

before it had thrown off the veil of flesh, to the third heaven? What but the positive law of Scripture can authorize the belief, that, while even "a passing generation,—beings immersed in the world, darkened by its ignorance, and inflamed by its passions,—may trace those mighty instances of benevolent power, exult in the knowledge that they pour upon them, and feel their highest hope and richest mental enjoyment in the view of the rapid completion of the promise and prophecy of the Eternal, yet that the spirit of the great Apostle,—with his fight finished, his work of faith and holy heroism done, his immortal crown gained, his solemn struggle with earthly passion and fleshly error ended in victory,—should, at the moment of triumph, be cast into the chains of darkness; have all his noble faculties and angelic thoughts, his ambition of eternity, sunk into a sea of oblivion; his freed spirit, that had actually seen, even in life, what it had not entered into the heart of man to conceive, nor had ever before been given to the eye of man to witness,—the Paradise of God,—should be sunk for years immeasurable into the clod of the valley.

All analogy is against such a conception. But we have the direct evidence of Scripture for the active existence of the soul on the separation from the body—the often-quoted answer of our Lord to those Jewish doctors, who denied the existence of the soul, "God is not the God of the *dead* but of the *living*." This undoubtedly implies, that he is the Lord of the living in some more definite sense than as he is the supreme master of all creation, active and inactive—merely material, and extinct with life. He is here declared to be the Lord of beings existing at the time when the words were spoken, though the Patriarchs were laid in their graves nearly four hundred years before.

Another text (Matthew x. 28.) which we do not recollect to have seen applied, strongly expresses the foundation of his doctrine,—"Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul," is an obvious declaration that whatever may be the means of extinguishing life, the Spirit of man is beyond their reach—that it does not share the grave. Our Lord's language to the penitent thief, is a similar declaration: "I say unto thee, this day shalt thou be with me in Paradise." Attempts have been made to represent, by a mistranslation, this text as only a general and remote promise: as if our Lord had said, "This day I tell thee." But the immediate time seems to be distinctly implied. The penitent thief had made a request applicable to a period, which, when he saw the Messiah on the cross, and palpably leaving life, he must have looked on as *remote*. "Lord, remember me when thou comest to thy kingdom." His belief in the truth of Messiah, must certainly have been of the most pre-eminent kind, when, in the midst of the fullest visible proof that the King of Israel was a human being, overwhelmed by his enemies, expiring in the common agonies of the cross, and suffering without resistance the rejection, tauntings, and cruelty of his people; with even his immediate followers as such all flying; and but a few, prompted by personal affection, venturing to approach his dying hour: and not less in the midst of the horrid pangs that were rousing every nerve of the criminal himself; he could proclaim by his solitary and glorious avowal, his reliance on the declaration of God. The answer, then, is worthy of the Lord of life and death,—"I tell thee, *this day* thou shalt be with me in Paradise." I shall not put off the reward to the time when I shall come in my triumph, the visible King of Israel and the world: I shall lead you *at once* into the place of beatitude, where the disembodied souls of the holy are. The text also makes a striking distinction between the request and the promise. The criminal asks to be a sharer in the future kingdom. This is not answered. But he is promised an entrance into the present Paradise; a promise, in which the remote glory is included, with the addition of the immediate and unsolicited happiness. The parable of Dives and Lazarus confessedly, like all the other parables, founded on the general belief of the people to whom it was addressed, is a proof of the general belief at the time; but it is more. There is a moral impossibility in our Lord's having taken it for the foundation of even a parable, if its material were not essentially true. The adjuncts of the narrative may be, or may not be, additions, for the purpose of giving an influence to the lesson at the time. But, as Paley well ob-

servos, all the parables seem to have been systematically founded on fact. And where, we may add, do we find any instance of a parable touching on the gross fables of antiquity, either Greek or Asiatic, of which we know, that the greater part were familiar in Syria?

Our Lord is also declared to have descended, after his death, into Hades, the place of the disembodied spirit, (improperly translated Hell,) and, as if expressly to obviate any vagueness in our belief of the fact, his actual occupation there is assigned.—he is declared to have preached to the spirits there, whose bodies had perished in the deluge, probably that portion of antediluvian mankind, which had not revoited with the multitude, but which as is the law of great catastrophes, had suffered in the general punishment of the evil.

But our Lord is declared to have been in all things "our example." Like us he lived on the earth, subject to its struggles and privations; like us he died: like him we are to rise from the grave bodily,—and why are we to suppose that in one point alone,—the active existence of the soul between death and the resurrection,—we are to be dissimilar?

But his death, he makes an obvious distinction between the body, which he was to leave on the cross, or surrender to the grave, and the Spirit, which was to survive. In the final agony he cries, "Father, into thy hands I commend my Spirit." And thereupon, say the Evangelists, "he gave up the Spirit." He does not present his body to the hands of the Father. St Stephen, when dying, with the vision of glory in his eyes, offers up the Spirit in almost the same words: "Lord Jesus receive my Spirit." If no further meaning were to be attached to those prayers than a general desire for the divine protection, why should the body, which is hereafter to partake of the glorious destiny, be unnamed? Why should not the martyrs' prayer have been "Lord Jesus, receive my soul and body," if they were alike to be precipitated into the grave, and slumber alike, until the great day on which the body is to awake from its slumber? The evident reason is, that their intermediate fates were to be different: and while the body was committed to the grave—a state of virtual non-existence,—the soul was to live, and be in the hands of God.



