

THE WAY TO DIVINE KNOWLEDGE

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THE WAY TO DIVINE KNOWLEDGE

being several

Dialogues between

HUMANUS, ACADEMICUS, RUSTICUS, AND THEOPHILUS

*As preparatory to a new edition of the works of Jacob Behmen;
and the right use of them*

by

William Law, A.M.

THE FIRST DIALOGUE

between

Humanus, Academicus, Rusticus, and Theophilus.

Humanus. Oh! Theophilus, I must yield, and it is with great pleasure that I now enter into conversation with you. You have taken from me all power of caviling and disputing. I have no opinions that I choose to maintain, but have the utmost desire of entering further into this field of light, which you have so clearly opened to my view. I shall not trouble you with the relation of what has passed in my soul, nor what struggles I have had, with that variety of heathenish notions which have had their turn in my mind. It is better to tell you, that they are dead and buried, or rather consumed to nothing by that new light, which you have opened in so many great points, that I was quite a stranger to before. To reject all that you have said concerning the fall of angels, the original of this world, the creation and fall of man, and the necessity of a redemption, as great as that of the gospel, is impossible; nothing can do it, or stand out against it, but the most willful and blind obstinacy.

But these great points cannot be received in any true degree, without seeing the vain contention of all those, who either defend or oppose the gospel without any true and real knowledge of them. The one contend for, and the other oppose, not the gospel, but a system of empty words, and historical facts, branched into forms and modes of dividing one church from another; whereas the gospel is no history of any absent, distant, or foreign thing, but is a manifestation of an essential, inherent, real life and death in every son of Adam; grounded on the certainty of his first angelical nature, on the certainty of his real fall from that into an animal earthly life of impure, bestial flesh and blood, and on the certainty of an inward redemption from it, by the divine nature given again into him. These three great points, with all the doctrines, duties, and consequences, that are essentially contained in, or flow from them, are the gospel of Jesus Christ, to which, by your means, I am become a convert. I am now, dear Theophilus, strongly drawn two different ways. First, I am all hunger and

thirst after this new light, a glimpse of which has already raised me, as it were, from the dead; and I am in the utmost impatience to hear more and more of this divine philosophy, which, I so plainly see, opens all the mysteries both of nature and grace from the beginning to the end of time. What I have heard from you, when I was obliged to be silent, and what I have since found and felt by much reading the Appeal, and that Dialogue, obliges me to speak in this ardent manner. They have awakened something in me which I never felt before, something much deeper than my reason, and over which I have no power; it glows in my soul, like a fire, or hunger, which nothing can satisfy, but a further view of those great truths, which I this day expect from your opening to us the mysteries of heaven revealed to that wonderful man, Jacob Behmen.

On the other hand, I find in myself a vehement impulse to turn preacher amongst my former infidel brethren; which impulse I know not how to resist: For being just converted myself, I seem to know, and feel the true place, from whence conversion is to arise in others; and by the reluctance which I have felt in my passage from one side to the other, I seem also to know the true ground on which infidelity supports itself. And he only is able to declare with spirit and power any truths, or bear a faithful testimony of the reality of them, who preaches nothing but what he has first seen, and felt, and found to be true, by a living sensibility and true experience of their reality and power in his own soul. All other preaching, whether from art, hearsay, books, or education, is, at best, but playing with words, and mere trifling with sacred things. Being thus divided in myself, I hope to have your direction.

Theophilus. Dear Humanus, my heart embraces you with great joy, and I am much pleased with what you say of yourself. This hunger of your soul is all that I wish for; it is the fire of God, the opening of eternity, the beginning of your redemption, the awakener of the angelic life, the root of an omnipotent faith, and the true seeker of all that is lost. For all these things, and much more, are the blessed powers which will soon break forth, and show themselves to be the true workings of this celestial fire, that has begun to glow within you.

Your business is now to give way to this heavenly working of the Spirit of God in your soul, and turn from everything either within you, or without

you, that may hinder the farther awakening of all that is holy and heavenly within you. For within you is that heavenly angel that died in paradise, and died no other death, than that of being hid a while from your sight and sensibility.

For be assured of this, as a certain truth, that corrupt, fallen, and earthly as human nature is, there is nevertheless in the soul of every man, the fire, and light, and love of God, though lodged in a state of hiddenness, inactivity, and death, till something or other, human or divine, Moses and the prophets, Christ or his apostles, discover its life within us.

For the soul of every man is the breath and life of the triune God, and as such a partaker of the divine nature; but all this divinity is unfelt, because overpowered by the workings of flesh and blood, till such time as distress, or grace, or both, give flesh and blood a shock, open the long shut-up eyes, and force a man to find something in himself, that sense and reason, whilst at quiet were not aware of. Wonder not therefore at this conflict in your soul, that you are eager after more light, and impatient to communicate that which you have. For you must be thus driven; and both these desires are only two witnesses to this truth, that a heaven-born spirit is come to life in you.

Only remember this; look well to the ground on which you stand, keep a watchful eye upon every working of nature, and take care that nothing human, earthly, private, or selfish, mix with this heavenly fire: that is, see that your mind be free, universal, impartial, without regard to here or there, this or that, but loving all goodness, practicing every virtue, for itself, on its own account, because it is so much of God; neither coveting light, nor longing to communicate it to others, but merely and solely for this reason, that the will of God may be done, and the goodness of God brought to life both in you and them. For there is no goodness but God's; and his goodness is not alive, or fruitful in you, but so far, and in such degree, as the good that you mean, and do, is done in and by that Spirit, by which God himself is good. For as there is but one that is good, so there is, and can be but one goodness. And therefore it is, that we are called not to an human, worldly, prudential, partial goodness, suitable to our selfish reason, and natural tempers, but to be perfect, as our Father in heaven is perfect. And the full reason is expressed in the words; for if our Father is

in heaven, we must be there too in spirit and life, or we are not his children; if heaven is that for which we are made, and that which we have lost, it is not any human goodness, but a heavenly birth and Spirit of God's own goodness, working in us, as it does in God, that can make us the heavenly children of our Father in heaven. You must love the light of God, as God loves it; you must desire that others may enjoy it, as God desires it. Now God is a free, universal, impartial love, loving and doing every kind of good, for its own sake, because that is the highest and most perfect working of life; and because everything else but goodness, for its own sake, is imperfect, and a degree of evil, misery, and death. And no creature can come out of its imperfection, misery, and death, but by the pure, free, unmixed goodness of God, being born in it. Though you had outwardly all virtues, and seemed doing all that the saints of God have done, yet unless the same Spirit, by which God himself is good, brought forth your goodness, all would be only an earthly labor, that could have no communication with heaven.

Therefore, my friend, set out right, and be assured of this truth, that nature, and self, and every particular view, must be totally renounced; or else, be your zeal what it will, ever so pleasing to yourself, or astonishing to the world, you are not working with God.

Here now you have the test of truth, by which you may always know, whether it be the Spirit of God, and the love of God, that drives you. If your zeal is after this pure, free, universal goodness of God, then of a truth the Spirit of God breatheth in you; but if you feel not the love of this pure, free, universal goodness, and yet think that you love God, you deceive yourself; for there is no other true love of God, but the loving that, which God is.

But if you please, Humanus, pray tell me, in what manner you would attempt to make converts to Christianity.

Humanus. I would not take the method generally practiced by the modern defenders of Christianity. I would not attempt to show from reason and antiquity, the necessity and reasonableness of a divine revelation in general, or of the Mosaic and Christian in particular. Nor enlarge upon the arguments for the credibility of the gospel-history, the reasonableness of

its creeds, institutions, and usages; or the duty of man to receive things above, but not contrary to, his reason. I would avoid all this, because it is wandering from the true point in question, and only helping the Deist to oppose the gospel with a show of argument, which he must necessarily want, was the gospel left to stand upon its own bottom.

And, on the other hand, should the Deist yield up such a cause as this, and change sides, he could only be said to have changed his opinion about facts, without any more altering or bettering his state in God, than if he had only altered his opinion about things in dispute amongst the ancient philosophers.

For since the fall of man, implying a real change from his first state, or a total death to his first created life, since the necessity of a new birth of that lost life, by the life of God again restored to, or born in the soul, are two points, quite overlooked by those who defend the truth and reasonableness of the Christian scheme, it may be truly said, that the only ground, and the whole nature of the gospel is quite dropped and given up by those who thus defend it.

For the gospel has but one ground, or reason, and that is the fall of man, it has but one nature, and that is to help man again to all that he had lost.

How unreasonable would it be, to offer the Christian redemption to glorious angels in heaven? Could anything be more inconsistent with their heavenly, unfallen state? Yet just so unreasonable would it be to offer it to man unfallen from his first created state — for man standing in that first perfection of life, which God breathed into him, and in that very outward state, or world, into which God himself brought him, wants no more redemption, than the most glorious angels do; and to preach to such a man, in order to be reconciled to God, the necessity of dying to himself, and the world he is in, would be as contrary to all sense and reason, as to preach to angels the necessity of dying to themselves, their divine life and the kingdom of heaven, for which God had created them.

Thus does it appear, that the fall of man, into the life of this earthly world, is the sole ground of his wanting the redemption, which the gospel offers.

Hence it is that the gospel has only one simple proposal of certain life, or certain death to man; of life, if he will take the means of entering into the kingdom of God, of death if he chooses to take up his rest in the kingdom of this world. This is the simple nature, and sole drift of the gospel; it means no more, than making known to man, that this world, and the life of it, is his fall, and separation from God, and happiness, both here and hereafter: and that to be saved or restored to God and happiness, can only be obtained, by renouncing all love, and adherence to the things of this world. Look at all the precepts, threatenings and doctrines of the gospel, they mean nothing, but to drive all earthly-mindedness and carnal affections out of the soul, to call man from the life, spirit and goods of this world, to a life of hope, and faith, and trust, and love and desire of a new birth from heaven.

To embrace the gospel is to enter with all our hearts into its terms of dying to all that is earthly both within us, and without us; and on the other hand to place our faith, and hope, and trust, and satisfaction in the things of this world, is to reject the gospel with our whole heart, spirit and strength, as much as any infidel can do, notwithstanding we made ever so many verbal assents and consents to everything that is recorded in the New Testament.

This therefore is the one true essential distinction between the Christian and the infidel. The infidel is a man of this world, wholly devoted to it, his hope and faith are set upon it; for where our heart is, there, and only there is our hope and faith. He has only such virtues, such goodness, and such a religion, as entirely suits with the interest of flesh and blood, and keeps the soul happy in the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life: this, and this alone, is infidelity, a total separation from God, and a removal of all faith, and hope from him, into the life of this world. It matters not, whether this infidel be a professor of the gospel, a disciple of Zoroaster, a follower of Plato, a Jew, a Turk, or an opposer of the gospel-history: this difference of opinions or professions alters not the matter, it is the love of the world instead of God, that constitutes the whole nature of the infidel.

On the other hand, the Christian renounces the world, as his horrid prison; he dies to the will of flesh and blood, because it is darkness, corruption, and separation from God; he turns from all that is earthly, animal, and

temporal, and stands in a continual tendency of faith, and hope, and prayer to God, to have a better nature, a better life and spirit born again into him from above.

Where this faith is, there is the Christian, the new creature in Christ, born of the Word and Spirit of God; neither time nor place, nor any outward condition of birth, and life, can hinder his entrance into the kingdom of God.

But where this faith is not, there is the true, complete infidel, the man of the earth, the unredeemed, the rejector of the gospel, the son of perdition, that is dead in trespasses and sins, without Christ, an alien from the commonwealth of Israel, a stranger from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.

Here therefore I fix my true ground of converting men to Christianity; and how miserably, may I say, do they err, who place Christianity and infidelity in anything else, but in the heart either devoted to this world, or devoted to God!

He therefore that opens a field of controversy to the Deist, about revelation in general, of the history of facts, creeds, and doctrines of churches, not only leads him from the merits of the gospel, but brings him into a field of battle, where he may stand his ground as long as he pleases. This I can truly say from my own experience, who have been 20 years in this dust of debate; and have always found that the more books there were written in this way of defending the gospel, the more I was furnished with new objections to it, and the less apprehensive of any danger from my not receiving it.

For I had frequently a consciousness rising up within me, that the debate was equally vain on both sides, doing no more real good to the one than to the other, not being able to imagine, that a set of scholastic, logical opinions about history, facts, doctrines, and institutions of the church, or a set of logical objections against them, were of any significance toward making the soul of man either an eternal angel of heaven, or an eternal devil of hell. And therefore it was, that I was often tempted rather to think, there was neither heaven, nor hell, than to believe that such a variety of churches, and systems of opinion, all condemning, and all condemned by

one another, were to find the heaven of God opened to receive them, but he who was equally led by opinion to reject them all, was doomed to hell. But you, sir (and how can I thank you for it?) have put a full end to all this vain strife of opinions floating in the brain; you have dispersed the clouds that surrounded my bewildered mind; you have brought me home to myself, where I find heaven and hell, life and death, salvation and damnation at strife within me; you have shown me the infinite worth of Christianity, and the dreadful nature of infidelity, not by helping me to a new opinion, for my reason to maintain, but by proving to me this great and decisive truth, that Christianity is neither more nor less, than the goodness of the divine life, light and love, living and working in my soul; and that infidelity in its whole nature, is purely and solely the heart of man living in, governed by, and contented with the evil workings of the earthly life, spirit and nature.

