

OBSERVATIONS
CONCERNING THE
MYSTERIES OF SCRIPTURE.

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1. **I**F we seek for any thing in the dark by so low a faculty of discerning as the sense of feeling, or by the sense of seeing with a dim light, sometimes we cannot find it ; though it be there, it seems to us to be impossible that it should be there. But yet, when a clear light comes to shine into the place, and we discern by a better faculty, viz. of sight, or the same faculty in a clearer manner, the thing appears very plain to us. So, doubtless, many truths will hereafter appear plain, when we come to look on them by the bright light of heaven, that now are involved in mystery and darkness.

2. How are we ready to trust to the determinations of a man, that is universally reputed a man of great genius, of vast penetration and insight into things, if he be positive in any thing that appears to us very mysterious, and is quite contrary to what we thought ourselves clear and certain in before ? How are we ready in such a case to suspect ourselves ; especially if it be a matter wherein he has been very much versed ; has had much more occasion to look into it than we ; and has been under greater advantages to know the truth ? How much more still, if one should be positive in it, as a thing that he had clearly and undoubtedly seen to be true, if he were still of ten times greater genius, and of a more penetrating insight into things, than any that ever have appeared ? And, in matters of fact, if some person whom we had long known, that was a person of great judgment and discretion, justice, integrity and fidelity, and had always been universally so reputed by others, should declare to us, that he had seen and known that to be true which appeared to us very strange and mysterious, and concerning which we could not see how it was possible that it should be ; how, in such a case, should

we be ready almost to suspect our own faculties, and to give credit to such a testimony, in that which, if he had not positively asserted it, and persisted in it, we should have looked upon as perfectly incredible, and absurd to be supposed ?

3. From that text, John iii. 12, " If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things ?" several things are manifest concerning mysteries in religion. (1.) That there are mysteries in religion, or that there are things contained in those doctrines that Christ came into the world to teach, which are not only so far above human comprehension, that men cannot easily apprehend all that is to be understood concerning them ; but which are difficult to the understanding, in that sense, that they are difficult to be received by the judgment or belief : " How shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things ?" Difficult, upon the same account that the doctrine of the new birth was difficult to Nicodemus, because it was so strange, and seemingly impossible. (2.) We may from the words infer, that the more persons or beings are, in themselves, and in their own nature, above us ; the more that the doctrines or truths concerning them are mysterious to us, above our comprehension, and difficult to our belief ; the more do those things that are really true concerning them, contain seeming inconsistencies and impossibilities. For Christ, in the preceding verses, had been speaking of something that is true concerning man, being of the same nature, an inhabitant of the same world with ourselves ; which, therefore, Christ calls an earthly thing. And this seemed very mysterious and impossible, and to contain great seeming inconsistencies. He says, " How can a man be born when he is old ?" This seemed to be a contradiction. And after Christ had somewhat explained himself, still the doctrine seemed strange and impossible ; v. 9, " How can these things be ?" Nicodemus still looked upon it incredible ; and, on that account, did not believe it at that time, as is implied in these words of Christ ; " If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not." But Christ here plainly signifies, that he had other truths to teach that were not about man, an earthly inhabitant, but about a

person vastly above man, even about himself, who is from heaven, and in heaven, as in the next verse : “ And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven ; even the Son of man which is in heaven.” Which, therefore, it would be most reasonable to suppose, should be much more difficult to men’s understanding and judgment, seeming to contain greater impossibilities and inconsistencies ; as he then proceeds immediately to declare to him an heavenly thing, as he calls it, viz. that Christ, an heavenly and divine person, should die ; ver. 14, 15. Such a mysterious doctrine, so strange, and seemingly inconsistent and impossible, that a divine person should die, is more strange than that men should be born again. Hence, when divines argue, from the mysterious nature of many things here below, with which we are daily conversant, that it would be very unreasonable to suppose but that there should be things concerning God which are much more mysterious ; and that, therefore, it is unreasonable to object against the truth of the doctrines of the Trinity, Incarnation, &c....they argue justly, because they argue as Christ argued.

