A LETTER
To the Reverend Dr. Francis Atterbury:
Occasion'd by the DOCTRINE Lately deliver'd by him in a FUnERAL-SERMON on i Cor. 15. 19.
August 30. 1706.

Length of Days is in her Right-Hand: And in her Left-Hand Riches and Honour. Her ways are ways of Pleasantness, and all her Paths are Peace. Prov. 3. 16, 17.


LONDON:
Printed and Sold by H. Hills, in Black-Fryars, near the Water-side, For the Benefit of the Poor.
A LETTER to the Reverend Dr. Francis Atterbury, &c.

Reverend Sir,

The Concern which all serious Christians ought to have for the Cause of Virtue, and the Interest of Practical Religion, will easily plead my Excuse for addressing my self to you upon this occasion, and after so public a manner. It is not the Design of this trouble I give you, to detract from that Character which you have before had on the Gentleman, at whose Funeral the Sermon now before me was preach'd: So far from that, that I rejoice in it; and heartily with that it may have so good an effect upon all who read it, as to engage them to study to deserve the like. Nor is it my Design to lend any hand to the exposing you to the World: As it would be a vain presumption in an obscure Person to pretend to lessen a Reputation so established as yours; so I hope, I have Sense enough of my Christian Duty, to induce me to abhor so base and unchristian an Intention. But the same Christian Duty which forbids me to do this, engageth me to express a Concern upon all occasions for the Cause of Religion, and to contribute all in my Power, towards the right understanding the nature of Virtue, and the Maxims and Precepts laid down in Holy Scripture. To speak plainly, The Doctrine deliv'rd in your late Sermon at the Funeral of Mr. B. hath offended many serious, and understanding Christians; who cannot but esteem it false and pernicious in its self, and utterly foreign from the Intention of St. Paul, on whom in great measure you fix it. This is the true Reason of the trouble I now give you: And I do it in a Publick manner, because the Doctrine you have delivered is now Publick; because it is fit that in so important a matter every one should see what can be said on each side, and judge themselves concerning the meaning of the Apostle, and the Truth of the matter; and because you may probably be more effectually engag'd by this means either to defend your Doctrine with stronger Arguments, or to retract it in as publick a manner as you have delivered it: One of which I cannot but think the Duty of a Christian Divine, when such Objections are propos'd to him, in any important matter, as seem to have some Weight in them, and appear to proceed from no other Principle but a Desire that Truth may prevail.

In order therefore, to contribute something to the Satisfaction of others, and to engage your self to review with all serious Impartiality the Doctrinal part of your late Sermon, permit me.

I. To represent to you what seems to me the true Intention of St. Paul in that Passage, from whence you have taken the Rife of your Discourse.

II. To endeavour to shew you from hence, how extremely foreign from that purpose of the Apostle, your Discourse is, both as to what you have expressly fixed upon him, and as to what you insinuate to be agreeable to his purpose, tho' not necessarily imply'd in the Letter of the Text.

III. To endeavour to make you sensible, that the Doctrine you have delivered is as false in itself, as it is remote from the Intention of St.
Paul, by offering to your thoughts some Observations concerning your manner of proceeding in the Argument you have undertaken.

I. I beg leave to represent to you what seems to me to be the true Intention of St. Paul in that place (1 Cor. 15. 19.) from whence you have taken the Rise of your Discourse.