This is the infidelity that you have forced me to fly from, and renounce, and that is the Christianity, to which I am converted with all the strength of my heart and spirit. Away then with all the fictions and workings of reason, either for, or against Christianity! They are only the wanton sport of the mind, whilst ignorant of God, and insensible of its own nature and condition. Death and life are the only things in question; life is God, living and working in the soul; death is the soul living and working according to the sense and reason of bestial flesh and blood. Both this life, and this death are of their own growth, growing from their own seed within us, not as busy reason talks or directs, but as our heart turns either to the one or the other.

But, dear Theophilus, I must now tell you that I want to make haste in this new road you have put me in. Time is short, I am afraid of leaving the world, before I have left all worldly tempers, and before the first holy and heavenly birth be quickened, and brought to life in me.

An angel my first father was created, and therefore nothing but the angel belongs to man, and nothing but the angel can enter into heaven. Angelic goodness, therefore, is the one thing that man must look up into God for, because it is the one goodness that he has lost. Everything else, flesh and blood, earth and all earthly tempers, everything that had its rise from the

fall of Adam, must be renounced, and given up to death, that the first angelic glory of the life of God in man may be again found in him.

Theophilus. Indeed, Humanus, you have made great haste already; for all the haste that we can make, consists in a total dying to all the tempers and passions which we have received from the spirit of this world, by our fall into it. And the more watchfully, earnestly, and constantly, we do this, the more haste we make to our lost country, and heavenly glory.

It is no extravagance, or overstraining the matter, when we say, that our goodness must be angelic; for no goodness less than that, can be divine and heavenly, or help us to a life in heaven. It is often said, that we are poor, infirm men, and not angels; and therefore must be content with the poverty and infirmity of human virtues. That we are poor, infirm men, is undeniable; but this is the one infallible reason, why a virtue that is according to our nature, or of its own growth, can do us no good. We were not created poor and infirm men by God, but have lost him, are separated from him; full of misery, because we have changed our first state, and brought all this poverty, corruption, and infirmity, upon ourselves. And therefore, as this infirmity is from ourselves, so we must intend nothing less, or short of the total removal of it, nor think that we have our proper goodness, till we stand in that degree of it, in which God created us. For, be assured of this great truth, that nothing in us can be the delight of God, but that very creature, which he created. All therefore must be parted with, that God hath not created and brought to life in us. And no goodness but that of an angel, can overcome the evil that is in us, or do the will of God on earth, as it is done in heaven, which is the only goodness in and for which God created us.

Academicus. Pray, Theophilus, give me leave to say, that I should think it better, not to insist so much upon the word “angelic,” when you speak of the goodness, that ought to be ours. For it seems to me too liable to objection. We have not the high faculties, and exalted powers, of angels; and therefore our goodness cannot rise up to an equality with theirs.

Rusticus. Pray, Academicus, give me leave also to say, that if your learning did not lead you to mind words, more than things, you could not have fallen into this critical scruple. For our call to angelic goodness does

not suppose or require any high stretch, or refined elevation, of our intellectual faculties and powers. A shepherd watching over his flock, a poor slave digging in the mines, may each of them, though so employed to the end of their lives, stand before God in a degree of goodness truly angelic. On the other hand, you may spend all your time in high speculations, writing and preaching upon Christian perfection, composing seraphic hymns of heavenly matters, with a strength of thought and genius that delights both yourself and others, and yet, so doing to the day of your death, have only a goodness like that of eating and drinking that which most pleases your palate.

Would you know the true nature of angelic goodness, see how the Spirit of Christ speaks, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, soul, and strength, and thy neighbor as thyself. I came into the world not to do my own will, not to seek my own glory or honor, not to have a kingdom in this world, but to promote the kingdom of God, and do the will of my Father in heaven. My meat and drink is to do the will of him that sent me. When thou makest a feast, call not thy rich friends and acquaintance, but the poor, the lame, and blind, etc. Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory and praise of God. Thus speaks the Spirit of Christ; and he that in this Spirit thus lives, is an angel, whether he be in heaven, or enclosed in flesh and blood. And all of us are in the way of attaining to this angelic goodness, as soon as we hate the selfish tempers of our own earthly life, and earnestly long, in the spirit of prayer, to have the life of God brought forth in us. Now this goodness we must have, or we have none at all; for there is but one God, one good, and one goodness; and it is rightly called angelic, because nothing is capable of it, but the heavenly angelic nature; nor can it have any existence in man, till the workings of our earthly nature are overcome, and brought into subjection to that Spirit, which is not of man, but from heaven. For flesh and blood in all its workings can work only for itself; darkness can only be dark, it has no other nature; coldness can only be cold; earth can only be earthly; and the works of light can only proceed from light. Flesh and blood, or that life which is only from the stars and elements of this world, can only work as the stars and elements work, only for time, and a corruptible life; it can only be bestial, and serve the end of a bestial life; it is insensible and incapable of divine virtue, and is, and can be of no higher a nature in a man,

than in a beast, and must have the same end in both. It is quite incapable of entering into the kingdom of God; and only for this reason, because it is absolutely incapable of having any true and heavenly goodness. It has then only its proper goodness, when it has lost its power of acting, and is governed by a spirit superior to it; whilst it lives and rules, it can only live to itself; is nothing but an earthly own will, own love, own honor, own interest, never rising higher, doing better, or coming any nearer to goodness, than its own pride or covetousness, envy or wrath, can carry it. For these tempers, with all their lesser subdivisions, are the atmosphere that sets bounds to the breath of the earthly life; they are essential to it, and as inseparable from it, as hardness and darkness are inseparable from a rock of stone. So long as the stony rock lasts, so long is it hard and dark. And so long as earthly flesh and blood lives and acts, it can only live and act for itself; it can seek, love, like, or do no manner of thing, but as its own will, own love, own interest, is some way or other felt, and found in it. Would you know the true ground and reason of this? It is because no life can go out of, or farther than itself; nor can it will anything, but what its own life is. This is absolutely true of every life, whether it be divine, earthly, or hellish; it can seek, love, and delight in nothing, but that which is according to its own life.

See here, Academicus, the folly of your quarreling with the word “angelic,” since the thing itself, angelic goodness, is absolutely necessary; it is the goodness of our first creation, and must be the goodness of our redemption. The falling from it has brought forth all the evils that we are surrounded with, and nothing can deliver us from the death of our fallen state, but a true and full resurrection of all that purity and goodness, which was living in the first creation of man. To be content with our infirmities, is to be content with our separation from God; and not to aspire after the one angelic goodness, is to be carnally-minded, which we are told is death, that is, death to the one divine life.

A virtue that is only according to the state of this earthly life, is a virtue of art, and human contrivance, a fiction of behavior, modeled according to rule and custom, or education, that can go no deeper, nor rise higher, nor reach farther, than the sense and reason, and interests of flesh and blood, can carry it. But this can have no communication with God and heaven, because it is not born of them, but is a lower, separate state of life, that at

best can only bring forth a civility of outward manners, little better than such a new birth as may be had from a dancing-master. But the goodness which we want, and which we were created to have, is the one holy blessed life of God, and Christ, and heaven, living in the soul. For from eternity to eternity, there never was, or ever can be, any other heavenly goodness in any creature, but the life, and Spirit, and Word of God, speaking, living, and breathing in it.

Bid the anatomist, that can skillfully dissect an human body, that can tell you the names, nature, and offices of most of its parts, that can show you how they all conspire to give life, strength, and motion, to the living machine: bid him, I say, put life into the dead carcass.

Now learned reason, when pretending to be a master of morality, is just as powerful as this very anatomist. It can skillfully dissect a dead system of morality, can separate all its parts, tell you the names, nature, distinctions, and connections, of most kinds of good and evil. But when this is done, learned reason, with all its dictates, distinctions, and definitions, can do just as much good to the soul, that has lost its goodness, as the anatomist can do to the carcass, that has lost its life.

It is wonderfully astonishing, that you men of learning seldom come thus far, as to see, and feel this glaring truth, that goodness must be a living thing; but, blinded with the empty sounds of words in variety of languages, are as content and happy with a religion of nature delineated, or book of axioms, maxims, and deductions, mathematically placed one after another, as if you had really found the tree of life. Whereas, in truth, all this is no better than the reading a lecture upon the use of the heart, liver, and lungs, to a dead carcass: for the life of goodness can no more be raised, or brought into the soul, by this art of reasoning, than life can be brought into the carcass, by a discourse upon the heart, liver, and lungs, made over it.

Oh! Academicus, forget your scholarship, give up your art and criticism, be a plain man, and then the first rudiments of sense may teach you, that there, and there only, can goodness be, where it comes forth as a birth of life, and is the free natural work and fruit of that which lives within us. For till goodness thus comes from a life within us, we have in truth none at all.

For reason, with all its doctrine, discipline, and rules, can only help us to be so good, so changed, and amended, as a wild beast may be, that by restraints and methods is taught to put on a sort of tameness, though its wild nature is all the time only restrained, and in a readiness to break forth again as occasion shall offer.

Thus far the masters of morality and human discipline may go; they may tame and reform the outward man, clothe him with the appearance of many images of virtue, which will, some or all of them, be put off, just as time, occasion, and flesh and blood, require it. For the goodness of a living creature must be its own life; it must arise up in it as its own love, or any passion doth; just as the fierceness of the tiger, and the meekness of the lamb, are the birth of their own life. And if goodness is not our natural birth from our natural parents, we must of all necessity be born again from a principle above nature, or no goodness can be living in us. Now since goodness is a life, we have a twofold proof, that no goodness can be living in us, till we are born again of the Word and Spirit of God: for nature, as well as scripture, assures us, that God is originally the one good, and the one life; and therefore no good life can possibly be in us, but by the Word, life, and Spirit, of God having a birth in us. And from this birth alone it is, that the free, genuine works of goodness flow forth with the freedom of the divine life, wherewith the Spirit of God has made us free; loving and doing all manner of good, merely for goodness-sake; virtuous in all kind of virtue, purely for virtue-sake: then we are the natural true children of our heavenly Father, and do the works of heaven with a cheerful and willing mind. Then it is, that we are good in the manner as God is good, because it is his goodness that is born in us; we are perfect as he is perfect, we love as he loves, are patient as he is patient, we give as he gives, we forgive as he forgives, and resist evil only with good as he does.

This, Academicus, is angelic goodness; and is the goodness of those who are born again of the Word, and become new creatures in the Spirit of Christ. This goodness our first father lost, when he chose to have the eyes of flesh and blood, and the spirit of this world, opened in him; and therefore our redeemer, who well knew what we had lost, and must have again, has taught us in our daily prayer, to ask for angelic goodness in these words, viz., “thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.” But I have done, and I think you must have done, with your

learned scruple about the word “angelic.” And now, Theophilus, if you please, return to your subject with Humanus.

Theophilus. Let me then tell you, Humanus, that I much approve of the way that you intend to proceed in. You are come directly to the truth and heart of the matter, and have hit upon the one only method of putting Deism to a full stand, by reducing Christianity to this one single great point, which so evidently contains the whole ground and nature of it.

Now this one great point consists of two essential parts; 1st, the fall of man from a divine angelic life into an earthly, bestial, corruptible, miserable life of this world. 2dly, the redemption of man, or his regaining his first angelic perfection, by a new birth of the divine nature, by the Word and Spirit of God. Stand steadily upon this true Christian ground; and then you will not only stand safely yourself, but you will have left the Deist no ground to stand upon. For here all the labored volumes of infidelity, with which these last ages have swarmed, are at once rendered useless, and cannot put so much as a little finger into this debate. Consult all, from Hobbes to the Moral Philosopher, and you consult in vain; their works are as dead as themselves, and unable to give forth one word against this Christianity. They had a much easier task upon their hands; for nothing can be easier than for reason to object, and continue objecting, to the extraordinary matters of the Old and New Testament. I don't mention this as an accusation of the Deists, or to charge them with the crafty contrivance of placing the merits of the cause where it is not. No the learning of the Christian world must bear the blame of the fruitless disputes: the demonstrators of the truth and reasonableness of Christianity have betrayed their own cause, and left true Christianity unmentioned in their defenses of it. What a reasonableness of Christianity have some great names helped us to? Just as useful, and good to our fallen souls, as the reasonableness of consenting to the death of Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea. But you, my friend, being rightly converted to Christianity, that began before the scriptures were written, and is as old as the creation and fall of man; keep close to its true and real ground; and, instead of showing the reasonableness of believing a long history of things, show the absolute necessity of man's dying to his present life, in order to have a better from God. This is the Christianity that began with the fall, and has been preached ever since to every son of fallen man, in every

corner of the world; and by the same preacher that tells every man, that he ought to be better than he is. For was not man fallen from a better state than that he is now in, he could no more be ashamed or offended at anything that his nature prompts him to do, than the ox is ashamed at breaking into a good pasture. Every man, therefore, from the beginning of the world, has had Christianity and the gospel written and preached within him; as it contains the fall of man, and his want of being raised to a better state. But as we see, that the truth and reality of his fall, and the truth and reality of his redemption by a real birth from above, can be lost, nay disowned, amongst those that are daily reading and expounding the scriptures; so it is no wonder that the same should have happened to those, who had no scriptures to read. Justly therefore, Humanus, are churches and creeds, doctrines above and contrary to reason, miracles of the Old and New Testament, and all historical facts and matters, which are so great an harvest to the Deists; justly, I say, are they removed by you out of the debate; and the one great point above-mentioned only insisted upon, as the whole of the matter. For this one point gained, all is gained; and, till this point is cleared up, all the rest is but a debate about nothing.