4. The wiser heathens were sensible, that the things of the gods are so high above us, that no other is to be expected, than that what appertains to them should appear exceedingly mysterious and wonderful to us ; and that it is therefore unreasonable to disbelieve what we are taught concerning them on that account. This is fully expressed by that great symbol of Pythagoras, viz. “ *Concerning the gods, disbelieve nothing wonderful, nor yet concerning divine things.*” This, says Jamblicus, declareth the superlative excellency of God’s instructing us, and puts us in mind, that we ought not to estimate the divine power by our own judgment. The Pythagoreans stretched this rule beyond the line of divine revelation, to the belief of every oriental tradition.” Gale’s Court of the Gentiles, p. 2. b. 2. c. 8. p. 190.

5. It is not necessary that persons should have clear ideas of the things that are the subject of a proposition, in order to their being rationally convinced of the truth of the proposition. There are many truths of which mathematicians are

convinced by strict demonstration, concerning many kinds of quantities, as, surd quantities and fluxions; but concerning which they have no clear ideas.

6. Supposing that mankind in general were a species of far less capacity than they are; so much less, that, when men are come to full ripeness of judgment and capacity, they arrived no higher than that degree to which children generally arrive at seven years of age; and supposing a revelation to be made to mankind, in such a state and degree of capacity, of many such propositions in philosophy as are now looked upon as undoubted truths; and let us suppose, at the same time, the same degree of pride and self confidence as there is now; what caviling and objecting, &c. would there be!

Or, supposing a revelation of these philosophical truths had been made to mankind, with their present degree of natural capacity, in some ancient generation; suppose that which was in Joshua's time; in that degree of acquired knowledge and learning which the world had arrived at then, *how incredible* would those truths have seemed!

7. If things, which fact and experience make certain, such as the miseries infants sometimes are the subjects of in this world, &c. had been exhibited only in a revelation of things in an unseen state, they would be as much disputed as the Trinity and other mysteries revealed in the bible.

8. There is nothing impossible or absurd in the doctrine of the *Incarnation of Christ*. If God can join a body and a rational soul together, which are of natures so heterogeneous and opposite, that they cannot, of themselves, act one upon another; may he not be able to join two spirits together, which are of natures more similar? And, if so, he may, for aught we know to the contrary, join the soul or spirit of a man to himself. Had reason been so clear in it, that a God cannot be incarnate, as many pretend, it could never have suffered such a notion to gain ground, and possess the minds of so many nations: Nay, and of Julian himself, who says that "Jupiter begat Esculapius out of his own proper substance, and sent him down to Epidaurus, to heal the distempers of mankind." Reason did not hinder Spinoso, Blount, and many

Other modern philosophers from asserting, that God may have a body ; or rather that the universe, or the matter of the universe, is God. Many nations believed the incarnation of Jupiter himself. Reason, instead of being utterly averse to the notion of a divine incarnation, hath easily enough admitted that notion, and suffered it to pass almost without contradiction, among the most philosophical nations of the world.

9. " In thinking of God's raising so many myriads of spirits, and such prodigious masses of matter out of nothing, we are lost and astonished, as much as in the contemplation of the Trinity. We can follow God but one or two steps in his lowest and plainest works, till all becomes mystery and matter of amazement to us. How, then, shall we comprehend Himself ? How shall we understand His nature, or account for His actions ? In that he contains what is infinitely more inconceivable than all the wonders of his creation put together." Deism revealed, edit, 2. vol. ii. p. 93, 94.

