

cation, and its inestimable value, that I have denied that any of its obligations can, properly speaking, be new; that I have denied that they can be thrown off or assumed at pleasure; that I have asserted that our Maker has just as many and as weighty claims on our hearts and lives, before we solemnly acknowledge them, as after such a ceremony. I have not advanced, it ought not to be supposed that I would advance, the smallest word of this essay, in order to make any portion of the community less religious; my sincere wish and prayer is, that the whole community may be more so. If I would chase away shadows, it is only that I may introduce substantial realities in their stead.

I would observe, that there is one circumstance which seems to take off the weight of religious obligation; and that is, unavoidable ignorance. In what has been said, I have all along referred to those who either know or might easily know, what the obligations of religion are. To him who knows them not, the untutored savage for instance, they have no existence; or rather, the same obligations which bind the Christian, have no existence. But even the savage is subjected to obligations, according to his knowledge and opportunities; and we may likewise say of him, that no formal acknowledgment of those obligations will make them greater than they are.

The sole point which I aim to establish, is, that our will and our convenience have no legitimate power over the nature of our duty. It would be as proper for a son to declare that he would not fulfil every filial obligation to his parents, till he appeared in court and took a legal oath that he would do so, as for the native of a Christian