As to this, I need not observe to you, that he is there arguing against some very weak Persons in the Church of Corinth, who professed to believe in Jesus Christ, and yet denied the general Resurrection at the last day, and consequently the Rewards of a future state. In answer to these Persons, he first establishes the Certainty of the Resurrection of Christ himself, upon the Testimony of many credible Witnesses, who saw him, and conversed with him after his Resurrection; from Verse the First to Verse the Twelfth. From the Resurrection of Christ, by which Almighty God professedly gave the World a Pledge and Assurance of the Resurrection of other dead Men, he proceeds to Argue that others also shall arise from the dead. For if it be false that other Men shall rise from the dead, then will it follow that it is false that Christ is risen from the dead, God having constituted his Resurrection an Assurance of their Resurrection, and made the one as certainly to come, as the other is certainly past. If therefore the one be not certainly to come, it will follow that the other is not certainly past. But the Resurrection of Christ is certainly past, as I have already proved from the Testimony of Eye-Witnesses: Therefore the Supposition that others shall not arise, from whence the contrary would follow, is false; and consequently, other Men will likewise arise from the Dead. This seems to me to be the Apostle's Argument, as may appear more plainly, if we connect the Twentieth Verse to the Thirteenth, and read the 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, as included in a Parenthesis; for the whole Argument appears in those two Veres thus connected. Ver. 13. If there will be no Resurrection of the Dead, it will follow from hence that Christ himself is not risen. Ver. 20. But Christ himself is certainly risen, and become the First fruits of them that sleep; therefore they also shall certainly arise: Which Conclusion he farther pursues and illustrates. In that Parenthesis he goes on to urge upon those weak Believers the Consequences of that Absurdity he had reduced them to, That Christ was not risen; instead of immediately pursuing his main Argument, turning off a little to something incidental to it, (as we find him often doing in other Arguments,) and speaking to them to this purpose; Ver. 14. And if Christ be not risen, as is imply'd in your Denial of the Resurrection of other Men, it is the vainest and most fruitless thing imaginable for us to preach him, or for you to believe in him. Ver. 15 Nay, for our parts we shall be found false witnesses for God, because we have pretended to witness that God hath raised Christ from the Dead, whom in truth he hath not raised, if it be true that other Dead Persons shall never arise. [Ver. 16. For I must tell you again, this is the Consequence of your Opinion, if it be true that the Dead shall not arise, it follows from hence, as I shew'd you before, that Christ is not himself risen.] Ver. 17 And for your parts, I tell you again, if Christ be not risen, it is the vainest thing in the
World for you to believe in him. You cannot by this hope for any justification, or Acquaintance from the Guilt and Punishment of your Sins, which you have been encouraged to hope for: For God promiseth no justification, but upon supposition of Christ's Resurrection, who died for our Sins, and arose again for our justification. Ver. 18. Nay, if Christ be not risen, it follows that all those who are now dead in Christ; all who have laid down their Lives for his sake, have lost their Labour, and are utterly perish'd without hope. Now if you would not be thought thus to reflect on those glorious Martyrs, whom you pretend to commemorate with Honour, why are you so foolish as to deny the Resurrection of Men at the last Day, which by consequence, you see, destroys the certainty of Christ's own Resurrection, and by that means reflects so highly upon those who have died in and for his Faith. Then follows your Text, Ver. 19. In one word, this Absurdity of Christ's not being arisen from the Dead (which follows from your denial of a general Resurrection) makes the Condition of all who now believe in him much more miserable than that of other Men. For if our Hope in Christ do not extend it self to another Life, and we do not consider, and believe in him as a Person raised from the Dead, and now alive in another and better State, we Christians, confider'd in the present Circumstances of things, and in the midst of those constant and bitter Persecutions in which we live, are the most to be pity'd, and indeed the most miserable of all Men; being exposed to the most grievous Sufferings not only for a Falshood, but for the sake of a Person who is utterly extinct, and unable to do us any Service in this World, and much less in another. After his having urged these Absurdities upon those weak and imperfect Believers, he resumes his Argument, Ver. 20, and proceeds in it, as I have before observ'd. That he speaks this merely with respect to the bitter Sufferings the Profession of Christianity then exposed its Professors to, is evident from Ver. 30, 31, 32, where the Apostle speaks of himself to this effect: To what purpose, and for what advantage do I endure those grievous Persecutions, which are as it were a continual and daily Death, for the sake of my Profession, if it be not true at last, that there is a Resurrection and a Future State, in which I may hope for a Reward? Upon this Supposition, that we must utterly perish at Death, it were better and safer for us not to profess a groundless faith, which exposeth us now to continual Persecutions without any advantage, but rather to take such Methods as that we may enjoy the Necessaries and Conveniences of Life, as quietly, and with as little disturbance as our Neighbours. Thus much may suffice for the establishing, and making clear the Apostle's Reasoning, and Intention, in this Place. I proceed now.

II. To endeavour to show you how extremely foreign from this purpose of the Apostle, your Discourse is, with respect both to what you have expressly fixed upon him, and to what you insinuate to be agreeable to his purpose, tho' not necessarily implied in the Letter of the Text.

First, You are pleas'd to call your Text a Concession which Saint Paul openly makes to this purpose, If all the Benefits we expect from the Christian Institution were confined within the bounds of this present Life, and we had no hope of a better State after this, of a great and lasting Re
ward in a Life to come, we Christians should be the most abandoned and wretched of Creatures; all other Sorts and Sorts of Men would evidently have the Advantage of us, and a much surer Title to Happiness than we. This is what you expressly, and in so many Words, fix upon the Apostle as his Design in this Passage, P. 3. Ed 8vo.

Now we usually, I think, call that a Concession which is yielded to an Adversary, and contended for by him; not that which he is unwilling to own, and which upon that account we urge upon him, in order to oblige him to disown something else from which that follows. And this I take to be the Case here. The Apostle is not conceding to those weak Believers any thing they contended for, but is manifestly urging them with something, which he thought would startle them; an Absurdity they were not aware of, in order to oblige them to disown that Error from which this Absurdity follows. He seems to speak to them to this purpose. Your Denial of the General Resurrection implies in it a Denial of Christ's Resurrection, and the denial of Christ's Resurrection by consequence proves his Disciples in these times the most miserable, and the most weak of all Men, who by professing to believe in one who is utterly perished, expose themselves to the most grievous Persecutions. If therefore you would not bring this Scandal upon your own Profession, you must not hold such an Opinion as manifestly tends to it in its Consequences. This is evidently no Concession, but what we call Argumentum ab Absurdo, which is a very different thing.