Those that deny the Trinity, because of the mysteriousness of it, and its seeming inconsistency, yet, generally own God's certain prescience of men's free actions, which they suppose to be free in such a sense, as not to be necessary..... So that we may do, or may not do, that which God certainly foresees. " They also hold, that such a freedom without necessity, is necessary to morality ; and that virtue and goodness consist in any one's doing good when he might do evil. And yet they suppose that God acts according to the eternal law of nature and reason, and that it is impossible that he should transgress that law, and do evil ; because that would be a contradiction to his own nature, which is infinitely and unchangeably virtuous. Now this seems a flat contradiction. To say, that the infinite goodness of God's nature makes it utterly impossible for God to do evil, is exactly the same as to say, he is under a natural necessity not to do evil. And to say he is morally free, is to say, he may do evil. Therefore the necessity and freedom in this case being both moral, the contradiction is flat and plain ; and amounts to this, that God, in respect to good and evil actions, is both a necessary and free agent. Dr. Clark, in his treatise on the Attributes, labors to get clear of

this contradiction upon these principles of liberty, but without success ; and leaves it just where all men, who hold the same principles, must be forced to leave it.

“ Therefore, they hold such mysteries, in respect to Deity that are even harder to be conceived of, or properly expressed and explained, than the doctrine of the Trinity.

“ When we talk of God, who is infinite and incomprehensible, it is natural to run into notions and terms which it is impossible for us to reconcile. And in lower matters, that are more within our knowledge and comprehension, we shall not be able to keep ourselves clear of them. To say that a curve line, setting out from a point within a hair’s breadth of a right line, shall run towards that right line as swift as thought, and yet never be able to touch it, seems contrary to common sense ; and were it not clearly demonstrated in the conchoid of Nechomedes, could never be believed. Matter is infinitely divisible ; and therefore a cubical inch of gold may be divided into an infinity of parts ; and there can be no number greater than that which contains an infinity. Yet another cubical inch of gold may be infinitely divided also ; and therefore, the parts of both cubes must be more numerous than the parts of one only. Here is a palpable contrariety of ideas, and a flat contradiction of terms. We are confounded and lost in the consideration of infinites ; and surely most of all, in the consideration of that *Infinite of infinites*. We justly admire that saying of the philosopher, that *God is a Being whose centre is every where, and circumference no where*, as one of the noblest and most exalted flights of human understanding ; and yet, not only the terms are absurd and contradictory, but the very ideas that constitute it, when considered attentively, are repugnant to one another. Space and duration are mysterious abysses in which our thoughts are confounded with demonstrable propositions, to all sense and reason flatly contradictory to one another. Any two points of time, though never so distant, are exactly in the middle of eternity. The remotest points of space that can be imagined or supposed, are each of them precisely in the centre of infinite space.”

Deism revealed, vol. ii. p. 109, 110, 111.

Here might have been added the mysteries of God's eternal duration, it being without succession, present, before and after, all at once : *Vitæ interminabilis tota simul et perfecta possessio.* See the nature of the human soul on this head.

10. To reject every thing but what we can first see to be agreeable to our reason, tends, by degrees, to bring every thing relating not only to revealed religion, but even natural religion, into doubt ; to make all its doctrines appear with dim evidence, like a shadow, or the ideas of a dream, till they are all neglected as worthy of no regard. It tends to make men doubt of the several attributes of God, and so, in every respect, to doubt what kind of being God is ; and to make men doubt about the forgiveness of sin, and about the duties of religion, prayer, and giving thanks, social worship, &c. It will tend at last, to make men esteem the science of religion as of no value, and so totally neglect it ; and from step to step it will lead to scepticism, atheism, ignorance and at length to barbarity, &c.

11. Concerning common sense, it is to be observed, that common inclination, or the common dictates of inclination are often called common sense. When any thing is shocking to the common dispositions or inclinations of men, that is called a contradicting of common sense. So, the doctrine of the extreme and everlasting torments of hell, being contrary to men's common folly and stupidity, is often called contrary to common sense. Men, through stupidity are insensible of the great evil of sin ; and so the punishment of sin threatened in the word of God disagrees with this insensibility, and is said to be contradictory to common sense. In this case, that turn of mind which arises from a wicked disposition, goes for common sense.