For if man is fallen from a divine life, no one need be told, that he can only be redeemed or saved from his fall by having the same divine life born in him again, or a second time. Nothing therefore touches the truth of the debate betwixt the Christian and the infidel, but that which proves with certainty, that man has, or has not, lost a divine life.

If he is thus fallen, has died this death to a divine life; then the nature and necessity of the Christian new-birth sufficiently proves itself. But if it can be proved, that he is not thus fallen, but stands in that state and degree of life in which God created him; the Deists have reason enough to reject the Christian scheme of redemption.

Strange it is therefore beyond expression, that every man, whether Christian or infidel, should not see, that here lies the whole of the matter; or that any learned defender of Christianity should think of beginning anywhere, or in anything, but where the redemption itself begins; or imagine there can be the least ground to propose a redemption to man, till he shows why, and from what, he is to be redeemed. Stranger is it still, if you consider, that Christians have nothing to excuse their wandering from

this one great point, since both the Testaments bear so open a witness to it. “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die,” says the Old Testament. “Except a man be born again from above, of the Word and Spirit of God, he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven,” says the New Testament.

Thus do these two Testaments begin with the most open declarations of these two things; viz., the death of man to his first created life; 2ndly, his redemption only and solely by a real birth of the divine life, received again from above. What excuse therefore can be made for those who read the scripture, and yet overlook that very one point; not only so plainly declared, but which, in itself, is the one only ground and foundation upon which all the scripture stands? For had not man died, neither Moses, nor the prophets, had ever been in being. For man not fallen, but abiding in his first created perfection of life, had been as free from any outward law, as the light is from darkness. The keeping his own nature had been the keeping, and doing, and seeing, and knowing all that God required of him. So that neither law nor prophecy have any ground or reason, but because man is dead to his first life.

But seeing man is dead to his first life, and living only in an earthly bestial world, under the power and slavery of the evil motions and tempers of gross flesh and blood; therefore Moses must come with his law, to set sin before him, and give him precepts of resisting and dying to all the lusts of this new earthly life, which he is fallen into: therefore, to seek for any other learning in or from Moses, than that of learning to resist and die to the tempers and passions of this earthly life, is knowing nothing right of Moses, nor of ourselves.

Next after Moses came the prophets, or the spirit of prophecy, with its far-seeing sight, and declaration of glories to come. Now the ground of prophecy is this, it is because man is to be restored to his first glorious state; and therefore the spirit of prophecy comes forth from God to awaken hope and faith, expectation and desire in man; because these are the only powers that can draw him out of the mire of the earthly life, in which he sticks, and carry him up to his first heavenly state again. Nothing therefore is to be sought for in or from the prophets, but the increase of

our hope, faith, and desire of the new birth of that glorious life which we have lost, and they foretold was to be had again.

Thus, my friend, you see the importance of this one point; Moses and the prophets have no ground or reason but this, that man has lost his divine life; and that this same divine life is to be born again in him. Now seeing this is the ground and reason of the scriptures, therefore is it the one unerring key to the right use of them. They have only this one intent, to make man know, resist, and abhor the working of his fallen earthly nature; and to turn the faith, hope, and longing desire of his heart to God: and therefore we are only to read them with this view, and to learn this one lesson from them. Whatever therefore occurs, that cannot be turned to this general end, but relates to only some temporal, occasional, or private matter, is of no more importance to us, than the cloak and parchments which St. Paul speaks of.

How many hundred barns must there be, to hold all the learned volumes, that had never been written, had man looked upon the scriptures as having no other view or end, but to teach him to renounce the tempers of his fallen earthly nature, and live unto God in faith and prayer; to be born again of the divine nature! But this one end being overlooked by learned reason, Hebrew and Syriac, Arabic, Greek, and Latin, have been called in, to torture the scriptures into a chaos of confused opinions, that has covered the Christian world with darkness, and lost the only good that was to be had from the written Word of God. Whereas, standing upon the ground on which you stand, with only this one great point at heart, the scriptures are a plain, easy, and certain instruction; and no honest unlearned heart stands in need of any commentator to help him to all the benefit that can be had from scripture, or secure him from any hurtful error.

Humanus. Indeed, Theophilus, my own experience can bear a full testimony to the truth of all that you have said. For upon my reading now the New Testament, with this key in my hand; viz., of man thus fallen, and thus called to a new birth from heaven; everything I read in it has spirit and life, and overflows my soul with such an unction, and sensibility of sweet doctrine, as I am not able to express. For whilst I consider it only as written to drive all earthly tempers and passions out of the soul, and

inflame the heart with love and desire of the grace, the spirit, and the light and life of the heavenly nature, I can say, as the Jewish officers did, never man spoke like Christ and his apostles.

Why was the Son of God made man? It was because man was to be made again a divine creature. Why did man want such a savior? It was because he was become earthly, mortal, gross flesh and blood. Now take Christ in this light, and consider man in this state, and then all that is said in the gospel stands in the fullest light.

Thus, "Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will refresh you." How poor, how mean, and uncertain a sense is there in this, till you know, that man has lost his divine nature, and is fallen into a world that is all labor, burden, and misery! But as soon as this is known, then how easy, how plain, is the full and highest sense of these words, "Come unto me, all that labor, are weary and heavy laden, and I will refresh you!" I will bring to life that first happy state which you have lost. This is the note, the paraphrase, the expositor, the key to the true sense of every doctrine of Christ; which, though variously expressed to awaken the heart, is only one and the same thing. Thus, "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." But why so? Because he that is troubled at the corruption, vanity, and impurity of his fallen earthly state, has the comfort of the heavenly life ready for him. Again, "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." How plain and great is the sense here, as soon as we know, that Christ is our righteousness; and that the righteous life of Christ in the soul, is that life which our first father lost! Therefore, to hunger and thirst after this righteousness, is the one way to be filled with that divine life, that we had lost. Again, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. And out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." What can the Latin or Greek critic do here? Nothing at all. He will only try to make some excuse for the strangeness of the phrase. But when these words are read by one who knows that he, and all mankind, have lost the divine nature, he tastes and feels the glad tidings which they bring; and is in love with these sweet sounds, which promise such an overflowing return of heaven into his soul. Again, "I beseech you," says the apostle, "as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul," etc. The critic looks into his books to see how Latin and Greek authors have used the

words “stranger” and “pilgrim,” and so some sense or other is given to the apostle; but the Christian, who knows, that man, wandering out of paradise, a colony of heaven, was taken captive by the stars and elements, to live in labor and toil, in sickness and pain, in hunger and thirst, in heat and cold amongst the beasts of the field; where evil spirits, like roaring lions, seek to devour him; he only knows in what truth and reality man is a poor stranger and distressed pilgrim upon earth. Again, “To the poor,” saith Christ, “the gospel is preached.” The critic only considers the several kinds of worldly poverty. But the Christian, who knows that the real great poverty of man consists in his having lost the riches and greatness of his first life, knows, that to this poor man the gospel is preached, because he only, who is sensible of this poverty, can hear and receive it. For to man, insensible of his fallen state, the glad tidings of the gospel are but like news from fairy land; and the cross of Christ can only be a stumbling-block and foolishness to him, whether he be a Christian, a Jew, or a Greek. Thus does it appear, that all the doctrines and sayings of Christ and his apostles are full of a comfortable, divine, and exalted sense, or mere empty words, just as the fall of man from a divine life is either owned or disowned. But I have done.

Theophilus. Thus far then, Humanus, we are agreed, that the fall of man into the life and state of this world, is the whole ground of his redemption; and that a real birth of Christ in the soul, is the whole nature of it. Let me now only ask you, how you would endeavor to convince a man of his fallen state?

Humanus. I would not begin with the account that Moses gives of it, for several reasons; but chiefly for these two: first, because the fall is not an historical matter; nor would a mere historical knowledge of it be of any use, or do any real good to him. Secondly, because Moses’s account is not the proof of the fall, and therefore not to be appealed to as such.

Moses is the first historian of natural death, and has recorded the death of the first man, and of many others who were born of him: but the proof that man is mortal lies not in Moses’s history of the death of the first man, but in the known nature of man, and the world from which he has his life. Again, we do not want Moses to assure us, that there was a first man; that he had something from heaven, and something from the earth in him;

and must have come into the world in another manner than all those who have descended from him. For every man is himself the infallible proof of this; Moses is only the historian that has recorded the when, and where, and how this first man came into the world, and what was his name. But the proof and certainty of the fact, that such a first man there must have been, lies not in Moses's account, but stands proved to every man from his own nature and state in this world.

Thus it is with the fall; we have no more occasion to go to Moses, to prove that man and the world are in a fallen state, than to prove that man is a poor, miserable, weak, vain, distressed, corrupt, depraved, selfish, self-tormenting, perishing creature, and that the world is a sad mixture of false goods, and real evils; a mere scene of all sorts of trials, vexations, and miseries; all arising from the frame, and nature, and condition both of man and the world. This is the full infallible proof of the fall of man; which is not a thing learnt from any history, but shows itself everywhere, and every day, with such clearness as we see the sun. Moses is not the prover of the fact, that man is fallen; but is the recorder of the when and how, and the manner in which the fall happened.

My first attempt therefore, upon any man, to convince him of the fall, as the ground of the redemption, should be an attempt to do that for him, which affliction, disappointments, sickness, pain, and the approach of death, have a natural tendency to do; viz., to convince him of the vanity, poverty, and misery of his life and condition in this world. For as this is the true proof of the fallen state of man, so man can only be convinced of it, by having this proof truly set before him. I would therefore appeal at first to nothing but his own nature and condition in the world; and show him how unreasonable, nay, impossible, it is, that a God, who has nothing in himself but infinite goodness and infinite happiness, should bring forth a race of intelligent creatures, that have neither natural goodness, nor natural happiness. The inspired saints of God say thus, "Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery." Again, "Man walketh in a vain shadow, and disquieteth himself in vain." Now if what is here truly said of mankind, could be truly said of any order of the beasts and animals of the field, who could defend the goodness of God in bringing such creatures into such a state of life? Now though the Deist rejects the scriptures, considered as a volume of divine revelation, yet everything that

he outwardly sees, and inwardly feels, demonstrates this capital truth of scripture, that man is in this poor and miserable state of life. And therefore, everything that we know of God, and everything that we know of man, is a daily irresistible proof, that man is in a fallen state. Look at the human infant just come out of the womb, you can hardly bear the sight; it is a picture of such deformity, nakedness, weakness, and helpless distress, as is not to be seen amongst the home-born animals of this world: the chicken has its birth from no sin, and therefore it comes forth in beauty; it runs and pecks as soon as its shell is broken: the pig and the calf go both to play, as soon as the dam is delivered of them; they are pleased with themselves, and please the eye that beholds their frolic state and beauteous clothing; whilst the new-born babe of a woman, that is to have an upright form, that is to view the heavens, and worship the God that made them, lies for months in gross ignorance, weakness, and impurity; as sad a spectacle when he first begins to breathe the life of this world, as when in the agonies of death he breathes his last.

What is all this, but the strongest proof, that man is the only creature that belongs not to this world, but is fallen into it through sin? And therefore his birth, in such distress, bears all the marks of shame and weakness. Had he been originally of this world, it is necessary to suppose, that this world had done the highest honor to its highest creature; and that he had begun his life in greater perfection than any other animal, and brought with him a more beautiful clothing than the finest lilies of the field have. But, to go on: when the human infant is set upon his legs, and begins to act for himself, he soon becomes a more pitiable object than when crying in the cradle. The strength of his life is a mere strength of wild passions; his reason is craft, and selfish subtlety; he loves and hates only as flesh and blood prompt him, jails and gibbets cannot keep him from theft and murder. If he is rich, he is tormented with pride and ambition; if poor, with murmuring and discontent: be he which he will, sooner or later, disordered passions, disappointed lusts, fruitless labor, pains and sickness will tear him from this world in such travail as his mother felt, when she brought forth the sinful animal.

