The image shows a close-up of a marbled paper surface, likely an endpaper or book cover. The pattern consists of irregular, organic shapes in shades of green and brown, set against a darker, textured background. The colors are somewhat muted and aged. In the lower-left corner, there is a small, white, octagonal label with black text.

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THE  
Nature, Folly, Sin, and Danger  
Of being

*Righteous over-much;*

With a particular VIEW to the  
Doctrines and Practices  
Of certain

MODERN ENTHUSIASTS.

BEING THE  
Substance of FOUR DISCOURSES

L A T E L Y

Preached in the Parish-Churches of *Christ-  
Church*, and *St. Lawrence Jewry*, London;  
and *St. Martin's in the Fields*; *Westminster*.

BY JOSEPH TRAPP, D. D.

The THIRD EDITION.

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ECCLES. vii. 16.

*Be not righteous over-much; nei-  
ther make thyself over-wise:  
Why shouldst thou destroy thyself?*



*R*ighteous over-much? may  
one say: Is there any  
Danger of that? Is it e-  
ven possible? Can we be  
*too good?* Or if that  
might be; is there any  
Occasion, however, of warning against  
it in *These Times*, when the Danger  
is manifestly on the other Extreme;  
when all manner of Vice and Wick-  
edness abounds to a degree almost un-  
heard of? I only answer at present,  
that to be *righteous over-much* is itself,  
often at least, one Sort of Vice and  
Wickedness; and a very bad Sort too:  
I say often, at least; because some-  
times 'tis rather *Folly*, than *Sin*; always  
one or the other; and not seldom a  
mixture of Both: And even when 'tis

*Folly* only, it has a dangerous Tendency, and is of pernicious consequence: And there seems to be a great deal of it in This Age and Nation. For the rest; these Questions will be fully answer'd in the Progress of my ensuing Discourse. I only observe farther in this place, that the Word תשומם in the Original, which our Version renders *destroy thyself*, may well be translated *stupidify, besot, or infatuate thyself*. I shall take in both; and shew

I. *First*, What we may reasonably understand by being *righteous over-much*, and *over-wise*.

II. *Secondly*, The extreme *Weakness* and *Folly* of it; and its Contrariety to sound Reason, and true Religion. *Why shouldst thou become stupid, and foolish?*

III. *Thirdly*, Its *dangerous Tendency*, and *pernicious* Consequences. *Why shouldst thou destroy thyself?*

IV. In the fourth and last place, I shall add something by Way of Application.

I. *First*

I. *First* then, What we may reasonably understand by being *righteous over-much*. It will not a little contribute towards the clearing of this Matter, to lay before you in a Short View the various Interpretations which have been put upon this Text by learned Commentators or Expositors: Which I shall therefore do in the first Place; and then come to a more close and determinate State of the Point before us. Setting aside then the Exposition of Those who would have the Words to be spoken, not in the Person of *Solomon* himself, but in that of a carnal, and corrupt Reasoner, persuading Men to Indifference and Neutrality in Religion; as if he should have said, since Vertue is exposed to so many Dangers; be not zealous or pertinacious in its Cause, but yield and give way to Times and Circumstances: I say setting aside This, (tho' 'tis certain that the Royal Preacher, in several Passages of this Book, speaks, by Way of *Prosopopæia*, not his own Sense, but that of others, even of Infidels, and Enemies to all Religion) and supposing him here, to deliver his own real Thoughts; he means, say some, not

Righteousness itself, but the Appearance of it, as thus; Do not arrogate to yourself more Vertue and Wisdom than you really have. He had been treating before, say others, concerning the lawful, right, and laudable Use of worldly Goods; and here he guards against an Extreme upon that Subject. Do not, out of an immoderate, and mistaken Sanctity, utterly reject all Enjoyment of worldly Pleasures, Honours, Riches, &c. nor too much macerate the Body by Watchings, and Fasting. Again; Be not *superstitious*: An over-strain'd Piety degenerates into Superstition. Those are *righteous over-much*, who to the Works prescribed, and commanded by God add Works of Supererogation, extraordinary uncommanded *Perfections*, as they imagine them to be; tho' in so imagining they are mistaken. Others thus; Be not too rigid, and severe in censuring, and reprovng your Neighbour for his Faults. Many take it for the utmost Rigour of *punitive Justice*, to the Exclusion of Equity, by insisting upon the strictest Letter of the Law, and Severity of Justice; when, in all Reason and Equity, there is Room for Mercy: Here that  
common

common Saying takes Place ; *Summum jus summa injuria*, the height of Justice is the height of Injustice. Hither likewise may be reduced the Error of those who think it necessary to go to *the very utmost* in every thing ; As also the Indiscretion of an overheated Zeal in exposing ourselves to Dangers, when there is no Necessity, nor even Occasion for it. This is not only *going to the utmost*, which is not always *necessary* ; but *going too far*, which is always *wrong*. †

For in the next Place (that we may now come to a more close, and direct State of the Point before us) most Vertues have an Extreme on each Side. We may *over-do*, and be *excessive*, as well as *under-do*, and be *defective*. But to be *too good* is impossible : What then is the Meaning of being righteous, good, or vertuous *over-much* ? I answer, there is, and can be, no such Thing, *properly, strictly, and literally* speaking. But the Expression is owing to the Imperfection of Language. One of the Extremes, *viz.* That in Excess, tho' allowed to be a Fault, is made (very improperly) to denominate the Person to whom it belongs *excessively*

*ively vertuous.* Thus Men are said to be charitable, sober, merciful, &c. *to a Fault*: Which is the same, in Effect, as to say, they are so *very vertuous* that they are *vicious*. If we make this Excess to be a *Fault*, as it certainly is; we should not join it with Charity, Sobriety, Mercy, &c. from which it deviates; unless we would make an unaccountable Coalition between Vice and Vertue. The Truth of the Matter therefore is, as I said: *We want Words* to express those Vices by, which are the Extremes in Excess of those Vertues just now mentioned, and several others: And so, when we would communicate our Thoughts concerning them, for want of a better Way of speaking, we say such a one is devout, temperate, &c. *to a Fault*. Thus by the Scantiness of Language we join together two very different, and disagreeing Ideas: and a very great Defect in Language it is. Whenever any Vertue rises beyond its due Bounds, and runs into an Extreme; it loses its Nature, and degenerates into Vice: And since it loses its Nature, it ought to lose its Name too. Strictly, and properly speaking therefore, 'tis impossible

ble to be *righteous over-much*: But the Meaning is, be not excessive in any Thing, tho' the Thing itself be never so good: For tho' the Thing itself be good, the Excess of it is Evil. Thus for instance: *Alms-giving* is very excellent; but to bestow *so much* upon *the Poor*, as not to make *sufficient* Provision for one's *own Family*, is a great Sin. *Rashness*, or *Fool-hardiness* is a Fault on the *excessive* Side of *Courage*; as well as *Cowardise* on the *defective*.<sup>+</sup> To be constant and frequent in *Prayer*, and other religious Exercises, is the Duty of every Christian; but that to *spend so much Time* in those Exercises as to neglect *all other* necessary Duties, or even any *one* other necessary Duty, is *contrary* to his Duty, the very Sound of the Words sufficiently informs us. *Pride* is a great Sin; but an *excessive over-strain'd Humility* is a Fault too, as well as *Folly*; tho' not so great a one as the other. The Vice of *Intemperance* in Eating, and Drinking, is plain to every Body: On the other Extreme, to *eat* nothing but *Bread* and *Herbs*, and *drink* nothing but *Water*, unless there be a particular Reason for it, is *Folly* at best; therefore *no*  
*Vertue*:

*Vertue* : 'Tis the *Excess* of Temperance, therefore a *Fault*; tho' not near so great a one, as the other Extreme, Intemperance. It may here be observed, by the Way, that the two Extremes of many Vertues are in the common Books of Ethicks wrong mark'd, distinguish'd by Names quite contrary to what they should be. Thus (to omit several other Instances) to Temperance, say they, is oppos'd in Excess Intemperance; in Defect, too much Abstinence. Intemperance indeed consists in one Sort of Excess, *i. e.* The Excess of Meat and Drink: But sure it is the Defect of Temperance. The Excess of it is too much Abstinence.