“ We ought never to deny, because we cannot conceive. If this were not so, then a man born blind would reason right when he forms this syllogism, “ We know the figure of bodies only by handling them ; but it is impossible to handle them at a great distance ; therefore it is impossible to know the figure of far distant bodies.” To undeceive the blind man, we may prove to him that this is so, from the concurrent testimony

ny of all who surround him. But we can never make him perceive how this is so. It is therefore a fundamental maxim in all true philosophy, that many things may be incomprehensible, and yet demonstrable ; that though seeing clearly be a sufficient reason for affirming, yet, not seeing at all, can never be a reason for denying." Ramsay's *Philosophical Principles of Religion*, vol. i. p. 22, 23.

12. One method used to explode every thing that is in the least difficult to the understanding, out of religion, is to ridicule all distinctions in religion. The unreasonableness of this may appear from what Mr. Locke observes concerning discerning and judgment. *Hum. Underst.* book ii. chap 2. "Accurately discriminating ideas one from another, is of that consequence to the other knowledge of the mind, that, so far as this faculty is in itself dull, or not rightly made use of, for distinguishing one thing from another, so far our notions are confused, and our reason and judgment disturbed or misled. If in having ideas in the memory ready at hand, consists quickness of parts ; in this of having them unconfused, and being able nicely to distinguish one thing from another, where there is but the least difference, consists in a great measure the exactness of judgment, and clearness of reason, which is to be observed in one man above another. Judgment lies in separating carefully one from another ideas, wherein can be found the least difference, thereby to avoid being misled by similitude, and by affinity to take one thing for another."

So Dr. Turnbull in his *Principles of Moral Philosophy*, part i. chap, 3. p. 94. "Judgment is rightly said to lie in nicely distinguishing the disagreements and variances or differences of ideas ; these especially which lie more remote from common observation, and are not generally adverted to. The man of judgment or discretion (for so discretion properly signifies) may be defined to be one who has a particular aptitude to descry differences of all kinds between objects, even the most hidden and remote from vulgar eyes."

13. If any respect to the Divine Being is of importance, then speculative points are of importance ; for the only way whereby we know what he is, is by speculation. He is a

speculative being in that sense. If our doctrines concerning him are not right, it will not be that Being, but some other, that we have respect for. So it may be said concerning our respect for Christ. If our doctrines concerning him, concerning his divinity, for instance, are false, we have not respect for the Christ of whom the Scriptures speak, but for an imaginary person, infinitely diverse. When it is said by some that the only fundamental article of faith is, that Jesus is the Messiah; if thereby be meant, that a person called by that name, or that lived at such a time or place, was the Messiah; that name not implying any properties or qualities of his person, the doctrine is exceedingly unreasonable; for surely the name and the place are not of so great importance as some other things essential in his person, and have not so great concern in the identity of the object of our ideas and respect, as the person the gospel reveals. If that Jesus the gospel tells us of be a divine person, then to suppose a Jesus that is a mere man, makes the object of our ideas and regard infinitely more diverse from the gospel Jesus, than to have a different name, and to suppose him to be of a different time and place. It is one great reason why speculative points are thought to be of so little importance, that the modern religion consists so little in respect to the divine Being, and almost wholly in benevolence to men.

14. Concerning this which is often said by some, that all things that are necessary to salvation are plain and clear, let us consider how, and in what sense this is true, and in what sense it is not true. 1st, It is true that all things that are necessary to salvation are clearly and plainly revealed. But it does not follow, that they shall appear to be plainly revealed to all men. Nothing, no divine thing, can have evidence sufficient to appear evident to all men, however great their prejudices are, and however perverse their dispositions. 2dly, If thereby is meant that all things necessary to be believed are easily comprehended, there is no reason in such an assertion, nor is it true.

Some late writers insist, that, for a thing to be revealed, and yet remain mysterious, is a contradiction; that it is as

much as to say, a thing is revealed, and yet hid. I answer : The thing revealed is the truth of the doctrine ; so that the truth of it no longer remains hid, though many things concerning the manner may be so. Yet many things concerning the nature of the things revealed may be clear, though many things concerning the nature of the same things may remain hid. God requires us to understand no more than is intelligibly revealed. That which is not distinctly revealed, we are not required distinctly to understand. It may be necessary for us to know a thing in part, and yet not necessary to know it perfectly.