But to let this pass; the main Question is, Whether your Paraphrase upon your Text be just, and well-grounded. There are two Parts of it, and, as I think, both very foreign from the Apostle's purpose. 1. That, upon the Supposition he makes in the Text, We Christians should be the most abandoned and wretched of Creatures. 2. That, upon the same Supposition, all other Sorts and Sorts of Men would evidently have the Advantage of us, and a much surer Title to Happiness than we. I say both these are fixed upon the Apostle without any ground.

For, 1. the Apostle doth not appear to have once thought of such an unhandsome Comparison as the estate of good Christians, in this World, and the estate of Brutes, unless the Word which we translate Men can be proved to signify Beasts also: And much less to have designed, by an Affection limited to the Times of most grievous Persecutions, to determine that, even in the ordinary and quiet course of God's Providence, Good Christians are more miserable than Beasts, in this World, as it is plain you intend in what you here fix upon the Apostle.

2. The Apostle doth nor say that, upon the Supposition in the Text, All other Sorts and Sorts of Men have a surer Title to Happiness than true Christians: Unless you can make that a general Proposition, and accommodate it to all Times, which he hath made a particular one, by assuming it manifestly to the Times only of the bitterest Persecutions. Little imagining that their Unhappiness proceeded from their strict Observation of the Moral Rules of their Profession, (as you expressly mention) or from any other Cause, but the accidental barbarity of the World at that time towards all who profess'd Faith in Jesus Christ.
Secondly, I observe that you first propose (as your own words are to show the undoubted Truth of the Apostle's Concession, and then perform this, by urging it somewhat farther than the Letter of the Text will carry us: Which is indeed a new way of proving the Truth of his Concession, viz. by making Concessions of your own, and then labouring the Proof of them. But you would, to be sure, intimate by this, that these Concessions (as you call them) which you here illustrate, are agreeable to the Design, tho' not to the Letter of the Text, Nay, Pag. 9 you expressly fix them upon the Apostle, and call the Argument, into which you have put these Concessions, that great Argument for a future State, which is urged by St. Paul in the Words before us.

Thirdly, You cannot, therefore, blame me if I be so concern'd left any well meaning Persons should be deceiv'd by this, as to give them notice that there is nothing in the Apostle's Words, or Design, which bears the least resemblance to what you here seem to fix upon him. For, 1. He is as far from saying that were there no Life after this, Man would really be more miserable than Beasts (as your Words are) as it is well possible to be imagined, as may appear by comparing this Proposition with the Proposition of St. Paul in the Text, viz. That if Christians had no hopes in Christ, as arisen from the Dead, and now alive at God's Right-hand, they were the most miserable of all Men, to expose themselves to the bitterest Persecutions for the sake of a Falshood, and of a Man utterly extinct, and unable to assist, or reward them; as they did at the time when this was written. If the former of these Propositions bear any relation (even the most distant possible) to the latter; nay, if the same Person who maintains the latter, may not justly abhor and detest the former, I confess I understand nothing of Logick or Good sense. By what Right, therefore, you have in any fort charged this fond Opinion of your own upon so great an Author, I leave to you to consider, and to every serious Reader to judge. Neither, 2. Can any such Proposition be built upon the Apostle's Words as your second, viz. That were there no Life after this, the best Men would be often the most miserable; I mean in the Sense in which you your self afterwards explain it; nay, nor in any Sense which I can think of. That the best Men are sometimes in this state the most miserable, as far as the Evils of this World can make them so, may possibly be true: But it is equally true, whether you suppose a Future state, or suppose it not. But I deny that the Evils of this World which they sometimes experience, as you have represented them, are sufficient to prove the Wicked more truly happy than the Virtuous, even in this state, and supposing no Life to come. This I shall have occasion to speak of by and by: At present I observe that this Proposition of yours hath no relation to the Design of the Apostle in the Text, which I think is very evident from hence, that the same person may maintain (as the Apostle doth in the Text) that if Christians have no ground of hope in Jesus Christ as arisen from the Dead, and alive in another state, they are the most miserable of Men, as being exposed by their Profession to constant and bitter Persecutions, without any present or future Advantage: I say, the same Person may maintain this, and yet deny with
Justice the Truth of the following Proposition (which is yours) viz. That if there were no Life after this, the best of men would be often the most miserable; i.e. as you explain it, that the Practice of the Moral Duties of the Christian Religion would, in the ordinary and quiet State of this World, be a greater Unhappiness to a Man than the Neglect and Violation of 'em. This is in truth a Concession; but such an one, I must tell you, as the Apostle might abhor, notwithstanding his Assertion in your Text; and such a one, as I am sorry to see made by any Preacher of Righteousness. But before I come to examine the Truth of these two Concessions, which you have here made to the Cause of Vice, as I proposed in the last place, I must observe.