But to return. Wholly abstaining from Things *indifferent*, and innocent in themselves, as *forbidden*, and *unlawful*, is a signal Instance of being *righteous over-much*: And so on the other hand is making Things *indifferent* to be *necessary*, and matters of *Duty*. This leads us to observe, that if the Excesses of some Vertues be (as they are) rather *Follies* than *Faults*, or rather *Faults* than *Sins*, in the Persons themselves who practise them; yet to *impose them upon others* as necessary,  
and

and to deter others from the contrary, as unlawful, is greatly and grievously sinful. Because it is *teaching for Doctrines the Commandments of Men*, (as our Saviour taxes the Pharisees, *Mark. vii. 7.*) adding to the Laws of God; and by their own Authority (*i. e.* none at all) making that necessary on the one hand, and unlawful on the other, which God never made so: Besides their obtruding some Doctrines, and Practices, as taught and commanded by the Christian Religion, and as the Perfection of it, which are in truth contrary to it. ✕

In short; to be *righteous over-much* is to place much Religion (where there is really none, but the Contrary) in *Extraordinaries*, in *new Inventions*, and striking out into *Bye-paths*. Some Things of this Nature, I doubt not, proceed from a *good Design*; tho', I think, not from a *good Judgment*. ✕ For instance. Let all Men practise all Christian Vertues; particularly go to Church even upon ordinary Days, as often as their necessary Business will permit them; and upon Sundays, attend Divine Service from the Beginning

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ning

ning to the End, Morning, and Afternoon, doing every Thing which our Church prescribes in her publick Offices; then go home, and employ a good Part of the Remainder of the Day (for it is not necessary they should so employ it all) in Reading, Meditating, and Praying, partly in private, partly with their Families: Whatever religious Exercise goes beyond this, were, I think, better let alone; I say, I think: For I do not presume directly to censure, much less condemn it; but only speak my own Opinion. Yet one or two Circumstances more I must take leave not only to mention, but somewhat more than mention. For *Laymen* to officiate in *reading Prayers* to any *Assembly*, except their *own Families*, is an Encroachment upon the Office of those who are ordain'd to holy Functions; and I fear takes off from the Reverence and Respect due to them. And for *unletter'd Laics* to take upon them to *expound* or *interpret* the Scriptures, is neither laudable, nor justifiable; it tends to the Confirmation, not the Removal of Ignorance; and lays a Temptation in their Way to *think more highly*

*highly of themselves, than they ought to think.*

Which naturally leads us to that other Expression of the Text, *neither be thou over-wise*, i. e. (as the wisest of Men, *Solomon* in another Place, and the great Apostle *St. Paul* after him, speak) *be not wise in thine own Eyes, or in thine own Conceit.* Prov. iii. 7. Rom. xii. 16. or (in other words) do not imagine thou art wiser than thou really art. And the Connexion between being *righteous over-much*, and being *over-wise*, i. e. vain and self-conceited, is very evident both from Reason, and Experience. When once a Person has taken it into his Fancy that he is more than ordinarily *holy*, he of course imagines that he is more than ordinarily *wise*; for what (says he) is Holiness, but the truest Wisdom? And besides; one of his transcendent Advances in Piety must needs be assisted with extraordinary Illuminations to improve his Understanding: And so he goes on, misapplying those Words of the Psalmist, *I have more Understanding than my Teachers; for thy Testimonies are my Study: I*

*am wiser than the aged, because I keep thy Commandments.* Psal. cxix. 99, 100.

However that be; do we not see in fact, that these *righteous over-much* are likewise *over-wise*: i. e. *wise in their own Conceits*? Do not ignorant, illiterate People presume to *expound the Scriptures*? which can never be done as it should be, but by Persons skill'd in Languages, History, and Antiquity, and such as have made Learning their Study, and Profession. — Suppose another, tho' in holy Orders, yet a raw Novice, very lately initiated into them, shall, upon the Principle of being *righteous over-much*, take upon him, at his first setting out, to execute, as it were, the Office of an Apostle, to be a Teacher, not only of all the Laity, in all Parts of the Kingdom, but of the Teachers themselves, the learned Clergy, many of them learned before he was born; to reflect upon, and censure them as if they did not know their Duty, or would not do it, without being instructed, and reprov'd by *Him*; what is This but an Outrage, upon common Decency, and common Sense; the  
Height

Height of Presumption, Confidence, and Self-Sufficiency; so ridiculous as to create the greatest Laughter, were it not so deplorable and detestable, as to create the greatest Grief and Abhorrence? Especially; if vast Multitudes are so sottish, and wicked too, as in a tumultuous manner to run madding after him? Surely it is shocking, and prodigious, for so *young a Son of Levi to take so much upon him.*

Having thus under my First Head consider'd what we may here reasonably *understand* by being *righteous over-much*, and *over-wise*; I proceed now to shew, under my Second, †

II. The extreme *Folly* and *Weakness*, of it; and its Contrariety both to sound Reason and true Religion. This may in a good measure be collected from what has been said already, in stating the *Nature* of being *righteous over-much*. For from thence it has appeared, that it is an *Extreme*; that it is *Excess*; that it is a *Deviation from Vertue*; therefore *vicious*; therefore contrary to *right Reason*, and *true Morality*; therefore to the *Christian Religion*. But I shall  
now

now more explicitly unfold this Matter, by instancing in some Particulars not yet mention'd, and enlarging upon others, which have been only mention'd; by which the *righteous over-much* would impose their *extraordinary Novelties* upon us; give a short Specimen (for that will be sufficient) of our Arguments *against* them; of Theirs in defence *of* them; and of our Answers *to* them.

These Doctrines and Practices of theirs, I say, are so far from being the Perfection of Christianity; that they are repugnant to it, as well as to Reason. These Men tell us, that according to the Spirit and Genius of the Christian Religion, we must absolutely renounce all the Possessions and Enjoyments of the World, and have nothing at all to do with them; “ That not  
 “ only the Vices (I speak the Words of  
 “ one of these Writers) \* the Wicked-  
 “ ness, and Vanity of this World, but  
 “ even its most lawful and allow'd  
 “ Concerns, render Men unable to en-  
 “ ter, and unworthy to be receiv'd in-  
 “ to

\* Mr. Law's Christian Perfection, p. 71.

“ to the true State of Christianity.”  
 That † “ the Wildom from above con-  
 demns all Labour, as equally fruit-  
 less, but that which labours after  
 everlasting Life.” † So here’s an ut-  
 ter Condemnation of all Trades, and of  
 all Professions except one, if that be  
 excepted; of all Business, and secular  
 Concerns whatsoever. According to  
 the same Divinity, ’tis a Sin to be rich;  
 a Christian ought not to leave an Estate  
 behind him, when he dies; but is  
 obliged to sell all he has, and give it  
 to the Poor. Going to Law is abso-  
 lutely unlawful, even on the defensive  
 Side; so that if a Man sues you for  
 your House or Land, without the least  
 pretence of Right, you are bound to  
 recede from your Right, and let him  
 have it, rather than defend it. That  
 no Sort of Gayety or Expensiveness in  
 Dress is permitted to any Persons what-  
 soever: No sort of Recreation or Di-  
 version; nothing but an universal Mor-  
 tification, and Self-denial: No Plea-  
 sure, but from Religion only; so that  
 to taste an agreeable Fruit, or smell to  
 a Rose must be unlawful: The bodily  
 Appetites

Appetites must not be in the least Degree gratify'd, any farther than is absolutely necessary to keep Body and Soul together, and Mankind in Being: No Allowances are to be made for Melancholy, Misfortune, or human Infirmary: Grief must be cur'd only by Prayer; to divert it (as the World speaks) by worldly Amusements, is carnal and unchristian: No Books must be read, but Books of Piety: Even the noble Writings of the ancient *Greeks* and *Romans* are unfit to be perus'd by a Christian; who ought to renounce human Learning, and *know nothing but Jesus Christ, and Him crucify'd.* Now is it not a sufficient Confutation of all This, to appeal to common Sense; and then ask every Christian, Whether what is inconsistent with That, can be consistent with Christianity? The Apostle, *Rom. xii. 1.* bids us present our *Bodys* to God; but these Men talk as if we had no Bodys at all. The true and judicious Professors of our Religion say of Reason and Christianity what *St. Paul* says of the Law and Faith, *Rom. iii. 31.* *Do we then make void Reason through Christianity?*

anity? *God forbid; yea we establish Reason.*

But Those who maintain these strange Doctrines will perhaps alledge, that we suppose the Thing in question: That the said Doctrines are contain'd in Scripture; therefore are agreeable to the Christian Religion, and consequently to Reason, according to our own Account. But I answer, none of them can be prov'd from Scripture, and some of them are contrary to it. Our blessed Saviour *came eating and drinking*, was present at Weddings, and other Entertainments; nay, at one of them work'd a Miracle to make Wine, when it is plain there had been more drank than was absolutely necessary for the support of Nature; and consequently something had been indulg'd to Pleasure, and Chearfulness. If it be a Crime to be rich; how comes *St. Paul* to give Precepts and Commands to rich Men as such, without the least Censure, or Reflection upon them for being so? *Charge them that are rich in this World, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain Riches, but in the living God,*