15. The importance of all Christian doctrines whatsoever, will naturally be denied, in consequence of denying that one great doctrine of the necessity of Christ's satisfaction to Divine justice, and maintaining those doctrines that establish men's own righteousness, as that on which, and for which, they are accepted of God. For that great Christian doctrine of Christ's satisfaction, his vicarious sufferings and righteousness, by which he offered an infinite price to God for our pardon and acceptance to eternal favor and happiness, is what all evangelical doctrines, all doctrines beside the truths of natural religion, have relation to ; and they are of little importance, comparatively, any other way than as they have respect to that. This is, as it were, the centre and hinge of all doctrines of pure revelation.

16. Indeed, the Papists, who are very far from having such a notion of that evangelical faith, which is the special condition of salvation in opposition to works, and have forsaken the evangelical notion of true saving religion, yet, with fiery zeal, insist on the profession of a great number of doctrines, and several of the doctrines of pure revelation, as the Trinity, &c. But this in them flows not from any regard to their influence in internal saving religion, but from quite another view, i. e. to uphold their tyranny. These are the doctrines which have been handed down among them by their church from ancient tradition ; and, to maintain the credit of the infallibility, and divine authority and dominion, of their hierarchy, over men's faith, they must be zealous against any that presume to deny

Christ's doctrines, because they look upon it as an infringement on the high authority they claim. And some Protestants have a zeal for doctrines from like views ; doctrines that indeed they have no great value for, in themselves considered.

17. That it is not alone sufficient to believe that one article, that a person of the name of *Jesus* came from God to reveal his will to man, without knowing or determining what he was, or concerning his nature and qualities, is evident from this, that it is often spoken of as necessary to *know* Christ. It is said, "This is eternal life, to know thee, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent."

18. There are two things especially that make modern fashionable divines look on doctrines of revealed religion of little importance. One is, their mistake about the conditions of salvation ; another is, their mistake about the nature of true virtue, placing it chiefly, and most essentially, in benevolence to men, and so little in respect to God and Christ. If Christian virtue consists very much in a proper respect to Christ, then certainly it is of great importance to know what sort of person he is, at least, as to that particular wherein his excellency or worthiness of regard consists, which is surely his divinity, if he be a divine person. Another thing on which a proper respect to him depends, is his relation to us, and our dependence upon him ; which surely chiefly depends on his satisfaction and merits for us, if he has satisfied and merited for us. The reasons or grounds of the love and honor to Christ required of us, consist chiefly in two things : (1.) In what he is : And, (2.) In what he has done for us. Therefore, with regard to the latter, it concerns us greatly to know, at least as to the principal things, what they are. And if he has satisfied for our sins ; if he has suffered in our stead ; if he has truly purchased eternal life and happiness for us ; if he has redeemed us from an extremely and perfectly sinful, miserable, helpless state, a state wherein we deserved no mercy, but eternal misery without mercy ; then these are principal things.

Another reason why doctrines are thought to be of little importance, is a notion of *sincerity* wherein true virtue con-

sists, as what may be prior to any means of it that God grants, as if it was what every man had in his power, antecedently to all means; and so the means are looked upon as of little importance. But the absurdity of this may be easily manifested. If it be independent of all means, then it may be independent of natural information, or of the truths of the light of nature, as well as of revealed religion; and men may sincerely regard and honor they know not what. The truths of natural religion, wherein Christians differ from the most ignorant, brutish, and deluded idolaters, the most savage and cruel of the heathen nations, may be of little importance. And the reason why they have this notion of sincerity antecedent to means, and so independent on means, is, that they have a notion that sincerity is independent on God, any otherwise than as they depend on him for their creation. They conceive it to be independent on his sovereign will and pleasure. If they were sensible that they depend on God to give it according to his pleasure, it would be easy and natural to acknowledge, that God gives it in his own way, and by his own means.