Now all this evil and misery are purely the natural and necessary effect of his birth in the bestial flesh and blood of this world, and there is nothing in his natural state that can put a stop to it; he must be evil and miserable so

long as he has only the life of this world in him. Therefore the absolute certainty of the fall, and the absolute necessity of a new birth, are truths, independently of scripture, plain to a demonstration. Thus, God is in himself infinite goodness, and infinite happiness; but man, in his present earthly birth and life, can neither have goodness or happiness, therefore his present state of life could not be brought forth by a God who is all goodness and happiness. Thus every man, that believes in a creator infinitely perfect, is under a necessity of believing the whole ground of Christian redemption, namely, that man hath some way or other lost that perfection of life which he had at first from his creator.

But the Christian has yet an additional proof of his matter, because the scriptures, which with him are infallible, so frequently and openly bear witness to it.

Thus, “Let us make man in our image; according to our own likeness.” How great, how divine, is this beginning of man? How can there be any evil or misery, any vanity or weakness, in a creature so brought forth? But now what is become of this man? For if you look at man just coming out of the womb, the pitiable object above described, what can be so absurd, as to call this birth, his creation in the likeness and after the image of God? Now what is said of the first man, is not spoken of one person, but of the human nature; for the first man was only the first instance of that which mankind were to be. He had no perfection peculiar to himself, but that of being the first man; and had he stood, all that came from him, had come to life as he did, in the same strength and glory of perfection, and not been born of a bestial womb, like the wild ass’s colt. Again, set the following text against Moses’s perfection of the first image of God, “Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery.”

Is not this a full proof, that the first created life of man is quite dead, and that an earthly life of misery is risen up instead of it? Again, the apostle saith, “The natural man knoweth not the things of God; they are foolishness unto him.” Can this natural man, the man of earthly flesh and blood, that can have no acquaintance with, or knowledge of God, to whom the “things of God are foolishness”; can this be the man first created in the image and likeness of God? What can be more absurd than such a thought? Or what excuse can be made for that learning which cannot see from so

plain a scripture, that human nature, now, is not that human nature, which it was at first created, but is dead to that first life, which it had in the image and likeness of God, or the things of God could not possibly be foolishness to it? But I will end this matter with these borrowed words, “We were no more created to be in the sorrows, burdens, and anguish of an earthly life, than the angels were created to be in the wrath and darkness of hell. It is as contrary to the will and goodness of God towards us, that we are out of paradise, as it is contradictory to the designs and goodness of God towards the angels, that some of them are out of heaven, prisoners of darkness.

“The grossness, impurity, sickness, pain, and corruption of our bodies, is brought upon us by ourselves, in the same manner as the hideous, serpentine, form of the devils are brought upon them. How absurd, and even blasphemous would it be, to say with the scripture and the church, “that we are children of wrath, and born in sin,” if we had that nature, which God at first gave us? What a reproach upon God, to say, that this world is a valley of misery, a shadow of death, full of disorders, snares, evils, and temptations, if this was an original creation, or that state of things for which God created us? Is it not as consistent with the goodness and perfection of God, to speak of the misery and disorder that unfallen holy angels find above, and of the vanity, emptiness, and sorrow of their heavenly state, as to speak of the misery of men, and the sorrows of this world, if men and the world were in that order, in which God at first had placed them? If God could make any place poor and vain, and create any beings into a state of vanity and vexation of spirit, he might do so in all places, and to all beings.’

Theophilus. You have put the fall, Humanus, upon its right proof, and shown great judgment in your intended method of converting anyone to the belief of it. You have set the whole matter in so just a light, that I have nothing that I would add to it.

Humanus. Give me leave, gentlemen, just to put in a word or two concerning another plain indication, that man has lost that life and nature, in which he was first created. Reason has been my God, and is the vain idol of modern Deism, and modern Christianity; and yet human ignorance, infirmity, and mortality; they all began together; they are inseparable; they

generate and are generated from one another; they are the life of each other; and they must live and die together, and all bear the same witness to the fallen state of man. For no creature can come from the hands of God into a state of any ignorance of anything, that is fit and proper to be known by it. This is as impossible as for God to have an envious, or evil will. Now all right and natural knowledge, in whatever creature it is, is sensible, intuitive, and its own evidence. But opinion, reasoning, or doubting (for they are all but one thing) can only then begin when the creature has lost its first right and natural state, and is got somewhere, and become somewhat, that it cannot tell what to make of. Then begins doubting, from thence reasoning, from thence debating; and this is the high birth of our magnified reason, as nobly born, as groping is, which has its beginning in and from darkness, or the loss of light. Hence we have a full proof, that man has lost his first natural state in which God created him. For reasoning, doubt, and perplexity in any creature, is the effect of some fall, or departure from its first state of nature, and shows, that it wants, and is seeking, something that its nature would have, but knows not how to come at it. The beasts seek not after truth; a plain proof, that it has no relation to them; has no suitableness to their nature, nor ever belonged to them. Man is in quest of it, in perplexity about it, cannot come at it; takes lies to be truth, and truth to be lies; a plain proof, both that he has it not, and yet has had it, was created in it, and for it; for nothing can seek for anything, but that which is lost, and is wanted; nor could it form the least idea of it, but because it has belonged to it, and ought to be his.

The beasts have no ignorance of anything, that concerns them; but have all the sensible, intuitive knowledge of everything that is the good of their nature. But man left to his reason is all over ignorance, doubt, conjecture, and perplexity in matters of the highest moment, about what he himself is, what is his chief good, where he is to seek it, and how to obtain it. For to ask your reason, how God is your God, how you are in him, and from him, what he is in himself, and what he is in you, is but like asking your hands to feel out the thickness, or the thinness, of the light. To ask your reason, whether the soul of man is immortal in its nature, is to as good purpose, is going no farther out of the way, than if you was to ask your eyes to show you, where extension begins, and where it ends. To ask your reason, whether man has anything of God, or the divine nature in him, is

just as suitable to the nature and power of your reason, as if you was to ask your nose, whether this or that sweet, aromatic smell in the garden, has any heavenly power mixed with, and opening itself in it.

Reason, therefore, is so far from being able to help man to that knowledge, which his nature and condition wants, that it can only help his ignorance to increase and fructify in doubts, fictions, and absurd debates. And the thing cannot be otherwise; man must walk in a vain shadow, so long as reason is his oracle. For nothing can act suitably to nature, find its true state in nature, or answer the end of its creation by the power of reason; because reason is not the life, the power, or former of nature; and therefore has no more power over nature, than over the powers and principles of vegetation, either in the body of man, or any other creature. He therefore who turns to his reason, as the true power and light of his nature, betrays the same ignorance of the whole nature, power, and office of reason, as if he was to try to smell with his eyes, or see with his nose. For as each of these senses has only its one work or power, which it cannot alter, or exceed; so reason has only its one work or power, which it cannot alter, or exceed; and that one work is, to be a bare observer and comparer of things that manifest themselves to it by the senses. This is as much its one only power, as seeing is the one only power of the eyes. When therefore reason takes upon it to determine on things not manifested to it by the senses, as to judge about divine new birth, a divine light, and divine faith; or how the soul wants, or does not want God, etc. it is then as much out of its place and office, as the eye that takes upon it to smell; and its true name and nature is, whim, humor, caprice, conjecture, opinion, fancy, and every other species of blindness, and passion.

Now suppose man to come thus into the world, with this chief difference from other creatures; that he is at a loss to find out what he is, how he is to live, and what he is to seek, as his chief happiness; what he is to own of a God, of providence, religion, etc. Suppose him to have faculties that put him upon this search, and no faculties, that can satisfy his inquiry; and what can you suppose more miserable to himself, or more unworthy of a good creator? Therefore, if you will not suppose a God, that has been good to all creatures, and given every animal its proper light of nature, except man, you must be forced to own, that man has certainly lost the true light and perfection of his nature, which God at first gave him.

But I believe Academicus wants to say something, and therefore I have done.

Academicus. I was only going to say, that every attribute of God, everything that sense and reason force us to see, and know, and feel, both of ourselves, and the world, join with the letter and spirit of all scripture in attesting, that man has certainly had a divine life, to which he has certainly died. But yet I must own it is very difficult to conceive, how a creature brought forth in so high perfection, in such enjoyment of the life, light, and Spirit of God, could either deceive himself, or be deceived by another.

Theophilus. All that we want to know, my friend, is the certainty of the fact, and this is of the greatest moment to us: for this is it, that takes us from the herd of earthly animals, and lays the foundation of religion, and divine virtue. For had not a divine life at first been in us, we should be now at the same distance from all true virtue and goodness, and as incapable of forming the least thought or desire of it, as other animals; and should have nothing to do, but to look to ourselves, live to our earthly nature, and make the most of this world. For this is the only wisdom and goodness, that an earthly nature is capable of, whether it be a man, or a fox. The certainty therefore of the fact, of our first divine birth, is all; nothing more need be inquired after. For on this ground stands all our comfort; hence it is, that, in faith and hope, we can look up to God as our Father, to heaven as our native country, and have the honor to be accounted only as strangers and pilgrims upon earth.

But however, to remove your difficulty, I shall give you a little sketch of the possibility of man's falling, although created in the perfection above-mentioned.

Now supposing God to have brought a new intelligent creature into a new world, all the attributes of God oblige us to suppose this creature to be created in a perfect state both inwardly and outwardly. As intelligent, it must partake of the divine understanding; as living, it must have a degree of the divine life in it; as good, it must have a birth of the divine goodness in it; as an offspring of divine love, it must have a divine happiness, for the enjoyment of which the love of God created it. Now there is but one possible way, for this intelligent creature, thus endowed, to fall from, or

lose the happiness of its first created state. It cannot knowingly choose misery, or the loss of its happiness: therefore it can only fall by such an ignorance, or power of falling as is consistent with its perfect state. Now this power lay wholly in the newness of its life: it only began to find itself an intelligent being; and yet had a power of looking with the eyes of its understanding either inwards, or outwards; upwards, or downwards. It had a power of acquiescing and rejoicing in that, which it found itself to be, and adoring that power and goodness which had brought it into the possession of such a nature: and it had a power of wandering into conjectures, and reasons about that, which it was not. Now as a free, intelligent creature, it could not be without this power of thus turning its intelligent eye; and yet, as a beginning creature, that had no experience, this power could not be free from a possibility of wandering; and therefore its power of wandering was not a defect, but a necessary part of its first perfect state. Now in this possibility of wandering with its intelligent eye, looking where it ought not, and entering into conjectures about that, which it was not, may be clearly seen the possibility of its falling from a state of high perfection.

This is the one only possible way for a good, intelligent, new creature to lose its happiness. And I think it may justly be affirmed, that the Mosaic account of the fall of man is exactly this very case; namely, how the eye of his new unexperienced understanding, beginning to cast a wandering look into that, which he was not, was by an unsuspected subtlety, or serpent, drawn into a reasoning and conjecturing about a certain good and evil, which were no part of his own created state.

Which inquiry, being given into, ended in the real knowledge of this good and evil, the sensibility of which became an immediate death to his first divine life, destroyed the angelic image in the likeness of God, and set a gross, earthly, naked, ashamed, frightened, wretched animal of bestial flesh and blood in its place, the only animal to which this new knowledge of good and evil could belong.

Supposing therefore the fall of man, which is a fact attested, and proved by everything we know of God, ourselves, and the world; the Mosaic account of it has every mark of truth, sobriety, and justness, as being a plain and easy description of the one only way, by which a creature so endowed could change or lose its first happy state.

Academicus. Truly, Theophilus, you have given a most natural and full solution of my difficulty, by which, I suppose, you mean as well to explain the fall of angels, as of men. But, sir, if that pride, to which their fall is charged, must have stolen upon them, in that same unsuspected way, in which the longing after the tree of good and evil insinuated itself into man; viz., from a wandering look into that, which they were not, occasioned by the newness of their untried life, in which they had but just began to be; suffer me then, to ask, why the fallen angels were not, at first, the immediate objects of divine mercy and goodness? Why they are to be forever prisoners of a never-ending hell? Or, are you of the opinion, that angels, as well as men, will be at last brought back to their first state?

Theophilus. Your questions, Academicus, seem to have too much of curiosity in them: but, as I hope you will not give way to this temper, so I will, for once, comply with your demands.