D

*who*

*who giveth us all Things richly to enjoy*: [By the way it appears from hence, that we may *enjoy* these Things; consequently this Sort of *Enjoyment* is not unlawful.] *That they do good, that they be rich in good Works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in Store for themselves a good Foundation against the Time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal Life*: 1 Tim. vi. 17, 18, 19. Nay this Text is a Proof of the contrary: For it seems a rich Man may be a good Man, be *rich in good Works*, go to Heaven, and *lay hold on eternal Life*. The same Apostle advises Christians, even in Times of Persecution, so to *use the World, as not to abuse it*; 1 Cor. vii. 31. We may *use* it then: Which sure no-body would do, (it would not be worth while) unless by *using* it he in some measure *enjoy'd* it. If no Books are to be read, but sacred and divine ones, if no Heathen Authors particularly must be perus'd by Christians; how happens it, that St. *Paul* was learned in the Wisdom of the *Greeks* and *Romans*, (as *Moses* was in That of the *Egyptians*) several times quotes  
the

the Writings of the *Greek* Poets, and incorporates them into the Body of his own? We ought not, they say, to blame their Doctrines for being strict: And we would not, if they were true. As the Case stands; we do not blame them only for being *strict*, but for being *false*: We are for as much Strictness as Christianity requires; which indeed is a great deal; and no more need be added: But we will never allow, that a Doctrine must be *eminently Christian*, merely because 'tis *strict*; when at the same time we can prove, that it is *contrary to Christianity*, as well as to *Reason*. †

But Texts of Scripture are urg'd to prove these their Doctrines. Our Saviour declares, that *whosoever forsakes not all that he has cannot be his Disciple*. And the young rich Man in the Gospel, tho' very well inclin'd, could not be a Christian; because he would not sell his Estate, and give it to the Poor. But besides that *forsaking all* may very well mean no more, than *being ready to do so*, whenever the Discharge of *our Duty* shall require it, (and This what Christian denies?)

will any one say, that the Case is the same with Christians in all Ages, as it was in the Days of Christ, and his Apostles? Is not the Case quite alter'd? Every-body knows, that in those Times, it was almost impossible for a Man to adhere to Christ, without hazarding the Loss of his temporal Goods, and even of his Life? But is it so now? Our Saviour, it is further alledg'd, commands his Disciples to *take no thought, what they should eat, drink, or wear*: But the Words in the Original  $\mu\grave{\eta}$  μεριμνᾶτε, \* be not anxious, solicitous, or distracted, are far from excluding all Care, or Concern about these Things. In another Place, it is argued, he has these Words; *Labour not for the Meat that perisheth, but for that Meat which endureth unto everlasting Life*, † i. e. according to the Hebrew Idiom, perpetually made use of by the Writers of the New Testament, not so much for the one as for the other. And the same may be said of that other alledg'd Text, || *Lay not up for yourselves Treasures on Earth,*

\* Matth. vi. 25.

† Job. vi. 27.

|| Matth. vi. 19, 20.

*Earth, but Treasures in Heaven*; i. e. be infinitely more careful for the latter, than the former. Those Expressions of our blessed Lord, *Matth. v. turning one Cheek, when the other is smitten; giving the Cloak, when the Coat is demanded, &c. seeming* to forbid all repelling of Force and Violence, particularly Law-suits, are only *proverbial* and *hyperbolic* Phrases, prohibiting Revenge, and a litigious Temper; commanding a patient Enduring of Injuries, in lesser Matters, or when they are in any degree tolerable, according to the Dictates of sober Reason, Prudence, and Equity. In the same Chapter, he *seems* at first View to forbid all Manner of *Swearing*: but the Context restraining it to common Conversation, would any one interpret it literally? Especially since in other Places of Scripture some swearing is commanded; and the Apostles, the Angels, and God himself recommend it by their Examples? It is well known what wild Work we must make with the Scriptures, and indeed with all other Writings of any Depth and Difficulty; if we take *every Word*  
and

and *Expression* in its *first, literal,* and most *rigorous Signification*, without attending to the main *Drift* and *Scope* of the *Writer*, and explaining what is obscure by what is easy and obvious. I only hint at these their Reasonings from Scripture, to give a Specimen or Sample of them; not pretending to answer their Arguments at large; which indeed it is not worth while to do, they being not considerable enough to be formally and professedly refuted. J

The Truth is, all their Arguments both from Reason and Scripture are (as all Arguments ever must be that are contrary to Common Sense) entirely fallacious, and inconclusive; confounding very distinct Ideas with one another; as the *Abuse* of a Thing with the *Use* of it; chiefly with *only*; *dangerous* with *unlawful*, &c. In the Course of their Reasonings *one* Thing is *mistaken* for *another*. As, when it is propos'd to be prov'd, that it is unlawful to take Pleasure in any of this World's Goods; the Arguments prove no more than the Unlawfulness of *Luxury*, which no-body denies.

They

They are likewise (as is usual upon these Occasions) inconsistent with themselves, and run into manifest Self-contradictions. ✕ Thus one of these Writers, as I said, positively asserts, that all Christians, in all Ages, are obliged to sell all they have, and give it to the Poor. But being aware, I suppose, of some Objections (as it would be strange indeed if he should not) he elsewhere says, that \* “ He sufficiently selleth all, who parteth with the Self-enjoyment of it, and maketh it the Support of those that want it.” To pass by that odd Expression *Self-enjoyment* of it; it seems then at last by *selling* all is meant, *not selling* all; but not enjoying any Thing, and supporting the Poor. Tho’ this is a wonderful Way of explaining one’s self; I deny even this: And how is it prov’d that we must enjoy none of these Things? Why, by no Arguments, but such as conclude only against Luxury, and Covetousness; as I observ’d before. ✕

Many

\* *LAW of Christian Perfection*, P. 115:

Many Things indeed are intermixed with these singular Doctrines, which are true, and of great Importance. This World is certainly very vain, and a mere nothing in comparison of the World to come: It is as certainly our Duty to live above it, to be heavenly-minded, and to set our Affections upon things above, more than upon things on Earth. But does it from hence follow, that we must have nothing to do with the World, but, literally speaking, live in it, as if we were not in it? Questionless, Self-denial, Mortification, and taking up our Cross, is necessary; and we shall be sure to have Opportunities enough for it, by resisting our vicious Appetites, and patiently suffering Afflictions. I grant too, that some voluntary Suffering inflicted upon ourselves, as Fasting, &c. is ordinarily very requisite; and in some Cases little less than necessary. But why must we allow ourselves no Pleasure in worldly Things? Is there no such Thing as innocent Diversion? Or will any body in his Wits say so? We should use our Flesh, as a good King would his Subjects, or a good Master

Master his Servants; that is, keep it in due Subjection, not pamper it into Rebellion, or Disobedience; yet not be unnecessarily cruel to it, nor torment it for the sake of tormenting it. We must, it is no less true, renounce the Poms and Vanities of the World: But how? *So as not to follow, or be led by them*; as our Church speaks; that is, not be enslav'd by them, or immoderately given up to them. But surely some Christians not only may, but must, admit of *Pomps*; otherwise, what would become of Sovereignty, and Magistracy? And all Christians must have to do with some *Vanities*; or else *they must needs go out of the World* indeed; for the World itself is all over *Vanity*. I grant too, that many who are thought good Christians are not (it is to be feared) truly such: This I not only grant, but insist upon. But why must so much Falshood be built upon so much Truth? Why must we be strain'd up to such a Pitch of Strictness, as is not only not requir'd by Christianity, but inconsistent with it?

III. I proceed now, in the Third Place, to shew the *dangerous Tendency*, and *pernicious Consequences* of being *righteous over-much*, and *over-wise*. *Why shouldest thou destroy thyself?* Here we must premise, that as there are several Sorts, and Degrees of being *righteous over-much*; they are not all equally vicious, nor equally dangerous, and destructive. In Some, it proceeds rather from Folly, and Weakness of Judgment, than from any more malignant Principle. In Some, it is attended with Pride, and Self-conceit; In Others not. In Some, 'tis well-meaning Weakness; in Others ill-meaning Hypocrisy: But in All, 'tis wrong and vicious; tho' not equally so. I say, vicious, as well as wrong, even in the best of them. For neither *Weakness of Judgment*, nor even a *good Intention* in the *Person*, can possibly alter the *Nature* of the *Thing*. All Deviations from Virtue are, and must be, in themselves vicious; and the Tendency of them dangerous more, or less; whatever be the Principle of them; or with whatever other accidental Circumstances they

they are attended. This being premis'd, I proceed.

These Extraordinarys, and Excesses, do infinite Mischief to Religion, and the Souls of Men. The other Extreme indeed is so far more *pernicious*, as it is more *common*: But still This is pernicious too: And because it is not so much observ'd, or apprehended, as the other, it is upon that account, as well as others, carefully to be guarded against. It dejects and perplexes Persons truly and sincerely religious, making them think they do not their Duty, when they really do: On the other Hand, it hardens the wicked, and profane; making them explode the Christian Religion, as being impracticable, and by consequence irrational: Of which more presently. These *righteous over-much* therefore and *over-wise* give great occasion to the Enemies of the Lord to blaspheme: They bring up an evil Report upon the true genuine Christianity; as the Spies from the Camp of the *Israelites* did upon the good Land they were sent to search: Only with this Difference; They had seen, and were acquainted

acquainted with the *good Land* which they misrepresented, and traduced; whereas These are not acquainted with the true Spirit, and Genius of Christianity. They even give Countenance and Encouragement (however undesignedly) to Those who are vicious in the other Extreme, to the Leud, and Debauch'd, the Irreligious, and Profane. So far are we from acting imprudently, or improperly, while we shew the Danger of this Extreme, at a Time when we see, and acknowledge that the other is so prevailing: Tho' let it be remember'd, by the way, that this, of which we are discouraging, is more than ordinarily prevailing too: And I say it gives Encouragement even to Those of the contrary Extreme. For when they see the *highest Professors* of Religion teaching such absurd Doctrines, and seconding them with such absurd Practices; they flatter themselves (tho' indeed very foolishly) that Religion itself is an absurd Thing, and that there is no Truth, or solid Reason in it: And so are harden'd, and confirmed in their Libertinism, and dissolute Course  
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of Living, in their Profaneness, and Infidelity. *Why* therefore shouldst thou destroy thyself, Thou righteous over-much, by destroying others, in casting so much Scandal, and Reproach upon Religion?