Fourthly, That as you have falsely mistaken the Apostle's Words in your Text, so you have likewise widely wander'd from the Inference he design'd should be drawn from it. Pag. 8. 9. For he is not urging here an Argument, which should conclude absolutely in favour of a future State. His main and conclusive Argument for the General Resurrection is the Resurrection of Christ, which he resumes in the next Verse. But here he is prelting them with some Considerations, which he judged would peculiarly move them, and endeavours to make them sensible of the bad tendency of their false Opinion, which they were so weak as not to see, by Words to this effect: By denying the General Resurrection, you call in question the Resurrection of Christ himself: and by doing this you make Christians the most miserable of men; to expose themselves by their Profession to bitter and daily Persecutions, without any Advantage from their Misery, either in this World, or in another. If you would not, therefore, call this blasphemous upon the Christian Religion, you must not maintain such Notions as by consequence infer this. How distant is this from the Argument which you have expressly fixed upon St. Paul, Pag. 9. in these Words. If in this Life only we had hope, men would really be more miserable than Beasts; and the best of men often the most miserable. But it is impossible to imagine that God of infinite Wisdom and Goodness should distribute misery and happiness so unequally and absurdly. It remains, therefore, that good men have a well-grounded hope in another Life, and are as certain of a future Recompence, as they are of the Being and Attributes of God. God forbid it should be otherwise! but God forbid they should build their Assurance of it on such Assertions as these, which I know not to have been ever before this, seriously maintain'd by any Persons of Virtue and Understanding; much less, to have been solemnly dictated as Undoubted Truths from the Pulpit, and built upon the Authority of an Apostle.

The Result of the whole is this: The Apostle speaks of Christians professing Faith in Christ: You speak of Persons practising the Moral Precepts of Religion. The Apostle speaks of the Condition of such Christians in a state of the most bitter Persecution. You speak of the Condition of virtuous Persons in the ordinary course of God's Providence. The Apostle designes nothing by his Assertion and Supposition, but to shame those ignorant unwary Professors of Christianity out of their Denial of a General Resurrection: You on the contrary draw from your Supposition and
Assertions, an absolute Argument for the Certainty of a Future State. So that, upon the review, it seems evident that you have mistaken the Assertion itself, which the Apostle layeth down in the Text; the Persons concerning whom He intends it; the Times to which He manifestly limits it; and the Conclusion which He design’d should be drawn from it.

Having thus said what is sufficient to shew how foreign from the Design of the Apostle, the Propositions, and Argument, which you have been pleased to fix upon Him, are; I proceed now, as I proposed,

III. To endeavour to make you sensible that the Doctrine you have delivered, according to your own Explication of it, is as fallacious in itself, as it is remote from the Intention of St. Paul; And this I shall do, by offering to you some Observations upon your manner of proceeding in the Argument you have undertook.

Your Positions are these, in your own Words, That were there no Life after this, First, Men would really be more miserable than Beasts; and, Secondly, The best Men would be often the most miserable: I mean, as far as Happiness or Misery are to be measured from pleasing or painful Sensations: And supposing the present to be the only Life we are to lead, I see not but that this might be esteemed the true measure of them. In these Words you declare, as plainly as one could expect from any Christian Divine, that, supposing no Life after this, the Practice of Virtue would not be the Happiness of Man, but the Pursuit of those Bodily Pleasures which the Beasts are capable of enjoying: An Opinion, which whatever Christians may think of it, the best of the Heathen Philosophers would have detested; I was going to say, and the worst likewise: For I may venture to affirm that Epicurus himself was far from speaking at this rate concerning Virtue, tho’ he absolutely deny’d not only a Future State, but the Superintendency of any wise Providence over this. And these Positions you maintain, without once supposing such a state of Perfection, as the Apostle pointed at: But with reference to the most quiet and prosperous Condition of this Life; supposing throughout the whole Man to be that same rational Creature he is now; and supposing your good Man to be a good Christian; not only to know God, but to have the present Support of the Belief of a Future State, and that firm Expectation of Rewards such an one ought to have. You suppose him to lead a Life of Virtue upon such Motives, and yet you positively affirm that the Beasts and Wickedest of Men enjoy here below a more entire and perfect Happiness than this good Man even in the most quiet and prosperous Condition of this Life.

But, to proceed to my Observations,

1. It hath a very strange appearance, that after you have called these Undoubted Truths, which cannot be true unless that Notion be so, on which they are entirely founded, viz. That Happiness and Misery in this state are to be measured by pleasing and painful bodily Sensations; and that after you have undertaken the Proof of these Undoubted Truths, you should not say the least word for the Proof of that on which only they can be founded; but take that for granted which is the main Point in Dispute, and fly to the Demonstration of that, which signifies nothing without
having first demonstrated the Truth of the other. This, I say, is a very
strange way of proceeding in so important a matter as this.

2. It is likewise as unaccountable, that in making the Comparison first
between Men and Beasts, and then between the Best and the Worst of Men,
you should not once mention any single Instance of the Excellence of the
former above the latter. This certainly might be expected at your hands,
when you undertook to state this Point; to consider all things on all sides
before you determine on which part the greatest Happiness lies, in any
state. This indeed is but the Continuance of the former way of Procedure.
But one would have thought, that even supposing no other state after this,
it were some Advantage to be made capable of knowing God, of imitating
Him, of seeing Him in his Works, of studying and finding out Truth.
One would have thought that the Pleasures of true Learning, and found
Sense; the Pleasures of Friendship, and honest Society; of interchanging
mutual Good-Offices; of contributing to the Safety and Happiness of
our Fellow-Creatures; and of the Practice of many Virtues which are Happy-
ness itself, might have been worth the mentioning: Not to say, might
have been accounted by you far beyond the Pleasures of Sense even in this
state. But it seems these are nothing in themselves, when compared with
the noble Pleasures which the Beasts so freely enjoy. And yet one thing
methinks so naturally offer'd it self upon this Head, that it cou'd hardly
escape the Observation of one who places so much Happiness in such things
viz. that Men have a liberty of enjoying the Bodily Pleasures with Tem-
perance, and under some reasonable Restraints; as well as the Beasts;
and besides this, enjoy those Advantages before-mentioned.