#### THOUGHTS ON THE NECESSARY EXISTENCE OF THE GREAT FIRST CAUSE OF ALL FINITE BEINGS.

WHEN we contemplate our own existence, it is natural for a thinking mind to inquire,—whence did I come,—to what primary power am I indebted for my being,—and by what modes of reasoning and inquiry, shall I obtain a satisfactory knowledge of that primitive Cause from which I have derived those bodily powers, and mental energies, which I possess?

That I am in existence, is a truth too plain to require proof, or to admit denial. I could not have imparted that existence to myself, for this would imply action prior to being, which is absolutely impossible; because action, which necessarily presupposes existence, can never be its primary cause. The same truth which is conclusive with regard to myself, is equally applicable to every creature and thing within the vast empire of Being. If, therefore, I could not have imparted existence to myself, so neither could any of my progenitors have imparted existence to themselves. This truth being granted, one of the two following propositions must be admitted: first, either the ancestors of human nature, must in a vast chain of retrogression, have existed without a beginning; or, secondly, man must be primarily indebted to some independent power, for that existence which he enjoys. Now, if out of two given propositions, one of which must be true, we can prove one to be false, the truth of the other will be clearly demonstrated.

It is a self-evident fact, that all individuals of the human race, as well as all the generations of those individuals, are limited as to the duration of their existence. Each has had a commencement of being; and, in those that are now no more, that commencement has been succeeded by a termination, so far as it respects our present state. Hence all the parts are necessarily finite, and no accumulation of finites can ever make an infinite. The whole of any given aggregate, and all the parts of which that whole is composed, must necessarily be

the same. If, therefore, all the parts are finite, so also must be the whole, which is formed of those parts.

In addition to the preceding observations, all the generations, of men, as well as the individuals which compose them, are dependent upon those which immediately preceded them. If, therefore, we allow the whole, to form in the aggregate an infinite series, we must suppose the existence of an infinite series of dependent beings to be not merely abstractedly possible, but to be in a state of actual existence. Now if this series be actually infinite, it follows, that it must also be independent, for no series can be strictly infinite, that is not absolutely independent. But how an infinite series can be constituted by an accumulation of finite links; or how the whole can include independence in its nature, when all the parts of which it is composed are actually dependent; we can never hope to know, until we can reconcile contradictions.

Admitting an infinite series to exist, we would ask—Suppose, as all the parts of which it is composed are finite, one individual generation were subtracted from the general mass, would that which remains be finite, or infinite? If infinite, it must have been more than infinite before the subtraction was made, which is impossible. But if it be finite, as that which is supposed to be subtracted is finite also, it is equally impossible to imagine, with any consistency of thought, that the union of two parts, each of which is avowedly finite, can ever constitute that which is infinite. And to suppose the whole to be infinite, while all the parts, of which that whole is composed, are finite, is to make the whole to be infinite and not infinite at the same time.

The supposition that the whole may be independent, while all the parts of which it is composed are dependent, is attended with consequences not less absurd. In this case, we must suppose, that all the parts are dependent upon each other in continued retrogression, until in the series we reach the first link, which we must admit to depend upon nothing. Now, if this link be not dependent upon any thing, it must be independent; for whatsoever has any existence, must be either dependent or independent. It cannot be dependent, because, being the first link, there is nothing on which it can depend; and even if this absurdity were set aside, we should be compelled to admit that it is an effect without a cause. It is equally certain that it cannot be independent, because it partakes of the same common nature with those links, which, without dependence, can have no existence. It must therefore be dependent and not dependent at the same time.

If the first link in an infinite series be independent, it must be eternal, for we have already seen, that nothing could have made itself, since this implies action prior to existence. But to ascribe eternity of existence to a first link in an infinite series of dependent beings, is to make it eternal and not eternal at the same time.

There seems to be but one way through which the absurdity of the above conclusion can be obviated, and that is, only by removing the difficulty to another stage, in which we shall again meet it in its last retreat. It may perhaps be asserted, that "To suppose an infinite series, is to suppose an aggregate from which a first link is necessarily excluded, and consequently, where no first link exists, no absurdity can be attached to it." Against this objection we would beg leave to assert, that this infinite series must either have a first link, or it must not: If it have a first link, the whole cannot be infinite, for nothing can be infinite that is placed within the reach of numbers. But if it have no first link, it can have no second, because it has no first; and no third, because it has no second; and consequently, it can have no successive link whatever. The supposition, therefore, of an infinite series of dependent beings, in what light soever it may be viewed, appears evidently to be pregnant with absurdity.

But if an infinite series of finite and dependent beings be totally impossible, it follows, that the human race must necessarily be dependent for their primary existence, upon some cause which is absolutely independent; and consequently, on some cause that must have eternally existed. Nothing short of this, can extricate our reasonings from those absurdities which we have already perceived attaching themselves to an infinite series of de-