But to come more closely and directly, to the Persons themselves. *Seest thou a Man wise in his own Conceit? There is more hope of a Fool, than of him,* says the wisest of Men, the Author of my Text, in another Place, *Prov.* xxvi. 12. And we see that to be *wise in one's own conceit*, and *righteous over-much* are here join'd together. Alas! Generally speaking a great Part of our Lives is spent, before we are wise enough to perceive that we are Fools; before we know enough to be sensible of our Ignorance. For the more we *truly* know, the more sensible we are how little we know: The Knowledge even of the most Learned being infinitely exceeded by their Ignorance: But then they *know That Ignorance*; which perhaps is the best Part of their Knowledge. True Wisdom therefore is always modest, diffident, and humble:

ble: But *real Ignorance* is apt to be confident, pragmatical, and presumptuous. 'Tis for this Reason that Those who run into the Follies of which we are speaking, are for the most Part *young People*; who are prone to be forward, and assuming: Whereas a considerable Portion of our Lives is spent, before we come to any maturity of Judgment; for to That *Experience* very much contributes. These more especially are apt to be *over-wise*, or *wise in their own conceits*: And what the wisest of Men says of such we have just now heard. To which *Reflection* of His in That Place, we may add his *Advice* in another; partly cited before. *Be not wise in thine own Eyes: Fear the Lord, and depart from Evil.* *Prov. iii. 7.* Plainly intimating that those who are *wise in their own conceit*, or *over-wise*, which is here join'd with being *righteous over-much*, have not the *true Fear* of God, and do not depart from Evil; however they may imagine themselves to be more wise, and righteous, than others. To which we may add That of the same

same inspired Writer in another Place, *Pride goeth before Destruction.* Prov. xvi. 18.

But perhaps it will be said, that Those, of whom we are speaking, are so far from being proud, that they are the *poorest in Spirit*, the meekest, the most humble, and mortify'd of Mankind. But there is a mighty difference between Appearance and Reality: There is often the deepest Pride, where there is no high, or lofty Look; and the Height of Confidence and Self-sufficiency, under the Guise and Semblance of the greatest Modesty. But how then shall we *distinguish*; since we know not the Hearts of Men? I answer, We certainly ought to judge charitably; and believe every Man to be what he *seems*, if he seems to be good; unless we have Proof and Evidence of the contrary. *By their Fruits therefore ye shall know them*; as our Saviour speaks of Those who *come in Sheep's Cloathing, but inwardly are ravening Wolves.* Matth. vii. 15, 16. A Pharisaical Ostentation, and outward Show of Piety, *Praying,*

ing, or Singing Psalms *in the Corners of the Streets, to be seen of Men*, (Matth. vi. 5.) is one undoubted Sign of Pride, and That the worst sort of it, *Spiritual Pride*. Again; He is proud, who *exercises himself in great Matters which are too high for him*, Psal. cxxxi. 1. who pretends to be more than ordinarily knowing in things which he knows nothing of; who peremptorily censures his Betters, and takes upon him to teach his Teachers. All which (to omit many other Instances) is contrary to the *Spirit and Genius of the Gospel*, to the *Modesty and Humility of the Christian Religion*. These, and such like, Symptoms are certain Indications of Pride, and That the worst Sort of it. Or if not Pride (for I desire to judge as favourably and softly as possible) 'tis a *Folly* that approaches very near to *Madness*; and the Consequences of it are never the less pernicious to others, whatever is to be said of the Persons themselves.

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But supposing this disease to be of the *worst sort*, it is one of the most dangerous that can be imagined; perhaps the most dangerous of any. For besides the consideration of Pride, spiritual Pride, already taken Notice of; what is it but *calling Evil Good, and Good Evil; putting Darknes for Light, and Light for Darknes; putting Bitter for Sweet, and Sweet for Bitter?* Isa. v. 20. *Excesses and Extremes*, which are always *Vices*, being extolled and recommended as the *Perfection of Virtue?* But the most dangerous Circumstance is this; that such persons are of all the *most difficult to be reclaimed* from their Errors and Vices. Others, tho' very bad Men, and difficult enough to be reformed, are sensible however that they *are* bad Men; but with these 'tis quite the reverse: In their own Imagination their Errors are the Height of Wisdom, and their Sins and Vices the most perfect Vertues. They think themselves the greatest Saints; when in truth, and for that very Reason, the grand Enemy (as it is to be feared) has the fastest hold of them; they are *under strong Delusion, in the Gall of Bitterness, and in the Bond of Iniquity*. They may indeed (and God grant they may) be convinced, and forsake the

Error of their Ways; nay, by his Grace they certainly will; if laying aside Prejudice, they listen to the sober Dictates of right Reason, and sound Religion.

Farther; as to be thus *righteous over-much* is in *itself* very *dangerous* and *pernicious*; so there is great *danger* of People's *falling into it*. Tho' the other Extreme be more common; yet this (as I hinted before) is common likewise. To run from one Extreme to another, or at least to be in one Extreme, or other, is the weak Side of human Nature. And this on the excessive part is the more *fallacious* of the two: because the other is plain and obvious to every body; but here Vice has the *Appearance*, and even the *Name* of Vertue; which there it has not. *Drunkenness*, or any other *Intemperance*, for Example, can never pass for a Vertue; but *foolish excessive Abstinence* may.

Then for the *spreading*, propagating, and diffusing of these extraordinary novel Doctrines and Practices; there is great Danger of that also. The Generality, the main Bulk of the People, are injudicious, and easy to be imposed upon. They are wonderfully struck with every Thing that is *new* and *unusual*, (another Weakness of human Nature)

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never considering, that Truth is the oldest Thing in the World; and that in Religion and Morality whatever is *really* new, is certainly false. To gratify their itch of Curiosity, they run in Multitudes after these extra-regular Novelists; not thinking of the Danger they incur by so doing. In Truth, there is scarce any Thing, among all the *Phænomena*, or Appearances of Nature, more astonishing and unaccountable than popular *Error* and *Delusion*; *one Fool* (as the common Saying is) *making many*. Much indeed might be said in the speculative Way, to give some Account of it: But I have not Time, nor is it my Business at present; it being rather Matter of Philosophy, than Divinity; of Curiosity, than Edification. Thus much only in general: It proceeds from great Weakness, and want of Judgment; from the universal Depravation and Corruption of human Nature, by the Fall of Man; as does all Folly, Error, Sin, and Misery: But then let it be ever remember'd, that God has provided, and put into our Hands, a Remedy for all this; that is right Reason and holy Scripture: which if we do not make use of, it is our own Fault, and we must severely answer for it at the Day of Judgment.

Add to this, that the great Enemy of Souls adapts his Temptations to *all sorts of Tempers* and Dispositions. Those who are inclined to be profane and debauch'd, we need not say how easily he prevails upon. But as for those who are disposed to be good and virtuous; if he cannot prevail with them to be *vicious*, commonly *so call'd*, he labours to make them *over-virtuous*, that is, *vicious*, tho' *not commonly* so called: And so involves them in the Dangers and Mischiefs of which we are speaking.

Some more of which, not yet taken Notice of, are these following. The two great Hindrances of Salvation are *Presumption* in the one Extreme, and *Desperation* in the other. Now this *over-much Righteousness*, or *Righteousness falsely so called*, is apt to produce both these; *Presumption* in some, *Despair* in others. For a Man to conceit himself transcendently virtuous and holy, when he is not so at all; to think himself *certain of Salvation*, when he is in great *Danger of Damnation*, is manifestly the highest *Presumption* imaginable. Another, on the contrary, being persuaded that it is his *Duty* to do those extraordinary Works above specified, with many such like; and finding that he neither

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does, nor is able to do them, is tempted to *despair* of his Salvation, as some of late, we are told, have actually done. They have been made *stark mad*, and received into *Bedlam*, as such. And was the Religion of Jesus Christ, that *reasonable Service* \*, as *St. Paul* styles it, intended to make People mad? Is this for the Honour of Christianity? Others, we are told, by immoderate Abstinence, have starv'd themselves to Death. To these the Words of my Text are applicable in the strictest Sense, *Be not righteous over-much; why shouldst thou DESTROY THYSELF?*

The Mischiefs done of late, and in so short a Time, by such Doctrines and Teachers, are sufficiently known to the World. They have set the nearest and dearest Relations at variance; disturb'd the Quiet of Families; nay, thrown whole Neighbourhoods and Parishes into Confusion.