The fall of angels must be supposed to have been as soon after their creation, as that of Adam. Had they stood any time in their new-created state, they had been in one and the same impossibility of falling, as the angels that are now in heaven. For no pure, intelligent, good, and holy created being, can possibly lose this divine state of perfection, but through the first use of its untried state and powers. The manner of Adam's falling into the life of this world plainly shows the manner how the angels fell into hell, namely, at first only by looking and conjecturing with their intelligent eye into that, which they were not, which was not opened in them, but was hid in God. This looking went on till it became a lust and strong longing after that somewhat; just as it had done in Adam, who so gazed upon the earthly good and evil, till it opened itself in him. Adam looked only at that which was creaturely, and in a life below him; and therefore only that lower, creaturely, bestial life was brought forth in him. But the angel turning his wandering look into that height and depth which was not creaturely, but hid in God; namely, into the might and strength of eternity, that he might know how the creaturely life was kindled by it; and thinking himself by his exalted nature, to be as near to this great power, and as capable of entering into it, as Adam thought himself near to, and capable of knowing the good and evil of the earthly life; and as Adam thought to be like God in this new knowledge; so the angel imagined to be like God, could he enter into this knowledge, how the might of God

kindled the creaturely life, for then he himself should have the power of creating or kindling the creaturely life; and as Adam's imagination brought forth a lust and longing, which could not be stopped, till the earthly knowledge, and earthly life, had opened itself in him; so the angel's imagination begot such a lust and longing to know the ground and original of life, as would not be stopped till the ground and original of life, namely, that depth of darkness and fire, in and from which every creaturely life must begin, was totally opened in him, and he as much swallowed up by hell, as Adam was by the earthly life. Thus you may see, how the same aspiring imagination (but with regard to different matters) rising in the same manner, and from the same cause, in both these creatures, and working itself up into a lust and longing, brought the one from heaven into hell, and the other from paradise into a bestial world.

Now as the lust of Adam, when it had obtained its desire, opened all the properties and tempers of the bestial life in him; so the lust of the angel, when it got what it wanted; viz., the ground and original of the creaturely life, which is darkness and fire; immediately opened all the dreadful properties of darkness and fire in him, which at once swallowed up or extinguished the angelic nature. Hence wrath, hatred, pride, envy, malice, and every enmity to light and love, are the one only life of the fallen angel; and he can will and act nothing else, but as these properties of darkness and fire drive him.

To ask therefore, why the fallen angels continue in their state, is to ask, why darkness is not made to be light? For the root and ground of nature is unchangeable; it keeps its own nature, or it could not be the ground; it must stand always in its own place, and be only the ground and root; it cannot rise higher than the root, no more than the root of the tree can be its branches and fruit. The angels, therefore, being fallen into the ground and root of nature, have only the working life of the ground and root of nature in them; and therefore seem to be as unchangeable, and incapable of having any other, as the root itself is.

To ask therefore, why the fallen angels were not helped by the mercy and goodness of God, as fallen man was; is like asking, why the refreshing dew of heaven does not do that to flint, which it does to the vegetable plant? For as the nature of the flint is too hard, and too much compacted, to

receive any alteration from the sweet softness of refreshing water; so the fallen angel, like the flint, being shut up in the wrathful working of its own hard darkness and fire, the goodness of God can have no entrance into it.

For what are we to understand by the mercy and goodness of God? His mercy is his patience. And his goodness, is his light, and Word, and Holy Spirit. Now every creature has the benefit of divine patience; but no creature can have his goodness, but that which is capable of receiving his light, and Holy Spirit.

And his light, and Holy Spirit, cannot enter into a creature, as an external, additional thing, that may be given to it, whether it will, or not, but must be brought forth as a birth in it. For the light, and Spirit of God can be nowhere, but as a birth, whether it be in God, or the creature. And therefore the goodness of God can be imparted to no creature, but that which is capable of a birth of the light and Spirit of God, or, in the words of scripture, unless it be “born of the Word and Spirit of God.”

This therefore you may rest upon, as a certain truth, that the one only reason, why the fallen angels have as yet had nothing of the Spirit or light of God breathed into, or born in them, is, because they are as yet utterly incapable of such a birth, or of being helped by the divine goodness. For as flame cannot communicate itself to flint, nor the Spirit of God to a beast; because the flint stands in the utmost contrariety to flame, and the beast in a total incapacity of holiness; so the fallen angel is in its working life altogether incapable of receiving the Spirit and life of God into it. Were it not thus, angels had been helped, as early as man: for the goodness, or the light and Spirit of God loses no time, but stands always in the same fullness of communication of itself to every creature that is capable of receiving it.

And therefore it is, that fallen man was immediately helped, because he fell only into earthly flesh and blood, in which the light of this world is kindled, which light has something of heaven in it, and was kindled by the light of heaven.

And therefore the goodness of God, or his light, and Holy Spirit, could come to man’s assistance in the light of this life, and therein begin a covenant of redemption with him. For in this light of his life, which is a

ray of heaven, the inspoken Word in paradise could enter, and have communion with it, and make itself to be a beginning of salvation to all those, who by faith and hope should lay hold of it, and endeavor after a new birth from it. Thus stands the ground and reason why men, and not angels, were immediately helped at their fall.

As to your last question, whether I believe the final restoration of all the fallen angels; I shall only say, that neither ancient nor modern writers, on either side of the question, have touched the true merits of the cause, or spoke to that point on which the decision of the matter wholly rests.

For it can neither be sufficiently affirmed, nor sufficiently denied, by any arguments drawn either from the divine attributes, or texts of scripture; for they cannot come up to the point in question. But the true ground and merit of the cause lies solely in the possibility of the thing, which no one has attempted to prove, nor perhaps is anyone able to do it; namely, to show from a true ground, that the diabolical nature is possible to be altered. Darkness can by no omnipotence be made to be light; it can only be suppressed, or overcome by it, or forced to be hid under it, as heaven hides or overcomes hell; but still the darkness has its first nature, never to be changed.

Now if anyone can show, that the devils are not essentially evil, as darkness is essentially dark, but have only such an accidental difference from goodness, as ice has from water, or a flint from transparent glass; then their restoration is possible, and they will infallibly have all their evil removed out of them by the goodness of God.

But unless it could be shown from a true ground in nature, that the fallen angels must have something of the heavenly life in them, though shut up in a thousand times harder death, than fire is in the dark flint, no length of time, or anything else, can produce any alteration, or cessation of their evil nature.

For time cannot alter the nature or essence of things; it only suffers that to come to pass which is possible, and consistent with the nature of things. No length of time can make a circle to have, or give forth, the properties of a right line.

Now if the fallen angels have nothing heavenly in them, but stand in as full a contrariety to all that is heavenly, as the circle does to the properties of the right line; then goodness is as impossible to be ever awakened in them, as in a beast. The beast must always be what it was at first; and for this reason, because nothing but the bestial nature is in it: if therefore the fallen angel is totally hellish, as the beast is bestial, it must always be what it is.

But we have launched far enough in a deep that does not belong unto us; and which cannot be sufficiently affirmed or denied but from the known possibility, or the known impossibility, of the thing, which does not yet appear. If it is possible, I am heartily glad of it; and am also sure enough, that it will then come to pass in its own time. For if he could not be thought to be a good man, who did not do all that he could to make sinners become holy and happy in goodness, we may be sure enough that the boundless goodness of God, will set no bounds to itself, but remove every misery from every creature that is capable of it. But let me now return to *Humanus*, and ask him, that, supposing he could not convince a man of the certainty of his fallen state, how he would farther proceed with him.

Humanus. Truly, *Theophilus*, I would proceed no farther at all; and for this good reason, because I should then have nothing to proceed upon. Did I certainly know of an infallible remedy for every disorder of the eyes, only to be had by going to China for it, I should not attempt to persuade a man, who believed his eyes to be sound and good, to leave all that he had, and go to China for this infallible remedy for bad eyes.

Now to press a man to deny himself, and leave all that he hath in the enjoyments of flesh and blood, in order to be reconciled to God, who believes himself to be in the same good state, in which God created him, seems to be as wild a project, as to desire him who is well pleased with the goodness of his sight, to go to the Indies to be helped to see.

And indeed I very well know, from former experience, that all discourse about the reasonableness of Christianity, the doctrine of the cross, the exceeding love of God in giving so great a savior, with many more things of the like nature, were mere empty sounds, heard with the greatest indifference, and incapable of raising the least seriousness in me, merely because I had not the least notion or suspicion of the truth and greatness

of my fallen state, and therefore was not the man who had any fitness to be affected with these matters. And thence it was that Christ said, "Come unto me, all ye that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you"; as plain as if he had said, No one else can come to me, nor anyone else be refreshed by me.

Here therefore, in my humble opinion, should all begin, who would propagate Christianity, or make true converts to it, and here stop, as Christ did. It is only the weary, and heavy laden, that are fitted to be converts, or refreshed; and therefore we can no way help a man to be a Christian, or fit him to be refreshed by Christ, but by bringing him into a full sensibility of the evil, and burden, and vanity of his natural state, till some good providence awakens him out of it; and not make proposals to him of the reasonableness of believing the Holy Trinity, the incarnation of the Son of God, and the necessity of his sufferings and death, etc. for this method is full as absurd, as to enter into solemn debate with a confessed atheist, about the reasonableness of worshipping God in spirit and truth; for, as the excellence of a God is the only ground of proving that he ought to be worshipped in spirit and truth, so the certainty and belief of our fallen state is the only ground of showing the reasonableness of the mysteries of redemption. And he that disowns the fall of man from a divine life, has all the same reasons for rejecting the mysteries of our salvation, as the atheist has to reject the doctrines of a spiritual worship of God. Therefore, to expose the mysteries of our salvation to the wrangle of a debate with an unbeliever of the fall of man, which mysteries have no other ground to stand upon, is not only helping him to an easy triumph over you, but is the most likely method to prevent his ever becoming a Christian. For seeing how easily he can ridicule mysteries, which, to him in his present state, can have no reasonableness in them, he is put into the most likely way of living and dying in a hardened contempt of them. Whereas if you stick close to the one true ground of Christianity, and only proceed as that proceeds, and make the unbeliever no offers of any other Christianity, but that which is to begin with the acknowledged sensibility of the fall of human nature from its first divine life; you stop where you ought to stop, and rob him of all power and pretense of meddling with the other mysteries of salvation.

The one business then upon his hands, if he will hold out against you, must be to deny his reason and senses, and maintain, in spite of both, that man is not fallen, but is by nature holy, just, good, and happy both in body and soul; and that mankind, and the world they are in, have all that goodness and happiness, which they could be supposed to have from an infinitely good and happy God; and who can will nothing in the creature but goodness and happiness. Here you bring the Deist to his proper work, and all the contradiction to sense and reason will lie on his side: you set Christianity upon its true ground; and whoever thus defends it, as it ought to be defended, not only does justice to the Christian cause, but acts the most kind and friendly part towards those who oppose it merely through a misunderstanding of its true ground and nature; which I will venture to say is the case of all the sober well-meaning Deists. For Deism has no natural foundation, or ground of its own, to stand upon; it does not grow from any root or strength within itself, but is what it is merely from the bad state of Christendom, and the miserable use that heathenish learning, and worldly policy, have made of the gospel. If it (Deism) seems to itself to be strong and well-grounded, it is merely because it can so easily object to church-doctrines, and scholastic opinions: if it seems to itself to be good it is because it can so easily lay open the evils which Christians and churches bring upon one another: if it seems to itself to be highly rational, its reason is, because it is free from that number of absurdities and contradictions which Christian churches lay to the charge of one another. Lastly, if it keeps off all fearful forebodings of the consequences of not receiving the gospel, it is because it so plainly sees, that Christians say, "Hail, master," kiss the gospel, and then break every part of it.

This is the true height, and depth, and total strength of Deism or infidelity; it never had any other support in myself but this; nor did I ever converse with a Deist, who carried the matter higher or farther than this, to support the cause. Hence it is, that you made so speedy a convert of me, by showing me such a Christianity as I never heard of before; and stripped of everything that gave me power to oppose it. Had you proceeded in the way practiced by most defenders of the gospel, you had left me just as you found me, if not more confirmed in my old way. But as you have justly removed all controversy about doctrines from the merits of the cause, and shown that it all lies in this one short, plain, and decisive point,

namely the fall of man; a fall proved and demonstrated to all my senses and reason, by every height and depth of nature, by every kind of misery, evil, and sin in the world, by everything we know of God, ourselves, and the world we live in; the ground and foundation of Christianity is undeniable, and no one can be too speedy a convert to the belief of it. And as you have also shown, that the whole nature of the gospel redemption means nothing but the one, true, and only possible way of delivering man from his miserable state in this world; Christianity is shown to be the most intelligible and desirable thing that the heart of man can think of. And thus, contrary to all expectation, the tables are quite turned; Deism can no longer be founded on argument, and Christianity is as self-evident as our senses: all learning on both sides, either for or against it, is insignificant; Christianity stands upon a bottom quite superior to it, and may be the sure possession of every plain man, who has sense enough to know whether he is happy or unhappy, good or evil. For this natural knowledge, if adhered to, is every man's sure guide to that one salvation preached by the gospel. Which gospel stands in no more need of learning and critical art now, than it did when Christ was preaching it upon earth. How absurd would it have been for any critics in Greek and Hebrew, to have followed Christ and his apostles, as necessary explainers of their hard words, which called for nothing in the hearers but penitent hearts turned to God; and declared, that they only "who were of God, could hear the Word of God!" How strange, that Christ should choose only illiterate men to preach the gospel of the kingdom of God, if only great scholars could rightly understand what they said! Again, supposing learned men to have only the true fitness to understand the word of scripture, and that the plain man is to receive it from them, how must he know which are the scholars that have the right knowledge? From whence is he to have this information? For no one need be told, that ever since learning has borne rule in the church, learned doctors have contradicted and condemned one another in every essential point of the Christian doctrine. Thousands of learned men tell the illiterate, they are lost in this or that church; and thousands of learned men tell them, they are lost, if they leave it.