3. It is again wonderful, that you should not think it worth your while
to mention any single Disadvantage either of Beasts, in their being made
wholly uncapable of these God-like Satisfactions; or of wicked Men, in
the Prosecution of their Lusts and Passions. What? Is it of no account
that wicked Men follow their Inclinations, even upon your own Supposi-
tion, in contradiction to their Reason? Or, Is this an happier state than
to follow Reason, and imitate God, in contradiction to Inclination? Doth
not the latter necessarily leave the Man in a more happy present state than
the former? Or, Are those Lusts of Conscience under which you sup-
pose the Wicked, of no manner of Consideration? Is it of no account,
that the Intemperate Pursuit of the Pleasures the Wicked value, destroys
even their own Design, and leads them into a thousand Sicknesses, Distur-
bances, Perplexities, Deaths, which the Virtuous keep off by their Tem-
perance, and Chastity, and Command over their Appetites? Is it of no
account, that Envy, Malice, Revenge, Incessant Desire of Riches, or
Honours, are present Unhappiness in themselves; and that the Virtues
contrary to them are Inward Peace, and Harmony, and Quiet? Is it of no
account, that many Vices impair the Health, destroy the Vigor of
the Mind, hasten Death, ruin Estates, disturb Families, render Men the
Scorn and Contempt of the good part of the World? And are not these
certain Inconveniences, and Unhappiness in this present state, and such
as were fit to be mentioned? Is it of no account, that Wicked Men are
as liable to Sickness, and Afflictions, as the Good, and want those Supports in them, which the Good, and Upright, upon your own Supposition, enjoy; nay, that their very Successes in this World are very frequently the Occasions, and Instruments, even of their present Ruin, and Unhappiness? And, why, I pray, should all this be overlooked for the sake of those brutish Pleasures in which they indulge themselves, even beyond the Example of Beasts?

4. It is wonderfully strange, that you should not consider, that the Chief Happines of any Being, in whatsoever State it is, or at what Duration soever its Life is, must result from the most excellent Part of its Constitution; that the Happines of a Being made capable of imitating God, tho' for never so short a time, must consist in that Imitation; that Virtue is the Imitation of God, and therefore must be the Happines of Man: That the Chief Happines of a reasonable Creature must consist in living as Reason directs, whether he lives one Day, or to Eternity; whether he lives in this State only, or in another afterwards; whether he hath Inclinations to the contrary, or not, provided they be such as may be conquered. For neither can the time of his Duration, or the Tendency of such Inclinations, alter any thing in this matter; unless to make Virtue more difficult, which doth not destroy the Excellence of it, and present Happines resulting from it, but enhance and improve it. Besides, on the other hand, the Practice of Vice, tho' it be with the Inclination, yet is against Reason, and Conscience, upon your own Hypothesis; and leads the Man to greater Disquiet, and Unhappiness, than is implied in resisting a present Inclination when Reason and Conscience directed. It is very strange likewise, that you should not consider that the Pleasures, and good things of this Life properly so called, and true Happines in this Life, are two very different things; that they are much oftener separated than united; and that they who pursue the former within the Bounds of Religion, have always most of the latter, in the ordinary Course of this World, to which your Positions are adapted.