The *Church* itself, as a regular, well-order'd *Society*, is by these irregular upstart *Societies*, even by the *best* of them, and much more by the *worst*, greatly weaken'd and impair'd. By these *Extraordinaries* they take off from the Re-

\* Rom. xii. 1.

verence due to the *ordinary* standing Rules and Laws of the Church. For tho' they do constantly attend divine Service, as prescribed in the publick Offices ; yet I appeal to all *discerning* and *judicious* Persons, whether, *in the Nature of Things*, they are not likely to set a greater Value upon *their own particular Meetings* and *Exercises*, set up purely by their own Fancies, and commanded by no Authority of God, or Man. To be plain ; If what I am inform'd of these Meetings be true, they are Schismatical, in their *Tendency* at least, tho' not so design'd : For there may be a Schism *in* the Church, as well as a Schism *from* it. If it be true, that they consist of considerable Numbers, that they have Prayers (some too extemporary ones) and Preaching, or something like it ; I do not see how they can be deem'd Legal Assemblies. The publick Meetings of Protestant Dissenters from the Church are tolerated by Law, and licens'd by Authority ; but I never heard that these are either : if they should be, I doubt there would be more Danger *to* the Church from a kind of Half-Dissenters *in* it, than from those who are total Dissenters *from* it. Now that the weakening of our pure, primitive, Apostolical

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cal Church, as a Society, must needs weaken the inward *Power of Godliness*, is evident ; because the Ordinances of the Church are the Outworks and Fortifications of inward Christian Piety and Vertue.

But there is *one Mischief* of being *righteous over-much*, which I have reserved for the *last*, to be more *largely* and *particularly* considered : Which is this, that it *tends* at least to that baneful Plague ENTHUSIASM. It is itself somewhat *nthusiastical* at best ; and *tends*, as I said, to *downright Enthiasm*. I do not say, that all *Righteous over-much* are *Enthusiasts* ; but I do say, that in all Ages *Enthusiasts* have been *righteous over-much* ; they began with the *last-mention'd*, and ended with the *other*. And is it not so in these Times ? To what a Height of *Fanatick Madness* in *Doctrin*e, as well as *Practice*, are some advanced, who set out at first with an Appearance of *more than ordinary Sanctity* in *Practice* only ?

By *Enthiasm* is meant a Person's having a strong, but false Persuasion, that he is *divinely inspired* ; or at least, that he has *the Spirit* of God *some way or other* ; and This made known to him in a *particular* and *extraordinary* Manner. Whether our modern *Righteous over-much*  
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do *as yet* pretend to a *Spirit of Prophecy*, I cannot say: I hear, however, they talk of *Dreams, Visions, and Revelations*. Be that as it will, we now see their *Actions*: and I argue thus. Either they think themselves inspired, or they do not. If they *do*, they are *Enthusiasts*; because that Persuasion of their being inspired is supported by *no Evidence*, and consequently *false*: For to those who were really inspired by God, of old, He always gave *Evidence*, and *Proof* that they were so; and always must; because otherwise the Inspiration is of no Use. If they do *not*, they are *mad another way*; supposing themselves, without extraordinary Assistance from God, to be capable of performing Things, which, without such Assistance, 'tis impossible they should perform: That Persons wholly unlearned, for Instance, or very little learned, whether Laic or Ecclesiastic, should by their own mere Abilities interpret, or expound difficult Places of Scripture, which cannot be done, without very great Learning. Take it which way you will, they are either *mad in Enthusiasm*, or *mad in Ignorance, Pride, and Confidence*: Pride and Confidence, shocking and prodigious, not only in a *Christian*, but in a *Human Creature*.

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But to return to *certain* Enthusiasm; Since those of whom we are speaking pretend, if not to direct divine *Revelation*, and *Prophecy*, yet to some *extraordinary Motions*, and *Impulses* of the *Spirit*: I ask them, What *Proof* have they of such *Motions* or *Impulses*? Why, they say, they have the *strongest Persuasion* of them. And I say, there is *strong Delusion*, as well as *strong Persuasion*; and the *latter* is most certainly the *former*, if there be no *Evidence* to prove it otherwise. O! but they are *sure* of it; they *see* it; they *feel* it: And do we want *Reasons* and *Arguments* to convince us, that the Sun shines at Noon-day? or that we feel any outward Impressions made upon our Bodies? I answer; This is arguing from a mere *Metaphor*; which was never yet allowed to be good Arguing. Do they then *see* the Light of the *Spirit* within them, in as *strict*, *proper*, and *literal* a Sense, as we *see* the Light of the *Sun*? Or *feel* his Impulses just in the same manner as by natural Sensation we *feel* Pleasure, or Pain, or any other Impressions made upon our Bodies? If they reply they *do*, 'tis perfect Phrenzy: All the World *knows* it to be *false*; and those, who *talk* at this Rate, are not fit to be *talk'd with* at all. If

they say they do *not*, we are come back to the *strong certain Persuasion* aforesaid. For nothing else is meant by this *Seeing*, and this *Feeling*: And to that *Persuasion* we have spoken already. In short, their Argument stands Thus: It is so, BECAUSE it is so; and they are *sure*, BECAUSE they are sure: And what an Argument that is, let any one in his Senses judge.

However, *sure they are*, it seems: At such a Place and Time exactly, they felt the Spirit rush upon them; and so can give a ready Answer to that old Fanatic Question: When and where, at what Place, at what Time, on what Day of the Month, at what Hour of the Day, did the Spirit come pouring upon you with irresistible Force, and seize you as his own? This, I say, is nothing but a Revival of the old Fanaticism in the last Century; when all manner of Madness was practis'd, and all manner of Villainy committed *in the Name of the Lord*, as those profane Hypocrites, or Enthusiasts, or both, at that time express'd themselves. But what do they mean by *having the Spirit*? Being *born again of him*, or, in other Words, being *regenerate*? If so; I ask, have we not the *new Birth*, and, in this Sense,  
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the *Spirit*; if we have a stedfast Faith in God and Jesus Christ, a Faith lively, and productive of Good Works; if we heartily repent of all our Sins, and effectually reform them; if our Consciences, in the main, condemn us not, but acquit and applaud us? They answer, it seems, that all this is nothing; unless we *see, feel, or hear something* within us. Being ask'd what that *something* is, they reply; They *only perceive* it, but cannot *explain* it. This now (if any thing more be meant by it, as they plainly do mean something more, tho' they know not what, than a *good Conscience*, and the Comforts of the Holy Ghost consequent upon it, which who denies?) is downright Enthusiasm and Phrenzy in Religion. 'Tis dethroning the higher Power of the Soul, *Judgment*; and setting up the lower Faculty, *Fancy*, or *Imagination*, in its room. And when that *grand Deceiver*, the *Devil*, has the Scene of *Fancy* or *Imagination* left clear to himself, to act his Illusions and Impostures upon; it is easy to judge what *dreadful Consequences* are like to follow. That there is such a thing as the Operation and Influence of the Holy Spirit upon our Souls (for what else is *God's Grace*, without which we

can do no good thing?) tho' we cannot distinguish it from the Operations of our own Minds, is not only granted, but insisted upon, by all sincere and judicious Christians. But what Reason, what Scripture, is there for this *inward Seeing, Feeling, and Hearing*? Read, by all means (I earnestly recommend it) the excellent Bishop Bull's incomparable Discourse *Concerning the Spirit of God in the Faithful; how and in what manner it doth bear Witness with their Spirits, that they are the Children of God; and what Degree of Hope or Persuasion concerning their Adoption this Witness of the Spirit doth ordinarily produce in the Faithful;* upon this Text of the Apostle, *Rom. viii. ver. 16. The Spirit beareth Witness with our Spirit, that we are the Children of God.* It is the Third Discourse in his Third Volume. Read it, I say, over and over; and digest it thoroughly in your Thoughts. I might in truth say the same of all his admirable Discourses. There you will see difficult Scriptures *really* interpreted and expounded; there you will see the Difference between true Doctrine and false, between *sound Divinity* and *Enthusiasm*; between the deepest, yet clearest Learning, join'd with the greatest Humility, on the one hand,

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and ignorant, illiterate Pride, and Confidence, on the other.