If therefore Christianity is in the hands of scholars, how must the plain man come at it? Must he, though unable to understand scripture, for want of learning, tell which learned man is in the right, and which is not? If so,

the unlearned man has much the greatest ability, since he is to do that for scholars, which they cannot do for themselves.

But the truth of the matter is this; Christian redemption is God's mercy to all mankind; but it could not be so, if every fallen man, as such, had not some fitness and capacity to lay hold of it. It must have no dependence upon times and places, or the ages and several conditions of the world, or any outward circumstance of life; as the first man partook of it, so must the last; the learned linguist, and the blind, the deaf and dumb, have but one and the same common way of finding life in it. And he that writes large commentaries upon the whole Bible, must be saved by something full as different from book knowledge, as they were, who lived when there was neither book nor any alphabet in the world.

For this salvation, which is God's mercy to the fallen soul of man, merely as fallen, must be something that meets every man; and which every man, as fallen, has something that directs him to turn to it. For as the fall of man is the reason of this mercy, so the fall must be the guide to it; the want must show the thing that is wanted. And therefore the manifestation of this one salvation, or mercy to man, must have a nature suitable, not to this or that great reader of history, or able critic in Hebrew roots and Greek phrases, but suitable to the common state and condition of every son of Adam. It must be something as grounded in human nature, as the fall itself is, which wants no art to make it known; but to which the common nature of man is the only guide in one man, as well as another. Now this something, which is thus obvious to every man, and which opens the way to Christian redemption in every soul, is a sense of the vanity and misery of this world; and a prayer of faith and hope to God, to be raised to a better state.

Now in this sensibility, which every man's own nature leads him into, lies the whole of man's salvation; here the mercy of God and the misery of man are met together; here the fall and the redemption kiss each other. This is the Christianity which is as old as the fall; which alone saved the first man, and can alone save the last. This is it on which hang all the law and the prophets, and which fulfills them both; for they have only this end, to turn man from the lusts of this life, to a desire, and faith, and hope of a better. Thus does the whole of Christian redemption, considered on

the part of man, stand in this degree of nearness and plainness to all mankind; it is as simple and plain as the feeling our own evil and misery, and as natural as the desire of being saved and delivered from it.

This is the Christianity which every man must first be made sensible of, not from hearsay, but as a growth or degree of life within himself, before he can have any fitness, or the least pretense to judge or speak a word about the further mysteries of the gospel. But here I stop.

Theophilus. Well, Humanus, I have now pushed the matter with you, as far as I intended; and you have given me full proof of the truth and solidity of your own conversion, and your ability to do good amongst your old brethren. You must now enter the lists with them; not to charge them with ignorance, ill will, or profaneness of spirit, but only to try, in the spirit of love and meekness, to undeceive them, in the manner you have been undeceived; and to show them, that Christianity is by no means that thing, which you and they have so long disliked.

Nothing can be more right than your resolution not to enter into debate about the gospel doctrines, or propose the reasonableness of them to anyone, till he owns himself sensibly convinced of the forementioned fall of man; and stands in a full desire to be saved, or delivered from it. And if that time never comes, you must leave him, as in the same incapacity to hear or judge of the doctrines of the Holy Trinity, in the incarnation of the Son of God, the operation of the Holy Spirit, as Epicurus would be. For every man that cleaves to this world, that is in love with it, and its earthly enjoyments, is a disciple of Epicurus, and sticks in the same mire of atheism, as he did, whether he be a modern Deist, a Popish or Protestant Christian, an Aryan, or an orthodox teacher. For all these distinctions are without any difference, if this world has the possession and government of his heart. For the whole of the matter lies solely in this, whether heaven, or earth, hath the heart and government of man. Nothing divides the worshipers of the true God from idolaters but this: where earth possesses and rules the heart, there all are of one and the same religion, and worship one and the same God, however they may be distinguished by sect or party.

And wherever the heart is weary of the evil and vanity of the earthly life, and looking up to God for an heavenly nature, there all are one of the true religion, and worshipers of the true God, however distant they may be from one another, as to time or place. But enough has been said of this matter.

Let me now only, before we break up, observe to you the true ground and nature of gospel Christianity: I call it so by way of distinction from that original universal Christianity, which began with Adam; was the religion of the patriarchs, of Moses and the prophets, and of every penitent man in every part of the world, that had faith and hope towards God, to be delivered from the evil of this world.

But when the Son of God had taken a birth in and from the human nature, had finished all the wonders that belonged to our redemption, and was sat down at the right hand of God in heaven, then a heavenly kingdom was set up on earth, and the Holy Spirit came down from heaven, or was given to the flock of Christ in such a degree of birth and life, as never was, nor could be given to the human nature, till Christ, the redeemer of the human nature, was glorified. But when the humanity of Christ, our second Adam, was glorified, and became all heavenly, then the heavenly life, the comfort, and power, and presence of the Holy Spirit, was the gift which he gave to his brethren, his friends and followers, which he had left upon earth.

The Holy Ghost descended in the shape of cloven tongues of fire on the heads of those, that were to begin and open the new powers of a divine life set up amongst men. This was the beginning and manifestation of the whole nature and power of gospel Christianity, a thing as different from what was Christianity before, as the possession of the thing hoped for is different from hope, or deliverance different from the desire or expectation of it. Hence the apostles were new men, entered into a new kingdom come down from heaven, enlightened with new light, inflamed with new love, and preached not any absent or distant thing, but Jesus Christ, as the wisdom and power of God, felt and found within them, and as a power of God ready to be communicated in the same manner, as a new birth from above, to all that would repent and believe in him. It was to this change of nature, of life, and spirit, to this certain immediate deliverance from the power of sin, to be possessed and governed by gifts and graces of an

heavenly life, that men were then called to, as true Christianity. And the preachers of it bore witness, not to a thing that they had heard, but to a power of salvation, a renewal of nature, a birth of heaven, a sanctification of spirit, which they themselves had received. Gospel Christianity then stood upon its own true ground; it appeared to be what it was. And what was it? Why, it was an awakened divine life set up amongst men; itself was its own proof; it appealed to its proper judge, to the heart and conscience of man, which was alone capable of being touched with these offers of a new life.

Hence it was, that sinners of all sorts, that felt the burden of their evil natures, were in a state of fitness to receive these glad tidings. Whilst the rigid Pharisee, the orthodox priest, and the rational heathen, though at enmity with one another, and each proud of his own distinction, yet all agreed in rejecting and abhorring a spiritual savior, that was to save them from their carnal selves, and the vanity of their own rational selfish virtues. But when, after a while, Christianity had lost its first glory, appeared no longer as a divine life awakened amongst men, and itself was no longer its own proof of the power and Spirit of God manifested in it; then heathenish learning, and temporal power, was from age to age forced to be called the glory and prosperity of the church of Christ; although in the Revelation of St. John, its figure is that of a scarlet whore riding upon the beast.

Here therefore, my friend, you are to place the true distinction of gospel Christianity from all that went before it, or that is come up after it. It is purely and solely a divine life awakened, and set up amongst men, as the effect and fruit of Christ's glorification in heaven; and has no other promise from him but that of his Holy Spirit, to be with it, as its light, its guide, its strength, its comfort, and protection, to the end of the world. Therefore as gospel Christians, we belong to the new covenant of the Holy Spirit, which is the kingdom of God come down from heaven on the day of Pentecost; and therefore it is, that there is no possibility of seeing or entering into this new kingdom, but by being born again of the Spirit. The apostles and disciples of Christ, though they had been baptized with water, had followed Christ, heard his doctrines, and done wonders in his name; yet as then, stood only near to the kingdom of God, and preached it to be at hand. They had only seen and known Christ according to the

flesh; had followed him with great zeal, but with little and very low knowledge either of him or his kingdom; and therefore it was, that they were commanded to stand still, and not act as his ministers in his new glorified state, till they were endued with power from on high: which power they then received, when the Holy Ghost with his cloven tongues of fire came down upon them, by which they became illuminated instruments, that were to diffuse the light of an heavenly kingdom over all the world. From that day began gospel Christianity, with its true distinction from everything that was before it; which was the ministration of the Spirit; and the ministers of it called the world to nothing but gifts and graces of the same Spirit, to look for nothing but spiritual blessings, to trust, and hope, and pray for nothing but the power of that Spirit, which was to be the one life and ruling Spirit of this newly opened kingdom of God. No one could join himself to them or have any part with them but by dying to the wisdom and light of the flesh, that he might live by the Spirit, through faith in Jesus Christ, who had thus called him to his kingdom and glory. Now this Christianity is its own proof; it can be proved from nothing but itself; it wants neither miracles, nor outward witness; but, like the sun, is only its own discoverer.

He that adheres only to the history of the facts, doctrines, and institutions of the gospel, without being born of its Spirit, is only such a Christian, and is no nearer to Christ, than the Jew, who carnally adhered to the letter of the law. They both stand in the same distance from gospel Christianity.

It is in vain therefore for the modern Christian, to appeal to antiquity, to history, and ancient churches, to prove that he belongs to Christ; for he can only belong to him, by having the power of Christ, and the Spirit of God living and dwelling in his renewed inward man.

But a learned Christianity, supported and governed by reason, dispute, and criticism, that is forced to appeal to canons, and councils, and ancient usages, to defend itself, has lost its place, stands upon a fictitious ground, and shows, that it cannot appeal to itself, to its own works, which alone are the certain and only proofs either of a true, or a false Christianity.

For the truth of Christianity is the Spirit of God living and working in it; and where this Spirit is not the life of it, there the outward form is but like the outward carcass of a departed soul.

For the spiritual life is as much its own proof, as the natural life, and needs no outward, or foreign thing to bear witness to it. But if you please, gentlemen, we will end for this time, and refer what remains to the afternoon.

The End of the First Dialogue

THE SECOND DIALOGUE

Academicus. I must take the liberty, gentlemen, of speaking first this afternoon; for though I have been much pleased with what passed betwixt Humanus and Theophilus in the morning, yet I must own to you all, that I was quite disappointed; for I came in full expectation of hearing everything, that I wish, and want to know, concerning Jacob Behmen, and his works. For though I have been reading, for more than two years, some one or other of his books, with the utmost attention, and I everywhere find the greatest truths of the gospel most fundamentally asserted, yet presently I am led into such depths, as I know not where I am, and talked to in such new, intricate, and unintelligible language, as seems quite impossible to be comprehended. Sometimes I almost suspect, that the author understood not himself: for I think, if I knew any truths, though ever so deep or uncommon; yet, if I understand them plainly myself, I could set them before others in the same plainness, that they appeared to me.

All my acquaintance have the same complaint that I here make; but some hope, and others say, that if you live to publish any of his books, you will remove most of his strange and unintelligible words; and give us notes and explications of such as you don't alter. Surely a kind of commentary upon him, would reconcile many to the reading of him, who, in the state he is in, cannot have patience to puzzle their heads about him.

Rusticus. Oh this impatient scholar! How many troubles do I escape, through the want of his learning? How much better does my old neighbor John the shepherd proceed? In winter evenings, when he comes out of the field, his own eyes being bad, the old woman his wife puts on her spectacles, and reads about an hour to him, sometimes out of the scriptures, and sometimes out of Jacob Behmen; for he has had two or three of his books some years. I sat by one evening, when my old dame, reading Jacob, had much ado to get on: "John," said I, "do you understand all this?" "Ah," says he, "God bless the heart of the dear man, I sometimes understand but little of him; and mayhap Betty does not always read right;

but that little which I often do understand, does me so much good, that I love him where I don't understand him."

"John," said I, "shall I bring a man to you, that knows the meaning of all of Jacob's hard words, and can make all his high matters as plain to you, as the plainest things in the world?" "No, no," replied John, "I don't want such a man, to make a talking about Jacob's words; I had rather have but a little of his own, as it comes from him, than twenty times as much at second-hand. Madam, the squire's wife, of our town, hearing how Betty and I loved the scriptures, brought us, one day, a huge expounding book upon the New Testament; and told us, that we should understand the scripture a deal better, by reading it in that book, than the Testament alone. The next Lord's Day, when two or three neighbors, according to custom, came to sit with us in the evening; 'Betty,' said I, 'bring out madam's great book, and read the fifth chapter of St. Matthew.' When she had done that, I bid her read the fifteenth chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians. The next morning, said I to Betty, 'Carry his expounding book again to my mistress, and tell her, that the words of Christ, and his apostles, are best by themselves, and just as they left them.'

"And, as I was that morning going to my sheep, thought I to myself, this great expounding book seems to have done just as much good to this little book of the Testament, by being added to it, and mixed with it, as a gallon of water would do to a little cup of true wine, by being added to it, or mixed with it. The wine indeed would be all there; but its fine taste, and cordial spirit, which it had, when drank by itself, would be all lost and drowned in the coldness and deadness of the water.