19. If any article of faith at all concerning Jesus Christ be of importance, it must be of importance to know or believe something concerning his person; who he is, and what he was; what sort of a person or being he was. And if any thing concerning him be of importance to be known and believed, it must be something wherein his excellency or worthiness of regard consists: For nothing can be of importance to be known or believed about him, but in order to some regard or respect of heart. But most certainly, if any thing of his excellency and dignity be of importance to be known or believed, it must be of importance at least to know so much about him, as to know whether he be God or a mere creature; for herein lies the greatest difference, as to dignity, that possibly can be. This difference is infinite. If it be of importance to know how worthy he is, then it doubtless is of importance that we should not be ignorant of, and deny, as it were, all his dignity, or so much of it, that what remains shall be absolutely as nothing to that which is denied. It is of importance that we love Christ, or have respect to him as one that is excellent,

and worthy of esteem and love. The apostle says, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema maranatha." And doubtless, true love to Christ is in some respect suitable to the worthiness and excellency of his person. Therefore it is of importance to believe, and not to deny those doctrines which exhibit his worthiness. It is of importance that we do not in effect deny the whole of his worthiness.

20. How many things were believed by the ancient philosophers about divine matters, even the most rational of them more mysterious than the doctrine of the Trinity, chiefly because such things were handed to them by the Phœnicians, Egyptians, Chaldeans, or Persians, or on the authority of some great master? Yet these things were imbibed without much difficulty, the incomprehensibility of the doctrines being no objection to their receiving them.

21. There are things evidently true concerning the nature of our own souls, that seem strange paradoxes, and are seeming contradictions; as, that our souls are in no place, and yet have a being; or, if they are supposed to be in a place, that yet they are not confined to place, and limited to certain space; or, if they be, that they are not of a certain figure; or, if they are figurate, that their properties, faculties, and acts, should or should not be so too.

22. If many things we all see and know of the mortality of mankind, the extreme sufferings of infants, and other things innumerable in the state of the world of mankind, were only matter of doctrine which we had no notice of any other way than by revelation, and not by fact and experience; have we not reason to think, from what we see of the temper of this age, that they would be exceedingly quarrelled with, objected mightily against, as inconsistent with God's moral perfections, not tending to amiable ideas of the Godhead, &c. &c.

23. The definition of a *mystery*, according to *Stafferus*, Theol. Polem. p. 263, and 353, is this: A *mystery* is a religious doctrine, which must be made known by immediate revelation, and cannot be known and demonstrated from the principles of reason, but is above reason, and which in this whole

universe has nothing like itself, but differs from all those truths which we discover in this system of the world.

Ibid. p. 859. It appears from the definition, that whatever is known by divine revelation, and is not certain from the principles of reason, is a *mystery*; otherwise it could not be said to be revealed.

Revelation cannot be conceived of without mysteries; and mysteries are the first thing which we conceive concerning revelation; for no revelation can be conceived without mysteries, and therefore they constitute the sum and essence of revelation.

It is to be observed, that we ought to distinguish between those things which were written in the sacred books by the immediate inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and those which were only committed to writing by the direction of the Holy Spirit. To the former class belong all the mysteries of salvation, or all those things which respect the means of our deliverance taught in the gospel, which could not be known from the principles of reason, and therefore must be revealed. But to the other class those things belong, which either are already known from natural religion, but are of service to inculcate duty on man, and to demonstrate the necessity of a revelation of the means of salvation; or are histories, useful to illustrate and to assure us of the doctrines revealed, and which point out the various degrees of revelation, the different dispensations of salvation, and the various modes of governing the church of God; all which are necessary to be known in the further explanation of mysteries.

Mysteries constitute the criterion of divine revelation: So absurdly do they act, who allow a revelation and deny mysteries; or deny revelation for this reason, that it contains mysteries. What the sum and essence of revelation, or of revealed religion, are, is plain from the end of it, which is this, to point out to sinful man the mean of obtaining salvation, and of recovering the divine favor. But this mean is, that Jesus Christ is the only and most perfect cause of salvation, to be received by a true faith. This doctrine, however, is a mystery of godliness manifestly great; 1 Tim. iii. 16.