The *Doctrines* they graft upon this wild Persuasion of their *having* and *feeling the Spirit*, are (like the Persuasion itself) *false* and *pernicious*. Such as these: No Man can be in a State of Salvation, without being *sure* of it; and on the other hand, if he be *sure* of it, he is certainly *in* it: Meaning by the Word *sure*, most strongly and thoroughly persuaded. This, I say, is both *false*, and *pernicious*. *False*; Because it makes the *Reality of Things* depend upon *our Persuasion* concerning them; than which nothing can be more senseless and absurd: On the contrary, our *Persuasion*, if true, must be founded upon the *Truth and Reality of Things*. *Pernicious*; Because here again we have *Despair* on the one hand, *Presumption* on the other. The former Part of this Doctrine tends to plunge into Despair Those who, whether *with*, or *without* Reason, have *not* this strong Persuasion of their being in a State of Salvation; and the latter to confirm in the Height of *Presumption* Those who, without Reason, *have* it. The real Truth of the Matter is this. It is one thing to be *certainly in* a good State; and another thing

to be *certain of it*: Tho' between those two very *different* things these false Spiritualists seem to make no *Distinction*. A Man may *be* in a State of Salvation, and yet by reason of Melancholy, Weakness of Judgment, or even Modesty and Humility, think he is *not*: On the contrary, he may be in a *very bad* way; and yet by reason of a sanguine Temper, Presumption, Pride, or Enthusiasm, conceit himself to be in a *very good* one. These People therefore may have the strongest Persuasion of their being in the sure Way to Heaven, and yet be far from it; nay *the farther*, upon the Account of that *very Persuasion*. And others may be, *certainly*, in the number of those who shall be saved, yet be *doubtful* concerning it, nay verily persuaded of the contrary. What *Proof* again have these Men for their confident Assertions? Why none at all; but, just as before, they are *sure*. But I ask once more, *Why* are they sure? Upon what *Grounds*, what *Evidence*? There it all turns; that is the only *Question* to the Purpose: If That be not well answered, all the rest is empty and insignificant. And yet, upon this groundless Confidence, how do they flatter and delude *themselves*; how judge and condemn *others*!

Do you *feel* the Spirit within you? Are you *feelingly sure* of your Salvation? The Answer being given in the Negative, as it well may, and yet those who give it be very safe; the immediate Reply is, **THEN YOU ARE DAMN'D.** Who can hear this without Horror and Detestation? Who can bear the audacious Presumption and Uncharitableness of these Wretches; thus, like *Solomon's Mad-man*, *Prov. xxvi. 18. casting their Firebrands, Arrows, and Death; and sending to Hell* (only because they are not of *their own frantick Persuasion*) millions of Christians *much better than themselves?*

I have still something to add concerning their pretended *Assurance*, or *Certainty* of their *having the Spirit*. This false Assurance may (and I hear does) produce very mischievous Effects, *different from, and even contrary to* each other; according to the *different Tempers* of different Persons. Some argue, that since they have *received the Holy Ghost*, every Sin they afterwards commit is a *Sin against the Holy Ghost*, and therefore *unpardonable*: So they are driven to *Desperation* and *Madness* on that Side. Others, may imagine, as some have actually done, that since they have the *Holy Ghost*, they *cannot sin at all*; at least

least not so far as to miss of Salvation: Either the *grossest Immoralities*, as Fornication and Adultery, are *in THEM no Sins*: or, if they are; yet, *having once the Spirit*, being *once* regenerate, and born again, they cannot *FINALLY fall away from Grace*, nor cease to be the Children of God. This is reviving the old, exploded, and so often solidly confuted Doctrine of *absolute certain Perseverance*, in the *Regenerate*: A Doctrine which, I verily believe, has contributed more to the Ruin of Souls, than any other that can be well imagined. For 1st, How does it *appear* that they *are* regenerate? Their *strong Persuasion* without Proof will never prove it; as we have often had occasion to observe. But 2dly, Supposing them to be so; the Doctrine of *absolute certain Perseverance* even in the truly Regenerate is *false* again in itself, and *pernicious* in its Consequences.

1st *False*. *Thou standest by Faith*, says the Apostle; *be not high-minded, but fear*. Rom. xi. 20. Why should he fear, if he stands, and is sure not to fall? I know this Passage is thought by many to relate not to particular Persons with regard to their eternal Salvation, but to whole Nations converted from Hea-  
thenism,

thenism, as compared with the People of the Jews, in respect of their once peculiar temporal Privileges: And indeed I am of the same Opinion myself. However, since those who assert absolute indefectible Perseverance in *particular Persons* interpret St. Paul's Discourse of *Predestinating, Choosing, Rejecting, Standing and Falling*, as relating to *particular Persons*, and their *spiritual State*; the Argument will hold *ad hominem*, according to their Exposition; and I see not how they can evade it. In another place the same Apostle has these words: *Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.* 1 Cor. x. 12. Now either he *really* stands, as well as *thinks* he does; or *only* thinks he stands, but *really* does not: If the *latter*, nothing need be said to it: He is *mistaken* even in *thinking* he stands, or is *regenerate*; and so can justly deduce nothing from this Doctrine of absolute Perseverance, supposing it to be true. If the former; if he *really* stands, as well as thinks he does; yet it seems he *may* fall; otherwise, why should he *take Heed* lest he *should* fall? St. Peter thus admonishes those to whom he writes: *Give Diligence to make your Calling and Election sure.* 2 Pet. i. 10.

Whatever be meant by *Calling* and *Election*, *Diligence*, it seems, must be employed to make it *sure*; therefore it is not *sure of itself*. St. Paul advises all in general, the most regenerate not excepted, to *work out their Salvation with Fear and Trembling*. Phil. ii, 12. What Occasion for *Fear* and *Trembling*, or even for *working*, if their Salvation be *sure* already? *The Just shall live by Faith*. Heb. x. 38. *And if he draw back, my Soul shall have no Pleasure in him*. The *Just* then, he *who lives by Faith* (that is, *sure the truly Regenerate*) may *draw back*; so draw back, that God's *Soul shall have no Pleasure in him*: And if so, certainly he falls, and perishes everlastingly. I cite the Passage exactly according to the Truth of the Original: For those Words [*any Man*] are added in our *English Version*, without the least Shadow of Reason or Authority. It would be endless to produce all the Texts to the same Purpose. It appears from the whole Tenor of the Gospel, that the Christian Life is a militant State, a State of Warfare; therefore of Danger more or less; and that (ordinarily speaking at least) we cannot be *sure of Heaven,*

Heaven, 'till we are *in* it, or just *entering into* it.

The Defenders of this Doctrine indeed alledge Texts of Scripture to justify it: But their Arguments from them have been long since abundantly answered by our learned Divines. I will produce one or two of them, for a Specimen or Sample only. Our Saviour speaking of *False Christs* says, *they shall shew Signs and Wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very Elect*, Matth. xxiv. 24. From whence it is inferred, that the Elect cannot possibly be *deceived*, and consequently not *fall away*. But 1st, *Who are the Elect*? If by that Word be meant those who are by God chosen to Salvation, yet is every one so, that *fancies* himself so? But in Truth, the Word *Elect*, both in Scripture, and the Writings of the primitive Fathers, generally at least, means no more than *Christians*, as distinguished from Jews and \* Heathens. 2dly, If the Persons here meant could not be *deceived by false Miracles*, yet they might finally *fall away by something else*. 3dly, The

\* See *Whitby* on *Mark* xiii. 20. and other Commentators.

Words εἰ δυνατόν, *if possible*, may very well relate to those who shall *endeavour to deceive*, and may be rendered thus: They shall *do all they possibly can to deceive* those there mentioned; which does not imply that those Persons cannot *possibly be deceived*. They argue farther from 1 John iii. 9. *Whosoever is born of God doth not commit Sin, for his Seed remaineth in him; and he cannot commit Sin, because he is born of God.* But why must this prove, that he who is really *born of God* cannot *finally fall away*? Why may it not as well (or rather much better, especially since so many other Texts of Scripture assert the contrary Doctrine) be no more than an *Explanation* of the *new Birth*; declaring *wherein it consists*; at least what is the certain *Proof* or *Evidence* of it. To be *born of God* is not to commit Sin, *i. e.* *great and grievous Sin* (for *in many things we offend all.* James iii. 2.) And he who is so, does not, and cannot commit it, *while he is so*: Because, while he is so, his Seed (*i. e.* the *Grace*, or *word* of God) *remaineth in him*. But does it therefore follow, that he cannot *lose* it, when so many plain Scriptures assure us that he

may? The fewer and obfcurer Texts certainly ought to be interpreted by the greater Number, and the more plain and eafy. But were Scripture filent in this matter; does not our own Reason tell us, that, with refpect to the Health of his *Soul*, as well as of his *Body*, a Man may be in a *good State* at one time, and in a *bad one* at another? that the Grace of God may be *abused*? and that upon fuch Abuse it may be *withdrawn*? What can be more obvious and rational than this?

That the Doctrines we have been examining, if it be *false*, as I have fhewn it to be, *must* be *pernicious*, is plain of itfelf: For he who is *firmly perfuaded* that he is *absolutely safe*, when he is in *great Danger*, *must* needs be in the *more Danger* upon the account of that *very Perfuaſion*. We furely want no Arguments to prove, that *Security* in a State of *War* and *Peril* is of moſt *deſtructive* Conſequence.