"When my Betty used to read this, or some such words of Christ, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven'; she used to stop a little, that my heart might have time to be affected with them, to love the blessed thing there spoken of, and lift up itself to God in desire of it. But this great book takes this good work from my heart; and only calls upon my mind, to behold the many parts which the text may be split into, and the many meanings, some better and some worse, some higher and some lower, that every part has, and may be taken in, by some doctor of some church or other. Therefore, Rusticus, I sent the great book to madam again; and am, for the same reason, utterly against hearing your

expounder of Jacob Behmen. If Jacob has more truths than other folks, he is the best able to tell me what they are; and if he has some matters too high for me, I don't desire any lesser man to make them lower.

“When he, like an Elijah, in his fiery chariot, is caught up into such heights, and sees and relates such things, as I cannot yet comprehend; I love and reverence him for having been where I never was; and seeing such things as he cannot make me to see: just as I love and reverence St. Paul for having been caught up into the third heaven, and hearing and seeing things not possible to be uttered in human words.

“As I have but one end in hearing the scriptures read to me, to fill me with the love of God, and every kind of goodness; so every part of scripture, whether plain or mysterious, does me the same good, is alike good to me, and kindles the same heavenly flame in my soul. Thus these plain words, ‘Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls’; give me, without any expounder of their meaning, such an aversion and dislike of all vanity and pride, fill me with such sweet contentment in every lowliness of life, that I long to be the servant of every human creature. On the other hand, these lofty words of scripture, ‘Behold, a throne was set in heaven; and he that sat thereon, was, to look upon, like a jasper-stone; and there was a rainbow round about the throne; and four-and-twenty seats; and upon the seats, four-and-twenty elders in white raiment, and crowns of gold upon their heads: and out of the throne proceeded lightnings, and thunders, and voices: and before the throne were seven lamps of fire, which are the seven spirits of God: and before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about it, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind: and the first beast was like a lion, the second like a calf, the third had a face as a man, and the fourth was like a flying eagle: and the four beasts had each of them six wings, and were full of eyes; and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy Lord God almighty, which was, and is, and is to come. And when these beasts give glory, and honor, and thanks, to him that sat on the throne, the four-and-twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor, for thou hast created all things,’ etc. (Revelations, 4, ver. 2 etc.)

“Now these lofty and mysterious words, instead of puzzling my head, lay hold of my heart, which, all inflamed with them, rises up with the eyes and wings of the beasts in their song of praise and honor; and bows down with the elders that worship the high and mighty Lord of heaven and earth. And thus I want no Hebrew or Greek scholar to tell me this or that, what are the seven spirits of God, why four kinds of beasts, why neither more nor less than six wings, who were the elders, and why twenty-four; but the whole matter, as if a glance of the majesty of heaven had just passed by me, strikes my heart with such good transports of wonder and joy, as makes me all longing and desire to be one of those, who are always singing the praises and wonders of the majesty of God. And thus, Rusticus, all that the scriptures give me to drink, whether high or low, is equally a cup of blessing to me, and equally helps forward the growth of heaven in my soul.

“Bring not therefore your cunning man, that has skill in words, to me; for words are but words; and though they be spoken even by the messengers of God, as angels, or prophets, or apostles; when they do their best, they can only do, as John the Baptist did, bear witness to the light: but the light itself, which can only give light to the soul, is God himself. And therefore not he that can best speak with the tongues of men and angels, but he that most loves God, that is, that most loves the goodness of the divine nature; he has most of God, and the light of God within him.”

Thus ended honest old John the shepherd. And now, Academicus, if your learned curiosity could be as much affected with what he has said, as my ignorant simplicity is, you would drop all that you had said, as the effect of such impatience as is much fitter to bring darkness than light into your soul. You own, that, in the works of Behmen, the greatest points of Christianity are most fundamentally opened. And how can you be more self-condemned, than by desiring more?

But the truth is, you have only heard these fundamental matters; you have only received them as good notions; are content with the hearsay of them; and are therefore impatient to have more of this hearsay knowledge, that you may become more learned in high matters, and more able to talk about the ground and depth of Christian doctrines. You know, as well as I can tell you, that this is your joy in Jacob Behmen; and thence it is, that you

have no patience, when you can't come at his meaning, so as to add it to your number of notions. And thus you forget how often he tells you, and how fundamentally he proves to you, that this notional knowledge, the treasure of human reason, is the very builder of Babel. Whilst you are under the guidance of our own Babylonian reason, you can have no good either from the scriptures, or the writings of Jacob Behmen; but will be hunting after notes and commentaries to help you to notions which only delude your mind with the empty shadows of knowledge. Would you know the truths of Jacob Behmen, you must see that you stand where he stood; you must begin where he began, and seek only, as he tells you he did, the heart of God, that he might be saved from the wrath of sin and Satan; and then it was, that the light of God broke in upon him. But you, full of the power of your own reason, want to stand upon the top of his ladder, without the trouble of beginning at the bottom, and going up step by step. But I believe you had rather have Theophilus speak than me; and therefore I shall now leave you to him.

Theophilus. Truly, Academicus, I am much of the same mind with honest Rusticus, though perhaps I might not have spoken it so bluntly as he has done. You seem to be in the same error, that most of my learned friends are in, with regard to Jacob Behmen, who, though they greatly admire him, yet, of all people, receive the least true benefit from him. They have been trained up in dispute and controversy, accustomed to determine everything by the light of their own reason, and know no other guide to truth. And therefore, till, sooner or later, they come to know the falseness of this guide, they can have no entrance into the region of divine light; but must be forced to take their part, not of truth, but of some such system of opinions, as their birth and education has placed them in. Thus, a learned Papist has one creed, and the learned Protestant has another; not because truth and light has helped him to it; but because birth and education have given to the one popish, to the other Protestant eyes. For reason, which is the eye or light of both, finds as much to its purpose, and as many good tools to work with, in popish, as in Protestant opinions. Learning and criticism are an open field to both, and he only has the greatest harvest, who is best skilled in reaping.

Academicus. I perceive then, that I must renounce all my learning and reason, if I am to understand Jacob Behmen. I cannot say, that I am

resolved to purchase it at so great a price. I hope the knowledge to be had from the scriptures, will be sufficient for me, without his deep matters. I did not expect to find you so great an enemy to learning.

Theophilus. Dear Academicus, be not so uneasy; I am no more an enemy to learning, than I am to that art which builds mills to grind our corn, and houses for ourselves to dwell in. I esteem the liberal arts and sciences as the noblest of human things; I desire no man to dislike or renounce his skill in ancient or modern languages; his knowledge of medals, pictures, paintings, history, geography, or chronology; I have no more dislike of these things in themselves, than of the art of throwing silk, or making lace. But then all these things are to stand in their proper places, and everyone kept within its own sphere.

Now all this circle of science and arts, whether liberal or mechanic, belongs solely to the natural man; they are the work of his natural powers and faculties; and the most wicked, sensual, unjust person, who regards neither God, nor man, may yet be one of the ablest proficient in any or all of them. But now Christian redemption is quite of another nature; it has no affinity to any of these arts or sciences; it belongs not to the outward natural man, but is purely for the sake of an inward, heavenly nature, that was lost, or put to death, in paradise, and buried under the flesh and blood of the earthly, natural man. It breathes a spark of life into this inward, hidden, or lost man; by which it feels and finds itself, and rises up in new awakened desires after its lost Father, and native country.

This is Christian redemption; on the one side, it is the heavenly divine life offering itself again to the inward man, that had lost it. On the other side, it is the hope, the faith, and desire of this inward man, hungering, and thirsting, stretching after, and calling upon this divine and heavenly life.

Now, whether this awakened, new man breathes forth his faith and hope towards this divine life, in Hebrew, Greek, or English sounds, or in no one of them, can be of no significance: a man that can do it only in one, or in all these languages, is neither farther from, nor nearer to, this redeeming life of God. Or can you think, that the heavenly life must more willingly enter into, and open itself in, a man that has many languages, than in him, who knows only one? Or, that a man, who can make high Dutch, Welsh, or

Greek grammars, must have a stronger faith, a more lively hope, and a more continual thirst after God, than he who can but poorly spell in his mother tongue? But now, if this is too absurd to be supposed; then, my friend, without the least injury done, or the least enmity shown, to learning, science, reason, and criticism, you must place them just where I have done, amongst the things and ornaments of this earthly life, and such things as, in their own nature, are as easy to be had, and as highly enjoyed, by men that despise all goodness, as by those who fear God, and eschew evil.

And therefore, sir, no truths concerning the divine and heavenly life are to be brought for trial before this learned bar, where both jury and judges are born and bred, live and move and have their being, in another world, which have no more power of feeling the divine life, than an eagle's eyes can look into the kingdom of God. If you, my friend, having read many old Greek and Latin books, should intend to publish Homer, or Caesar's Commentaries, with critical notes, I should have nothing to object to your ability; you might be as well qualified by such means for such a work, as one man is to make baskets, or another traps to catch flies. But if, because of this skill in old Greek and Latin, you should seem to yourself, or others, to be well qualified to write notes upon the spirit and meaning of the words of Christ, I should tell you, that your undertaking was quite unnatural, and as impossible to be free from error, as when a blind man undertakes to set forth the beauty of different colors.

For the doctrines of redemption belong no more to the natural man, than the beauty of colors to him, that never saw the light. And from this unnatural procedure it is, that the scriptures are as useful to the Socinian or Aryan, the papist or the Protestant; and they can as easily, by the light of reason, charge one another with absurdities, and confute each other's opinion, as two blind men can quarrel and reject each other's notions of red and green.

Jesus Christ is the light of that heavenly man that died in paradise; and therefore nothing in man, but that awakened seed of life, that died in paradise, can have the least sensibility or capacity for receiving the redeeming power of Jesus Christ. But light and life have no dependence upon words or phrases; they both can only proceed from a birth, whether

it be the light and life of God, or the light and life of this world. How absurd would it be, to suppose, that a man, naturally blind, must be taught grammar or logic, to fit him for the reception of the light of the sun, and the knowledge of colors? Yet not less absurd, than to think, that skill in Hebrew and Greek words can open the light of God and heaven in the soul. If you now, Academicus, can set this matter in a juster light, I am ready to hear you.

Academicus. Standing upon the ground, that you, Theophilus, stand upon, all that you have said of reason, science, historical knowledge, or critical skill in words, is unanswerable. For what can all these things avail, if redemption is purely a birth of the divine nature, light, and Spirit of God, offered to fallen man; which birth can only be received by the faith, hope, and desire of that inward man, which is divine in us? For nothing else can have any hunger or thirst after the divine nature, but that which is itself born of it.

Now this true ground of the Christian redemption gives the greatest glory to God and comfort to man. It explains the fact, why plain and simple souls, having their inward man kindled into love, hope, and faith in God, are capable of the highest divine illumination; whilst learned students, full of art and science, can live and die without the least true knowledge of God and Christ, and slaves to all the lusts of the flesh. For thus, this redemption belongs only to one sort of people, and yet is common to all. It is equally near, and equally open, to every son of man. There is no difference between learned and unlearned, between Jew or Greek, male or female, Scythian or barbarian, bond or free; but the same Lord is God over all, and equally nigh to all that call upon him. It is told us, as the glory of the divine goodness, that "it giveth fodder to the cattle; and feedeth the young ravens that cry unto it." What cattle? Surely not only to the cattle of Jacob; or only to the young ravens that cry in the land of Judah. Yet this would be much more consistent with the goodness of the one universal God, than to hold, that only the sons of Jacob, or the children of the circumcision, were in the covenant of God's redemption.

But now, though this one ground of Christian redemption stands in the highest degree of plainness from scripture, and is absolutely certain from the very nature of the thing; yet, till I met with honest Rusticus, I never

conversed with any man, or read any book, that gave me the least hint of it. When I had taken my degrees, I consulted several great divines, to put me in a method of studying divinity. Had I said to them, "Sirs what must I do to be saved?" they would have prescribed hellebore to me, or directed me to the physician as a vapored enthusiast. And yet I am now fully satisfied, that this one question ought to be the sole inquiry of him, who desires to be a true divine. And was our savior himself on earth, who surely could do more for me, than all the libraries in the world; yet I need have asked no more divinity-knowledge of him, than is contained in the one question.