5. On the other hand; it is equally strange, that you should not consider the Consequences of such a Principle as you build upon; that upon your Supposition the Imitation of God, tho' it do not expose to any considerable external Calamities, is not to be compared for Happiness to the greedy pursuit of the Bestial Pleasures, or the Riches, and Honours of this World; that supposing Man and Beast both immortal in this State, it had been eligible to have been made a Beast rather than a Man; or to be the most Wicked, than the most Virtuous of Men; that Virtue doth not in its own Nature tend so much to the Happines of Man in the most quiet State of this World, as the Bestial Enjoyments purp'd even against the Dictates of Conscience, and under the Apprehension of a future Reckoning. I might name many more Absurdities, coincident with these, which follow from your Principle as you appear to have understood it your self. But these are sufficient to deter any Man from maintaining it: And I here mention them, not to charge them upon You, but upon your Exerise, in order to shew you the Unreasonable of it.
6. It is likewise unaccountable, that you should not consider the bad Influences such Positions must have upon some Men; and the no Service of them to any good Purposes. For by this performance of yours you have unwarily put more into the Mouths of licentious Persons than they ever yet generally contended for: It having been often owned by many of them; that the steady Practice of Virtue is more eligible even in this World, than the contrary, unless in a State of bitter Persecution; if ever there was or can be a Persecution merely for the sake of the Moral Virtues of any Person; which I much question. Whereas You suppose no Case of Persecution; and yet concede to them, or rather contend for them, that the Practice of Vice tends to greater Happiness (supposing no State but the present) than the strict Practice of Virtue. Your Positions deprive the Cause of Virtue of a very good and proper Argument to recommend it to the Tryal of any Persons who are Strangers to it, viz. That it will contribute even to their present Happiness much more than Vice; that it will more consult the Ease of their Minds, the Health of their Bodies, the Preservation, and Increase of their Estates, the Establishment of their good Name; all which are, in their several degrees, present Happiness. Your Doctrine robs even Christianity itself of an excellent Argument, viz. That the Moral Virtues it recommends, are in themselves infinitely preferable to the Vices contrary to them; and much more conducive to the present Happiness of Man, as well as to his future. It seems to contradict several Texts of Scripture, which declare at least thus much, that in the ordinary Course of God's Providence, the Virtuous Man doth more truly enjoy Happiness even in this Life, than the Wicked. And it gives a wide Encouragement to Men who have no Faith, or a very weak one concerning Future Rewards, to disturb Human Society, by their inordinate Pursuit of the Bestial Pleasures: Which one Consideration, I think, sufficient to have prevailed with any true Lover of the Public to have buried such Thoughts as these in perpetual Darkness. For whatever degree of present Happiness the prosecution of Men's Lusts and Passions may bring to themselves, it is manifest it tends to the Disturbance, Unhappiness, and Ruin of Human Society much more than the Practice of Virtue: And methinks this a very good Argument that it cannot be the greatest Happiness of any particular Persons in this Life. To counterbalance these pernicious Effects, I cannot call to mind one single good Effect this Doctrine can have. I am sure the Certainty of a Future State stands in need of no such Supports as this. Philosophers affected it, whilst they strenuously maintained that the Practice of Virtue was infinitely preferable to Vice even without looking beyond this present state; tho' you are pleased to fix the contrary upon them. And so may Christians: For I know not that our Lord hath changed the Tendencies of things, or detracted anything from the Aimableness, or present Happiness of Virtue. His Resurrection from the Dead, and the Assurances of a Future State, which He confirmed by numberless Miracles, added to the Presumptions of Reason, are sufficient to satisfy all who are willing to listen to Truth. And if they be not, they must be of an odd Composition, who are induced
to believe that Virtue shall be rewarded in another Life, because it is not in its own Nature so great an Happiness to Man in this State, as the Procuration of the Bestial Pleasures; because Beasts, and Profligate Sinners, enjoy more entire and perfect Happiness in this State than the most Virtuous Men, even supposing them in a State of Prosperity, and outward Quiet. I have heard indeed the Advantages of Beasts above Men in the Enjoyment of Bodily Pleasures insisted on, to make Men ashamed of making such Pleasures their main End, and to make them sensible they are not the Happiness of Man, whether there be another Life, or no. I have heard the Sufferings and Afflictions of many good Men here below, made an Argument that in another State, all the Virtuous shall have the Outward as well as Inward Tokens of God's Favour. But I never yet heard, nor ever expected to hear it from a Pulpit, That (supposing no State after this,) the Bestial Life was truly more happy, and consequently more eligible than the Virtuous Life: Or, that the Practice of Vice in its own Nature tended to make Men more happy in all States of this Life, than the Practice of Virtue: And this under the specious Title of an Argument for a Future State, which needs not such Supports, and ought not to be believed upon such Principles, as do so highly reflect upon that Virtue which is the Imitation of the most perfect, and most happy of all Beings.

7. It is extremely unaccountable that in proving your Positions, you should make use of such Arguments as really prove the contrary to what you design; and effectually overturn what you are labouring to establish. Thus, for Instance, you represent it as the present Unhappiness of Man that he is under the Checks of Reason, and Reflexion; that he hath a Notion of a Superior Good, and an Higher End than the Bestial Pleasures, to which he is ordained; and Prefages of a Future Reckoning: And the contrary, the Happines of Beasts above him. Whereas all wise Men have hitherto taught that these were his glorious Privileges, not his Infelicities; that it is the greatest present Happiness to know God, to understand his Nature, to be guided by Reason and Conscience to imitate his Moral Perfections, to live under the Apprehension of a Future State, and of being removed into it; and to be kept by this means within the Bounds that Reasonable Creatures ought to wish for, and not to lament. This is pleasant in the Practice, as it is agreeable to our most Excellent Part: And highly delightful in the Review. In the ordinary Course of things, it keeps off a great many Temporal Evils, and gives the Man that Rational Happines, which is infinitely beyond the Brutal.