The Truth is, theſe *extraordinary Spiritualifts*, notwithstanding their *high Professions*, have in all Ages propagated *Doctrines* deſtructive of a *holy Life*: And their *Practices* too, notwithstanding their Pretences to the greateſt Rigour,

gour, Strictness, and Severity, at their first setting out, have at last been grossly and scandalously *immoral*. Nor is this at all strange: When once Men have forsaken the *via regia*, the King's Highway to Heaven, as plainly marked out in Holy Scripture; deserted the standing Rules and Orders of an excellently constituted Church, as ours is, and ran into such wild Vagaries as have been often seen, and now *are* seen; God only knows where they will stop: They may be so far given up to the *Spirit of Delusion*, as to run into the greatest *Excess of Riot*. The *Montanists* of old, and the *German Anabaptists*, about 240 Years since, are Instances of this; to omit others, both ancient and modern. It appears from History and Experience, that the Gradation has been usually this: *Righteous over-much in Practice* — *Righteous over-much in Practice and Doctrine* — *Immoral and Profligate in Both*: And this *still* with a *Continuation* of the Pretences to an extraordinary Measure of the *Holy Spirit*. It is evident from that of the Apostle, 2 *Tim.* iii. 2, 3, 4, 5. That the *worst of Men* may have a *Form of Godliness*: He is  
by

by very learned Writers supposed to reflect particularly upon that filthy Sect the *Gnosticks*; who wallowed in all manner of Vice and Wickedness, and even taught for Doctrines the most detestable Impurities. Whether St. *Paul* in that Place means *Them*, or no; certain it is, the Founder of their Sect, *Simon Magus*, was a most leud Wretch both in Practice and Doctrine; and yet was called the *great Power of God*. Our present Pretenders to Saintship have among them (it is notorious) Women of a most infamous and prostitute Character: And they say, it seems, that by joining with *Them*, from being great Sinners they become Saints; all being such who are of their Way, and all others Reprobate. This is generally the impudent and unchristian Assertion of Seducers and false Teachers; as of the *Novatians* and *Donatists* of old, of the Papists now; and of most Hereticks, Schismaticks, and Enthusiasts, both ancient and modern. It is *commonly reported*, that Those, with whom we have now to do, maintain other Tenets utterly destructive of Christian Piety. I do not affirm this, because I cannot strictly prove it: But I have  
 heard

heard it affirmed by many. This I am sure of, it is *likely* to be true; because, since they are Revivers of *Antinomianism*, in the Doctrines I have above considered, it is highly probable they are so in others, tho' perhaps not in all. And of the *Antinomian* System in the main take the short Account which follows. " They were  
 " so called, for rejecting the Law as  
 " of no Use under the Gospel. They  
 " say that good Works do not further,  
 " nor evil Works hinder Salvation: That  
 " the Child of God cannot sin; that  
 " God never chastiseth them, nor pu-  
 " nisheth any Land for its Sin: That  
 " Murder, Adultery, Drunkenness, &c.  
 " are Sins in the Wicked, but not in  
 " them: That the Child of Grace, be-  
 " ing once assured of Salvation, never  
 " doubteth afterwards: That no Man  
 " should be troubled in Conscience for  
 " Sin: That no Christian should be  
 " exhorted to perform the Duties of  
 " Christianity: That an Hypocrite may  
 " have all the Graces that were in  
 " *Adam* before the *Fall*: That Christ  
 " is the only Subject of all Grace:  
 " That no Christian believeth, or work-  
 " eth any good, but Christ, only be-  
 " lieveth

“ lieveth and worketh ; that God doth  
 “ not love any Man for his Holiness ;  
 “ that Sanctification is no Evidence of  
 “ Justification, &c \*.

I have not Time so much as to mention many other Particulars which occur to my Thoughts : But one more, not yet mentioned, must by no means be entirely omitted. We have heard of *Field-Conventicles* in *Scotland* among the Enthusiasts of that Country : which yet, I think, were *there* always *suppressed* by the *Authority* of *Church*, or *State*, or *both*. We have in former Times had something of this Nature in *England*, as practised by Brownists, Anabaptists, Quakers, Ranters, or such like. But for a *Clergyman* of the *Church* of *England* to *pray*, and *preach*, in the *Fields* in the Country, or in the *Streets* in the City, is *perfectly new*, never heard of before ; a *fresh Honour* to the *blessed Age*, in which *We* have the Happiness to live. To pray, preach, and sing Psalms, in the *Streets* and *Fields*, is worse, if possible, than *intruding into Pulpits* by

\* *Collier's Dictionary* ; under the Article *Antinomians*. See also *Bp. Bull's Sermons*, Vol. I. p. 12, 13, 14, 15.

downright *Violence*, and *Breach of the Peace*; and then *denying* the plain Fact with the most *infamous Prevarication*\*. I could say much here; but am quite *ashamed* to speak upon a Subject, which is a *Shame and Reproach*, not only to our *Church and Country*, but to *human Nature* itself. I will only add some short *Queries*: Can it promote the *Christian Religion*, to turn it into *Riot, Tumult, and Confusion*? To make it *ridiculous and contemptible*; and expose it to the *Scorn and Scoffs of Infidels, and Atheists*? *St. Paul* commands that *all Things* (in the *Publick Service and Worship of God*) *be done decently, and in order*. Is this *decent and orderly*? If it be *alledged* (as I think it is) that *Christ, and his Apostles, prayed and preached in the Fields, on Mountains, on the Sea-Shore, &c.* I ask, have these *Creatures* the same *Spirit and Power* that they had? They *seem* to say they have indeed: But if they *directly say so*, do they not *blaspheme*? Do they *work Miracles*, as our *Saviour and his Apostles* did? Or give the *least Proof* of the *Spiri-*

\* See the *Weekly Miscellany* concerning the forcible *Intrusion into the Pulpit at St. Margaret's, Westminster.*

rit they pretend to? Is Christianity now in its Infancy, as it was then? Was the Church then established, as it is now? Are we now to be converted to Christianity from Judaism or Heathenism, as People were in those Days? Or if we were; are such false and spurious Apostles as these able to convert us? I might here very properly urge the *Canons* \* of the Church of *England*; and (if I mistake not) the *Laws* of the *Civil State*. But the Thing, tho' detestable, and of most pernicious Tendency, is, in another View, too contemptible to be longer insisted upon. It would likewise be endless, as well as nauseous, to make Reflections, tho' never so just, upon that Rhapsody of Madness, Spiritual Pride, and little less than Blasphemy, if not quite so; which this *Field-Preacher* calls his *Journal*: And so I say no more of it; but shall conclude all with some *Observations* upon others, and some *Application* to ourselves. As to the former; let it be observed,

1st, That this Error of being *righteous over-much* (like other Errors) proceeds from considering only *one Side of*

\* See Canon LXXII and LXXIII.

*Things*; and not taking in the *whole Compass* of an Argument or Subject. Did we *duly reflect* upon *both* Extremes, we should *never fall* into either of them. What! says the *Half-Thinker*, is not *Charity to the Poor* a most excellent thing? And can I be *too* charitable? Can I therefore bestow *too much* upon the Poor? I answer; Would you consider the other side, you would perceive, that tho' you cannot be too charitable, yet you may bestow too much upon the Poor, to the Ruin of your Wife and Children; which is not *Charity*, but *Madness*, and a great and *most grievous Sin*. Did you never hear of that common and very true (tho' often indeed misapply'd) Saying, *Charity begins at Home*? Or, to urge a much better Authority than a vulgar Proverb; Did you never read that of St. Paul, 1 Tim. v. 8. *If any provide not for his own, and specially those of his own House; he hath deny'd the Faith, and is worse than an Infidel*? The same Half-Thinker proceeds: Can I *pray* too much, when the Apostle says *Pray without ceasing*? I answer, Yes, you may: For the same God who gave us *Scripture*, gave us *common Sense*: Which tells us that those Words can mean

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mean no more, than being *always* in an *habitual State* of praying, and *actually* praying both in publick and private, *frequently* and *constantly*; not spending *all our Time* in it, no nor the greatest Part of it, nor any Thing like it: Because, if we should, we could not do the Business of our *ordinary Callings*, nor perform many other even *Christian Duties* (*strictly* such) which our Religion as much requires of us, as Prayer itself. And so of the rest.

2dly. It is to be observed, that a great Part of what has been said in this Discourse is applicable not only to our *new Enthusiasts*, but to those of *longer Standing*; as the *Quakers*, (one of the most pestilent Sects that ever infested the *Christian Church*) the *Anabaptists*, many of whom, among the ignorant Country People at least, are perfect *Enthusiasts*; and, perhaps, some others. All their Doctrine turns upon strange unaccountable Notions about the *Spirit* and *inward Lights*; by which they know not what they mean, and which they confidently *assert* without any Sort of Proof. The *Quakers*, in particular, tell us that the *Light within them* admits of *no Proof*, because it is *self-evident* as a *first Principle*; that

that is, they are *sure*, because *teby* are *sure*; they *see*, and *feel*, and *hear inwardly*; the Folly and Infatuation of which I think I have sufficiently, tho' briefly, exposed.