And thus that great mystery constitutes the sum and essence of revelation. The essence of revealed religion consists in this, that men by a true faith receive this doctrine, which the apostle calls a mystery manifestly great. Therefore the knowledge of the greatest mystery belongs to the very essence of the religion of a sinner.

How absurd do many of the doctrines of mathematicians and astronomers appear to ignorant men, when they cannot see the reason of those doctrines, although they are most true and evident, so that not the least doubt concerning them can remain in the mind of a thorough mathematician? Ibid. tom. iii. p. 560.

Since, in religion, there are some primary truths, and others more remote, which are deduced from the former by reasoning, and so are secondary, and these last may not be known, though the primary are known, but when once they are known they cannot be denied; it follows, that those articles which constitute religion, and so are fundamental, are to be distinguished into primary and secondary. The primary are those of which a man cannot be ignorant, consistently with true religion and his own salvation; and they are necessary with a necessity of *means*. The secondary are those of which a man may be ignorant, consistently with his resting upon the foundation of true religion, and with his own salvation; and those are necessary with a necessity of *command*. Therefore, to the same man, certain doctrines may be now fundamental, which were not fundamental to him before he knew them. Ibid. tom. i. p. 524, 525.

Joh. Chr. Kirchmejerus, in his Dissert. concerning fundamental articles, says, "They may be either reduced to fewer, or extended to more; as often one article may include the rest, and so all may be reduced to that one; and on the other hand, that one, according to the various truths contained in it, may be divided into several. Therefore, authors do not contradict themselves, who reduce all fundamental articles to one: For they cannot well be determined by their number; because as many fundamental truths are contained in one fundamental truth, as there are essential properties belonging to

the truths thus contained. Therefore, the holy scripture often sums up all fundamental articles in one, as in John xvii. 3. "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." Sometimes it distinguishes them into several; as in 1 Tim. i. 5. "Now the end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned." Ibid. tom. i. p. 528.

On account of the various degrees of men's capacities, and the various circumstances of the times in which they live, one man may know truths which another cannot know. Whence it follows that the very same articles are not fundamental to all men; but accordingly as revelation hath been more or less complete, according to the several dispensations under which men have lived, their various natural abilities, and their various modes and circumstances of living, different articles are, and have been, fundamental to different men. This is very plain from the different degrees of knowledge before and since the coming of Christ; for before his coming, many truths lay hid, which are now set in the most clear light: And the instance of the apostles, abundantly shows the truth of what I have now advanced; who, although they were already in a state of grace, and their salvation was secured, yet for some time were ignorant of the necessity of the sufferings and death of Christ, and of the true nature of his kingdom. Whereas, he who now does not acknowledge, or perhaps denies, the necessity of Christ's death, is by all means to be considered as in a fundamental error. Therefore, as a man hath received of God greater or less natural abilities, so let the number of articles to which he shall give his assent be greater or smaller; and as revelation hath been made, or information hath been given, to a man, more clearly or obscurely, in the same proportion is more or less required of him. Therefore, in our own case, we ought to be cautious of even the smallest errors, and to aim at the highest degree of knowledge in divine truths. In the case of others, we ought to judge concerning them with the greatest prudence, mildness, and benevolence. Hence we see, that a certain precise num-

ber of articles, which shall be necessary and fundamental to every man, cannot be determined. Ibid. p. 531.

If one single article of faith be so comprehensive, that in it are involved all things necessary to salvation, a man is not to be condemned as a latitudinarian, or as indifferent to all other doctrines, because he says that one article only is fundamental. For instance, That by the grace of the Triune God, Jesus, the true and eternal God, having assumed the human nature, became, through his satisfaction for sin, by his sufferings and death, the only and most perfect cause of our salvation ; who, therefore, together with the whole sacred Trinity, is, in the way of self denial, to be sought, loved and worshipped. Ibid. p. 532.

END OF VOL. II.