As for the Dread of Death, S. Paul himself reckons them delivered in great measure from this Bondage who believe a Future State: And you suppose Mankind here to be under the Apprehension of a Future State, and yet quote him to prove them in Bondage to that Dread. Accordingly we find that many of the best Heathens were so far from being made perpetually miserable by the Dread of Death, that they could look upon it with some degree of Satisfaction, merely thro' that Belief they had of a future and better State. And surely, therefore, this is not sufficient to depress the present Happines of the best of Men below that of Beasts.
much less that of the best Christians, whom yet amongst others you undertook to prove more miserable than Beasts, supposing no Future State: but something might have been thought of, in their Condition, sufficient to counterbalance this single Evil. Nay, I know not whether Mankind would not run themselves into much greater present Evils, and Miseries, were they free from this Apprehension, than they do now they are under it. Besides, the Pleasures it most affects, and spoils, are those of the Wicked, who are most terrify'd with this Apprehension. And therefore if this be of such Weight, in order to prove Men more miserable than Beasts in this World, it will help to destroy your second Position, and prove Wicked Men, who are most alarm'd by it, much more miserable than the Good and Virtuous.

Again, You place the Happiness of Beasts above Men in this, That in their Fruitions they are carried no farther than Nature directs, and leave off at the point at which Excess would grow troublesome, and hazardous: And under your next Head you esteem it the Unhappiness of Good Men that they govern their Appetites, and the contrary the Happiness of the Wicked. Now if it be the Unhappiness of Men in general, under your first Head, that they proceed in Pleasure to troublesome, and hazardous Excesses, this will prove it the Unhappiness of Wicked Men, under your second Head, that they do not govern their Appetites, but go on to great Excess in their Corporeal Enjoyments; and give a vast Advantage to Good Men above them, who enjoy all the good things of this Life with Temperance. But indeed all that you say in proof of your first Position, concerning the present Advantages of the Beasts above Men, affects only the Case of the Wicked Part of Mankind; which only it is that enjoys Bodily Pleasure to Excess, or that finds any such Torment in the Knowledge of God, or in the Apprehension of a Future State, as is sufficient to render any Beings more miserable than they would be without these. And the Righteous Man having no Torment from his Conscience, or his Principles, comparable to the Supports he hath from them: All this manifestly destroys your second Position, and as plainly sets Him above the Wicked Man in point of present Happiness, as it depresses the Sinner below the Beast.

Again, You represent it as the unhappiness of Good Men in this State above the Wicked, that they are obliged by their Religion to be moderate in the use of worldly Pleasures; to keep their lower Appetites in due Subjection to their Reasoning Powers; to set Bounds to their Desires after Riches, and Honours; and to be contented in whatever State they are; and as the Happiness of wicked Men above them, that they permit themselves to act contrary to the good Man in these Cases. Which is just as if you had argued in others Words, The virtuous Man is obliged by his Religion to be more easy, and happy within than the Wicked; therefore he is more unhappy. What is it to bound our Desires in this World, with respect to the Riches and Honours of it, but to be without those Racks and Tortures which the covetous and ambitious Men continually feel? And, above all, what is it to be obliged to be contented, but to be obliged to ce
happy? Yet do we here find the poor unhappy good Man condemned, as
more miserable than his Neighbour, because he is less covetous, less am-
bitious, and more contented than be. Again, What is it to be obliged
to be humble, to be meek, to be placable, and easy to forgive, but to
be without those Torments, and Uneasinesses; Pride, and Haughtiness,
and Revenge carry along with them? Yet you are pleased to reckon this
also part of the good Man's present Unhappiness, that he is humble, and
easy to forgive; i. e. that he is good natured, not inwardly discom-
poiled, and ruffled; not carried beyond himself into a thousand Incon-
veniences by his turbulent Passions. And because this Temper sometimes
may incite wicked Men to injure him (tho' it oftener melts them into a
fort of Goodness, and doth not hinder him from any Self-defence, or
Legal Redress;) therefore is he set forth as unhappy, because he is easy
to forgive; and, in the mean while, those innumerable Plagues that are
inseparable from the Spirit of Revenge, and Pride; and all that
Train of temporal Evils, and Deaths, that it is seen to bring along with
it, are forgotten, as of no manner of account in this Cause. Neither
is there anything said here, of any account; but that a good Man will
sometimes look singular, and be abused in Words and Actions by the
Wicked. Now this may be, and yet the wicked Wretch under the Lashes
of his own enraged Confidence, and the Terrors of a future Account; in
his unmanly Flattery to Sin, and under the Tyranny of Pride, and Re-
venge, and Covetousness, must be incomparably more unhappy at pre-
sent, than this Good Man, who doth not measure his Happiness by the
Opinion of the Wicked, and finds at present, more than enough in the
regular Practices of Virtue, to counterbalance such an Inconvenience;
much more in the prospect, and belief of future Rewards, which you
suppose him to expect. Nor do I believe the World ever to have been so
corrupt since the Flood, but that in civilized Nations a Man may sooner
be respected and honoured for his Moral Virtues by the generality of
Men, than affronted, and injured on their Account: And to a parallel
Objection may be drawn from hence, against the Happiness of the Wicked
Man, that he will be forsaken, neglected, avoided, and condemned by the
best part of Mankind. And then the Question is, Whether this doth
not counterbalance the Reproaches of the Wicked; Or, whether the
constant Neglect, and Contempt of Good Men, be more eligible than the
Affronts of some of the Wicked, which will sometimes be the vir-
ous Man's Portion.