3dly. Observe the strange *Inconsistency* and *Self-Contradiction* of these *Enthusiasts*. They pretend to extraordinary *Strictness* in *Practice*; yet teach *Doctrines* utterly subversive of *common Morality*. I have *proved* this; and therefore may be allow'd to *affirm* it. However, they talk much of the *Comforts* they feel *within* them; the *Presence* of God *with* them; their *Enlargements* in *Devotion*; and such like. But may not all this, which they imagine to be the *Illapse* of the *best Spirit*, be really the *Delusion* of the *worst*? Nay, is it not *certainly* so; if their *Doctrines* and *Practices* are *contrary to the Gospel*, as I have shewn them to be? Whatever may be thought by some of the *Quakers* in particular; Those who are well acquainted with these Matters are, I believe, pretty well satisfy'd, that, tho' they *began* with being *righteous over-much*, and acted in a wild Manner under Pretence of extraordinary Sanctity; yet they are *at present* not overladen with Religion,

on, not altogether spiritual ; but have at least very near as much Regard for *this* World, as for the *next*. As to our *new Enthusiasts* ; if they go on in their Way, we may expect in a short Time to hear them revive the old profane ridiculous Jargon of being *Godded with God*, and *Christed with Christ* ; of *Indwellings*, *Outgoings*, being *carried out in Duty* ( such was the *Cant* in those Times, now, belike, 'tis *Enlargements* ) of *resting, lying, rolling upon Christ* ; with many other uncouth Phrases ; which must needs be disgustful to every sober Christian.

4thly. It is very observable that the *Righteous over-much*, the *Enthusiasts* and *false Spiritualists* have, in all Ages, *bated the establish'd Church and Clergy* ; of late Years, and here in *England*, particularly : Which I think is much to the Honour of the Church and Clergy. They may apply to themselves with Regard to God and Religion, what *Cicero* said of himself with Regard to the Common-Wealth of *Rome* ; That all who are Enemies to *God and Religion* are Enemies to *them* likewise. What envenomed Arrows have been shot against us by the Lewd and Debauch'd, the Ungodly and Profane, the *Infidels* and *Atheists*, is sufficiently known :

known: And it is as well known that the Pretenders to extraordinary Holiness, false Prophets, and *Enthusiasts* of all Kinds, have given abundant Proof of their *Ill-will to us, and our Sion*. To pass over the inveterate Malice of the *Quakers*; the *pretended Prophets* about thirty Years ago, in their Effusions of blasphemous Nonsense, which they call'd *Warnings*, utter'd the most virulent Invectives against the Clergy in general: Our *present Enthusiasts*, it is said, do the same; and none more, than those who are *Clergymen themselves*. What Sort of *Clergymen*, or even *Men* they are, let the World judge. The Reason why all the Enemies of the *Christian Religion* among us, however they may differ in other Respects, do yet, by the Devil's Policy, and their own Inclinations, unite in one Body against the *establish'd Church* and *Clergy*, is this very plain one; because the *establish'd Church* is the *Fortress*, the *strong Hold* of the *Christian Religion*; and the *Clergy* the *Garrison*, or *Soldiers that defend it*.

Having made these *Observations* upon *Others*, let us in the next Place make some *Application* to *Ourselves*.

For

I. First, then, let us grieve and mourn for all deluded and deluding Persons; beseeching God to give them a right Understanding in all Things relating to their eternal Happiness.

II. Considering that to the Prevalency of Immorality and Profaneness, Infidelity and Atheism, is now added the Pest of *Enthusiasm*; our Prospect, it must be own'd, is very sad and melancholy. Let us mourn and pray, and cry mightily to God; but not be dejected, or despond. Let us all, in our *several Stations*, with *prudent Activity*, and a *Zeal according to Knowledge*, join our Endeavours to stop the Growth of all these Mischiefs; and then with entire Resignation leave the Event to God. *Hypocrisy* and *Enthusiasm* are no new Things: These *Ignes Fatui*, these *glaring Meteors*, have often appear'd in this Nation: But they have soon disappear'd; and 'tis to be hoped they will do so now. Popular Madness, like a sudden *Land-Flood*, may run high for a Time; but seldom lasts long. True it is indeed, tho' the *Ignis Fatuus* soon disappears; it may draw People into *Ponds or Ditches*, before it does so: And the *Land-Flood*, tho' not lasting long, may *deluge a Country*, and do *infinite Mischief*, before it runs off. The Case is exactly the same

here ; and, in my humble Opinion, might deserve the Consideration of *Some*, whom I will not presume to mention. Therefore,

III. *Go not after these Impostors, and Seducers ; but shun them as you would the Plague. Having a Form of Godliness ; but denying the Power thereof : From such turn away,* says the Apostle 2 Tim. iii. 5. Many, I doubt not, follow them out of *mere Curiosity* ; but 'tis a *vicious Curiosity* : 'Tis *sinful* ; because *it is partaking of other Men's Sins,* ( 1 Tim. v. 22. ) by giving Countenance and Encouragement to them, however *undesignedly*. But how many more, tho' greatly despising both their Persons and their Doctrines, yet run after them ; that they may *seem* to increase the Number of their Disciples, and so give them Credit and Reputation, with a *real form'd Design,* to *help forward the Mischief* they are doing ! These are the *Enemies* of our Religion, and Church, of every Denomination ; among whom, the PAPISTS you may be sure, are neither the least industrious, nor the least delighted : These *Protestant Enthusiasts,* with all *Protestant Hereticks, Schismaticks,* and *false Teachers,* on the one Hand, and the *Free-thinkers, Infidels, Deists,* and *Atheists*

*Atheists* on the other, are *doing* THEIR *Work* for them, to their Hearts Desire.

IV. Lastly, let us make so good a Use of the *Excesses* we have been considering; as by them to be put in Mind of *our own Defects*. To omit the grosser Immoralities, with which this profligate Age abounds, and concerning which the Case is so plain; how many are there, who, tho' thought by themselves and others, to be good Christians, are yet far from being so! How many who never, or at least but seldom, receive the blessed Sacrament; tho' 'tis the indispensable Duty of every Christian to receive it frequently! Who neglect private Prayer; tho' without the frequent and constant Performance of that Duty, 'tis impossible to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven! Who might come to Church on *Week-days*, as well as *Sundays*, if they would; yet do not, tho' they have nothing else to do! How many, who, tho' they are not Drunkards commonly so call'd are yet intemperate in Drinking! Who allow themselves in unlawful Diversions, or are immoderate in lawful ones! Who, tho' not guilty of any scandalous Crime, in common Estimation, are yet carnal, sensual, worldly-minded, and *Lovers of Pleasure more than Lovers of God!* How

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many,

many, who, being very rich, imagine they are charitable, if they now and then give a small Piece of Money to the Poor; when they ought to give largely and liberally! — Who, under Pretence of *providing for their Families*, are *shamefully covetous*, and observed to be so by every Body but themselves! A *dangerous Delusion* this last; and very often, I fear, a fatal one. I might mention numerous Instances more; which, together with these now mention'd, you, to whom I have so long minister'd, know, and are my Witnesses, I have often, and with the greatest Earnestness insisted upon. So far have I been from relaxing the *real* Obligations of our holy Religion; that, perhaps, I have been thought by Some to be too rigid and severe: Tho', to the best of my Judgment and Understanding, I have not err'd on either Extreme; but have with all Faithfulness represented to you the true Will of God, as reveal'd in the sacred Scriptures. And the rest of the Clergy, most of them at least, can, I am confident, truly say the same of themselves. I should not have said so much upon this Article; did not the Calumnies and lying Slanders cast upon us by our Enemies, (tho' Clergymen themselves) these proud *Pharisaical*

*risaical Enthusiasts*, render it very proper, if not quite necessary. Far be it from us (as it ever has been) to *preach smooth Things to please Men*; to dissemble the real *Terrors of the Lord*; or in any wise to *handle his Word deceitfully*. How often do we tell you (nay, *what else*, almost, do we tell you?) that without *Faith* and a *good Life*, you will *undoubtedly perish everlastingly*? What is a *good Life*, is indeed the Question: In that our great Business is to instruct you. It is, in short, *living up to the strictest* (I say *the strictest*) Precepts of the Gospel *really such*; but by no Means *going beyond them*. However, as I said, let the *Excesses of Others* remind us of our own *Deficiencies*; so as that we may thoroughly and effectually reform them. Let us earnestly beseech God to *send forth his Light and his Truth*; that we may all fully discover these *Depths of Satan*, this *Mystery of Iniquity*, upon which we have been discoursing: But let us not, to avoid *Enthusiasm*, fall into *Coldness*, or *Lukewarmness* in Religion; nor be *too little righteous*, for Fear of being *righteous over-much*.

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*It must needs be that Offences come; but wo to that Man, by whom the Offence cometh, Mat. xviii. 7.*







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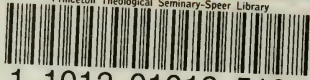
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