

body, considered as a distinct thing, as in itself it is, from the two principles of intelligence and perception, differs in kind (for in respect of excellence and nicety of workmanship all comparison were impious; but in kind the vegetable life of the human body differs in this circumstance only) from mere clock-work.

This mechanism of life, in that part which belongs to the body; so evident to the anatomist and physician, and so obvious indeed to common observation, is so little repugnant to holy writ, that it is clearly implied in many passages. It is implied in the expressions in which Moses describes the animation of the first man; which, though it be referred to the union of soul and body as a principle, is described, however, in expressions which allude to the mechanical action of the air, entering at the nostrils, upon the pulmonary coats. The mechanism of life is again most remarkably implied in the verse which immediately precedes my text; in which the approaches of death are described as the gradual rupture of the parts of a machine; not without particular allusion to the true internal structure of the human body, and the distinct offices of the principal viscera in maintaining the vegetable life—"The silver cord loosed—The golden bowl broken—The pitcher broken at the well—The wheel broken at the cistern." I dare not in this assembly, in which I see myself surrounded by so many of the masters of physiology, attempt a particular exposition of the anatomical imagery of this extraordinary text; lest I should seem not to have taken warning, by the contempt which fell on that conceited Greek, who had the vanity to prelect upon the military art before the conquerors of Asia. I shall only venture to offer one remark, to confirm what I have said of the attention (not of implicit assent, except in religious subjects, but of the attention) which is due to what the inspired writers say upon any subject, which is this; the images of this text are not easy to be explained on any other supposition, than that the writer, or the spirit which guided the writer, meant to allude to the circulation of the blood, and the structure of the principal parts by which it is carried on. And upon the supposition that such allusions were intended, no obscurity, I believe, will remain for the anatomist in the whole passage. At any rate it is evident, that the approaches of death are described in it as a marring of the machine of the body by the failure of its principal parts. And this amounts to an assumption of the mechanism of life, in that part which belongs to the body.

Thus revelation and philosophy agree, that human life, in the whole a compounded thing, in one of its constituent parts is mere mechanism.

But let the philosopher in his turn be cautious, what conjectures he build upon this acknowledged truth. Since human life is undeniably a compound of the three principles of intelligence, perception, and vegetation; notwithstanding that the vegetable life be in itself mechanical, it will by no means be a necessary conclusion, that a man must be truly and irrecoverably dead, so soon as the signs of this vegetable life are no longer discernible in his body. Here Solomon's opinion demands great attention. He makes death consist in nothing less than the dissolution of that union of soul and body; which Moses makes the principle of vitality. And he speaks of this disunion as a thing subsequent, in the natural and common course of things, to the cessation of the mechanical life of the body. Some space, therefore, may intervene; what the utmost length of the interval in any case may be, is not determined, but some space of time it seems may intervene between the stopping of the clockwork of the body's life, and the finished death of the man, by the departure of the immortal spirit. Now in all that interval, since the union of the spirit to the body first set the machine at work, if the stop proceed only from some external force, some restraint upon the motion of any principal part, without derangement, damage, or decay of the organization itself, the presence of the soul in the body will be a sufficient cause to restore the motion, if the impediment only can be removed.

Thus by the united lights of revelation and philosophy, connecting what is clear and indisputable in each, separated from all conjecture and precarious inference, we have deduced a proof of those important truths, to which the founders of this society have been indeed the first to turn the attention of mankind: namely, that the vital principle may remain in a man, for some time after all signs of the vegetable life disappear in his body: that what have hitherto passed, even among physicians, for certain signs of a complete death, the rigid limb, the clay-cold skin, the silent pulse, the breathless lip, the livid cheek, the fallen jaw, the pinched nostril, the fixed staring eye, are uncertain and equivocal; inasmuch that a human body, under all these appearances of death, is in many instances capable of resuscitation.