These are the demonstrative Reasons upon which you are pleased to
declare not only that Good Men are hinder'd by their Principles from so
great an Enjoyment of Pleasure as Beasts, and Wicked Men, and expos'd
by them to greater Unhappinesses, and so are of all Creatures, in this State,
the most miserable; but in plainer Words, p. 8. That the Supreme Man's joys
in this State, do upon the whole exceed those of the Upright; (tho' in truth
you have not been so impartial as to mention any of the Advantages of the
Upright;) and that the Beasts of the Fields which serve not God, and know
him not, do here enjoy a more entire and perfect Happiness than the Lord
of this lower Creation, man himself, made in God's own Image, to acknowledge and adore Him. Words, which I confess, I am almost ashamed to repeat. Whereas these very Reasons, and what is included in them, are fully sufficient to prove the contrary, that upon the whole, the Pleasures and Happiness of the Virtuous Man, do in the ordinary course of God's Providence, even in this State, exceed those of the Wicked, and of the Brave.

8. Give me leave to observe farther, That the you are so favourable to the best of Men, in the Second of your Assertions, as to profess only to shew that they are often the most miserable; you afterwards are pleased to change your Mind, and demonstrate them always to be so, and in all states of this Life; taking your main Proof of this, from that obligation to some particular Practices, from which they are never exempt in any Condition of this Life. Another Method of Procedure which looks very strange, and unaccountable.

9. It is likewise very unaccountable, that you should lay it down at first, and fix it upon the Apostle (p. 1.) That all other Sorts and Sects of men would evidently have the advantage of Christians, and a much surer Title to Happiness, were there no other State but this; and afterwards prove the present Unhappiness of Good Christians, from such Topics as equally conclude against all Philosophical Sects, which have been of any account in the World. Did not the Peripatetics, the Stoics; nay, did not Epicurus himself teach the Government of our lower Appetites; the keeping our Desires within Bounds; the Virtue of Contentment; a Freedom, and Disengagement from all discomposing Passions: In fine, such a Behaviour as often made their Followers singular, and exposed them to the Affronts of the other part of the World? And if this be so, what Advantages had these Sects over the Christians, since they had all those very Unhappinesses you have seen fit to fix upon the best of Christians?

10. Last of all, I cannot but think it very strange, that after you have summed up your Argument, (p. 8.) you should fix it upon the ancient Philosophers, as the best Argument for a future State, which Mankind had to rest upon before the Christian Revelation; and affirm, (p. 9.) That the only sure Foundation of Hope, which the wisest and most thoughtful men amongst the Heathen pretended in this case to have, was, from the consideration suggested in the Text, as you have explain'd it; for so to be sure you mean. Whereas I do not think you can name one serious Philosopher amongst all the Antients, who ever taught that Man was more miserable in this Life than the Beasts; or that the Best of Men are render'd more miserable than the wicked, by the practice of Virtue, as you have explain'd these two Points, (p. 5, 6, 7.) or that the Impious man's Joys do, upon the whole exceed those of the Upright; or that the Beasts of the Field, which know not God, enjoy a more entire and perfect Happiness in this State than Man; nay, than the Best of Men in the most quiet and prosperous Course of God's Providence: Which are the Positions you have undertaken to maintain. Innumerable are the Passages in the wisest of Heathen Philosophers, which are known absolutely to contradict these Positions, and to carry the matter
matter so high the other way, as to to make Virtue its own Reward in all Circumstances of Life; and the most afflicted state of the Virtuous man preferable at present to the most prosperous and flourishing Condition of the Vicious. How unlikely, therefore, is it that they should make use of an Argument for a Future State, the main Parts of which they always rejected as false? And how unaccountable is it that you should fix this upon them who do so frequently, and zealously express themselves against such Positions?

These are the Considerations which I could not but think proper to present to you upon this Occasion. If you do not think them wholly frivolous, or beneath your Regard, you will judge it worth your while to review your Sermon again. And that you may not reject them wholly, without giving any farther Account of so important a Subject to the World, I solemnly assure you, that this Representation proceeds from no other Principle, but a Desire that the Truth may be known in so important a Matter; that the Cause of Virtue, which is the Cause of GOD, may not suffer thro' the Frailty of Men; and that you may have a fair Occasion, either of Explaining and Defending your Sense, so as to rectify the Mistakes, and remove the Prejudices of many serious Christians, or of acknowledging your Error, and joyning in the Confirmation of the opposite Truth. All who have any esteem for you, must needs lament that you have in this Sermon given your Adversaries such an Handle to triumph over you. All who have any Respect for the Clergy, must lament that such strange Doctrine should be recommended to the World by one of that Body. And all who have any Regard to the Honour of CHRIST, must lament to see it solemnly back'd, and confirm'd by the Authority of one of his Apostles.

For my own part, I have not said what I think it truly deserves; nor could I if I would. But, I hope, I have said enough to engage you to take a Second View of this Subject: And shall only therefore now commend you to the Direction of GOD's Holy Spirit, and so bid you,

Farewel.

FINIS.