature, presents himself to us in every providence; to him we must seek, in him we must rest. God had no rest from the creation till he had made man, and man can have no rest in the creation till he rests in God. God only is 'our dwelling-place,' Ps. xc. 1; our souls should only long for him, Ps. lxi. 1; our souls should only wait upon him. The spirit of man never riseth to its original glory, till it be carried up on the wings of faith and love to its original copy. The face of the soul looks most beautiful when it is turned to the face of God, the Father of spirits; when the derived spirit is fixed upon the original Spirit, drawing from it life and glory. Spirit is only the receptacle of spirit. God as Spirit is our principle, we must therefore live upon him. God as Spirit hath some resemblance to us as his image, we must therefore only satisfy ourselves in him.

Inference 9. If God be a Spirit, we should take most care of that wherein we are like to God. Spirit is nobler than body, we must therefore value our spirits above our bodies; the soul as spirit partakes more of the divine nature, and deserves more of our choicest cares. If we have any love to this Spirit, we should have a real affection to our own spirit, as bearing a stamp of the spiritual divinity, the chiefest of all the works of God; as it is said of Behemoth, Job xl. 19. That which is most the image of this immense Spirit should be our darling; so David calls his soul, Ps. xxxv. 17. Shall we take care of that wherein we partake not of God, and not delight in the jewel which hath his own signature upon it? God was not only the framer of spirits, and the end of spirits, but the copy and exemplar of spirits. God partakes of no corporiety, he is pure Spirit. But how do we act, as if we were only matter and body! We have but little kindness for this great Spirit as well as our own, if we take no care of his immediate offspring, since he is not only Spirit, but the Father of spirits, Heb. xii. 9.

Inference 10. If God be a Spirit, let us take heed of those sins which are spiritual. Paul distinguisheth between the filth of the flesh and that of the spirit, 2 Cor. vii. 1; by the one we defile the body, by the other we defile the spirit, which in regard of its nature is of kin to the Creator. To wrong one who is near of kin to a prince is worse than to injure an inferior subject. When we make our spirits, which are most like to God in their nature, and framed according to his image, a stage to act vain imaginations, wicked desires, and unclean affections, we wrong God in the excellency of

his work, and reflect upon the nobleness of the pattern; we wrong him in that part where he hath stamped the most signal character of his own spiritual nature, we defile that whereby we have only converse with him as a Spirit, which he hath ordered more immediately to represent him in this nature, than all corporeal things in the world can, and make that Spirit with whom we desire to be joined unfit for such a knot. God's spirituality is the root of his other perfections. We have already heard he could not be infinite, omnipresent, immutable without it. Spiritual sins are the greatest root of bitterness within us; as grace in our spirits renders us more like to a spiritual God, so spiritual sins bring us into a conformity to a degraded devil, Eph. ii. 2, 3. Carnal sins change us from men to brutes, and spiritual sins divest us of the image of God for the image of Satan. We should by no means make our spirits a dunghill, which bear upon them the character of the spiritual nature of God, and were made for his residence. Let us therefore behave ourselves towards God in all those ways which the spiritual nature of God requires us.