It would take up near half a day, to tell you the work which my learned friends have cut out for me. One told me, that Hebrew words are all; that they must be read without points; and then the Old Testament is an opened book. He recommended to me a cart load of lexicons, critics, and commentators, upon the Hebrew Bible. Another tells me, the Greek Bible is the best; that it corrects the Hebrew in many places; and refers me to a large number of books learnedly writ in defense of it. Another tells me, that church history is the main matter; that I must begin with the first fathers, and follow them through every age of the church, not forgetting to take the lives of the Roman emperors along with me, as striking great light into the state of the church in their times. Then I must have recourse to all the councils held, and the canons made, in every age which would enable me to see with my own eyes the great corruptions of the Council of Trent. Another, who is not very fond of ancient matters, but wholly bent upon rational Christianity, tells me, I need go no higher than the reformation; that Calvin and Cranmer were very great men; that Chillingworth and Locke ought always to lie upon my table; that I must get an entire set of those learned volumes wrote against popery in King James's reign; and also be well versed in all the discourses which Mr. Boyle's and Lady Moyer's lectures have produced: and then, says he, you will be a match for our greatest enemies, which are the popish priests, and modern Deists. My tutor is very liturgical; he desires me, of all things to get all the collections that I can of the ancient liturgies, and all the authors that treat of such matters; who, he says, are very learned, and very numerous. He has been many years making observations upon them, and is now clear, as to the time, when certain little particles got entrance into the liturgies, and

others were by degrees dropped. He has a friend abroad, in search of ancient manuscript liturgies; for, by the bye, said he, at parting, I have some suspicion that our sacrament of the Lord's Supper is essentially defective, for want of having a little water in the wine, etc. Another learned friend tells me, the Clementine Constitutions is the book of books; and that all that lies loose and scattered in the New Testament, stands there in its true order and form; and though he won't say, that Dr. Clarke and Mr. Whiston are in the right; yet it might be useful to me to read all the Aryan and Socinian writers, provided I stood upon my guard, and did it with caution. The last person I consulted, advised me to get all the histories of the rise and progress of heresies, and of the lives and characters of heretics. These histories, he said, contract the matter; bring truth and error close in view; and I should find all that collected in a few pages, which would have cost me some years to have got together. He also desired me to be well versed in all the casuistical writers, and chief schoolmen; for they debate matters to the bottom; dissect every virtue, and every vice, into its many degrees and parts; and show, how near they can come to one another without touching. And this knowledge, he said, might be useful to me, when I came to be a parish priest.

Following the advice of all these counselors, as well as I could, I lighted my candle early in the morning, and put it out late at night. In this labor I had been sweating for some years, till Rusticus, at my first acquaintance with him, seeing my way of life, said to me, "Had you lived about seventeen hundred years ago, you had stood just in the same place as I stand now. I cannot read; and therefore," says he, "all these hundreds of thousands of disputing books, and doctrine books, which these seventeen hundred years have produced, stand not in my way; they are the same thing to me, as if they had never been. And had you lived at the time mentioned, you had just escaped them all, as I do now; because, though you are a very good reader, there was then none of them to be read.

"Could you therefore, be content to be one of the primitive Christians, who were as good as any that have been since; you may spare all this labor. Take only the gospel into your hands; deny yourself; renounce the lusts of the flesh; set your affections on things above; call upon God for his Holy Spirit; walk by faith, and not by sight; adore the holy Deity of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, in whose image and likeness you was at first

created; and in whose name and power you have been baptized, to be again the living likeness, and holy habitation, of his life, and light, and Holy Spirit.

“Look up to Christ, as your redeemer, your regenerator, your second Adam; look at him, as truly he is, the wisdom and power of God, sitting at his right hand in heaven, giving forth gifts unto men; governing, sanctifying, teaching, and enlightening with his Holy Spirit, all those that are spiritually-minded; who live in faith, and hope, and prayer, to be redeemed from the nature and power of this evil world. Follow but this simple, plain spirit of the gospel, loving God with all your heart, and your neighbor as yourself; and then you are Christ’s disciple, and have his authority to let the dead bury their dead.

“God is a spirit, in whom you live and move and have your being; and he stays not till you are a great scholar, but till you turn from evil, and love goodness, to manifest his holy presence, power, and life, within you. It is the love of goodness, that must do all for you; this is the art of arts; and when this is the ruling spirit of your heart, then Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, will come unto you, and make their abode with you, and lead you into all truth, though you knew no more books than I do.”

So ended Rusticus. It is not easy for me, Theophilus, to tell you, how much good I received from this simple instruction of honest Master Rusticus; for master I may well call him, since he, in so few words, taught me a better lesson of wisdom, than ever I had heard before.

What a project was it, to be grasping after the knowledge of all the opinions, doctrines, disputes, heresies, schisms, councils, canons, alterations, additions, inventions, corruptions, reformations, sects, and churches, which 1700 years had brought forth through all the extent of the Christian world! What a project this, in order to be a divine, that is, in order to bear true witness to the power of Christ, as a deliverer from the evil of flesh, and blood, and hell, and death, and a raiser of a new birth and life from above! For as this is the divine work of Christ, so he only is a true and able divine, that can bear a faithful testimony to this divine work of Christ.

How easy was it for me to have seen with Rusticus, that all this labyrinth of learned inquiry into such a dark, thorny wilderness of notions, facts, and opinions, could signify no more to me now, to my own salvation, to my interest in Christ, and obtaining the Holy Spirit of God, than if I had lived before it had any beginning! But the blind appetite of learning gave me no leisure to apprehend so plain a truth. Books of divinity indeed I have not done with; but I will esteem none to be such, but those that make known to my heart the inward power and redemption of Jesus Christ. Nor will I seek for anything even from such books, but that which I ask of God in prayer; viz., how better to know, more to abhor and resist the evil that is in my own nature; and how to attain a supernatural birth of the divine life brought forth in me: all besides this is pushpin. The shipwrecked man wants only to get to shore. Did we see the truth of our state as he does, we should have but one want, and that would be, to get possession of our first created state. There is no misery but in the evil that is in our own fallen state; this is our shipwreck, and great distress; nor is there any happiness, but in having the first life of God, and all goodness, opened again in the soul. He that is not intent upon this one thing needful, is not a wise Christian, much less a divine, or one qualified to make known to others the mystery of the power of Christ in the work of redemption.

But now I go back to that which I first spoke of; and though I give up all that I said of putting out Jacob Behmen in new language, with comments, etc. yet I must still desire, that, some way or other, he may be made more plain and intelligible; call it by what name you please.

Theophilus. Jacob Behmen may be considered,

- (1.) as a teacher of the true ground of the Christian religion.
- (2.) As a discoverer of the false anti-Christian church, from its first rise in Cain, through every age of the world, to its present state in all and every sect of the present divided Christendom.
- (3.) As a guide to the truth of all the mysteries of the kingdom of God. In these three respects, which contain all that anyone can possibly want to know or learn from any teacher; he is the strongest, the plainest, the most open, intelligible, awakening, convincing writer, that ever was. As to all these three matters, he speaks to everyone,

as himself saith, in the sound of a trumpet. And here to pretend to be an explainer of him, or make him fitter for our apprehension, in these great matters, is as vain, as if a man should pipe through a straw, to make the sound of a trumpet better heard by us.

Further, he may be considered,

- (4.) as a relater of depths opened in himself, of wonders which his spirit had seen and felt in his *ternario sancto*.

Now in this respect he is no teacher, nor his reader a learner; but all that he saith is only for the same end as St. Paul spoke of his having been in the third heaven, and hearing things not possible to be spoken in human words. And yet in these matters it is, that most of his readers, especially if they are scholars, are chiefly employed; everyone in his way trying to become masters of them. Thus, when he first appeared in English, many persons of this nation, of the greatest wit and abilities, became his readers; who, instead of entering into his one only design, which was their own regeneration from an earthly to an heavenly life, turned chemists, and set up furnaces to regenerate metals, in search of the philosopher's stone. And yet, of all men in the world, no one has so deeply, and from so true a ground, laid open the exceeding vanity of such labor, and utter impossibility of success in it from any art or skill in the use of fire. And this must with truth be affirmed of him, that there is not any possible error, that you can fall into in the use of his books, but what he gives you notice of beforehand, and warns you against it in the most solemn manner; and tells you, that the blame must be yours, if you fall into it. Neither is there any question that you can put, nor advice or direction that you can ask, but what he has over and over spoke to; telling you, in the plainest manner, what the mystery is which his books contain; how, and by whom, and for what end, they are to be read.

There are two sorts of people to whom he forbids the use of his books, as incapable of any benefit from them, and who will rather receive hurt, than any good from them. The first sort he shows in these words: "Loving reader, if thou lovest the vanity of the flesh still, and art not in an earnest purpose of the way to the new birth, intending to be a new man, then leave the above-written words in these prayers unnamed, or else they will

turn to a judgment of God in thee.” (Repent. p. 42) Again, “Reader, I admonish you sincerely, if you be not in the way of the prodigal, or lost son, returning to his father again, that you leave my book, and read it not; it will do you harm. But if you will not take warning, I will be guiltless; blame nobody but yourself.” (Three Prin.)

In this advice, so different from that of other writers, he shows the truth and reality of his own regenerated state; and that the very same spirit speaks in him, as formerly said, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Unless a man deny himself, and forsake all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple. No man can come unto me, except the Father draweth him. Except a man be born again from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God. He that is of God, heareth God’s word. Come unto me, all ye that labor, are weary and heavy-laden.” For all these texts of scripture say that very self-same thing that Jacob Behmen doth, when he absolutely requires his reader to be in the way of the returning prodigal. It is not rules of morality observed, or an outward blameless form of life, that will do: for pride, vanity, envy, self-love, and love of the world, can be, and often are, the heart of such a morality of life. But the state of the lost son is quite another thing; and must be the state of every man: as soon as he comes to himself, and has seeing eyes, he will then, like him, see himself far from home; that he has lost his first paradise, his heavenly Father, and the dignity of his first birth; that he is a poor, beggarly slave in a foreign land, hungry, ragged, and starving, amongst the lowest kind of beasts, not so well fed and clothed as they are: when thus finding himself, he saith, “I will arise, and go to my Father,” etc. then has he his first fitness for the mysteries opened in Jacob Behmen’s writings; for they are addressed to man only in this supposed state; they have no fitness to him but in this state; and therefore no one, whether Jew, Christian, or Deist, who does not find and feel himself to be the very lost son described in the parable, has any capacity to receive benefit from them, but they will be a continual stumbling block to him. And it is just thus with the gospel itself; wherever it is received and professed, without something of this preparation of heart, without this sensibility of the lost son, there it can only be a stone of stumbling, and help the earthly man to form a religion of notions and opinions from the unfelt meaning of the letter of the gospel.

Secondly, the other sort of people, whom he excludes from his books, and for whom he has writ nothing, are the men of reason, who give themselves up to the light of reason, as the true touchstone of divine truths. To these he declares over and over, that he has not his light from reason; and that he writes nothing to reason. “The rational man,” saith he, “understands nothing in reference to God; for it is without and not in God.” Again, “The true understanding must flow from the inward ground, out of the living Word of God. In which inward ground, all my knowledge concerning the divine and natural ground, hath taken its rise, beginning, and understanding. I am not born of the school of this world, and am a plain simple man; but by God’s Spirit and will am brought, without my own purpose and desire, into divine knowledge in high natural searchings.” (Epist. p. 121.) Again, “He that will learn to understand the true way, let him depart from and forsake his own reason.” (p. 138) “If my writings,” says he, “come into your hands, I would that you should look upon them as of a child’s, in whom the highest has driven his work; for there is that couched therein, which no reason may understand or comprehend.” (Ibid. p. 141.) Again, “Reason must be blinded, kept under, and not allowed to stir.” (p. 68.) Again, “Reason must yield up its own hearing and life, and give itself up to God, that God may live in the understanding of man, else there is no finding in the divine wisdom. All that is taught and spoken concerning God, without the Spirit of God, is but Babel.” (Epist. p. 9) Again, “We must wholly reject our own reason; it is not available to help us to the light, but is a mere leading astray, and keeping us back. This we intimate to the reader, that he may know what he readeth. Let none account it for a work of outward reason.” Again, “Speaking of the mystery, (Three-fold L. p. 68,88.) he saith, “pray to God the most high, that he would be pleased to open the door of knowledge, without which no man will understand my writings; for they surpass the astral reason; they apprehend and comprehend the divine birth; and therefore only the like spirit can understand them aright. No reasoning or speculating reacheth them, unless the mind be illuminated from God, to the finding of which the way is faithfully shown to the seeking reader.” (Epist. p. 138)

And now, Academicus, you may see how needless it is to ask me, or anyone else, to help you to understand his works: he himself has given you all the assistance that can be given: he has laid open before you, in the

utmost plainness, both the nature of the mystery, and the one only possible way that you can partake of it.

Academicus. You speak often of the mystery: pray, what am I to understand by it?

Theophilus. You are to understand by it, the deep and true ground of all things. A mystery, in which the birth and beginning of eternal nature, or the first workings of the inconceivable God, opening and manifesting his hidden triune Deity in an outward state of glory in the splendor of united fire, light, and spirit, all kindled and distinguished, all united and beatified by the hidden three. In this eternal nature, all inward powers, all the hidden riches of the incomprehensible Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, are from eternity to eternity brought forth into outward majesty, and visible glory. In which triune opening of heavenly glory, power, and majesty, the triune God beholdeth himself as in his own manifestation, is clothed as with his own garment, dwelleth as in his own habitation, and worketh all his wonders of wisdom and omnipotence in and by, and according to, the possible powers of this eternal nature. For this eternal nature is the first possibility of all after-beings and things; for before, or without, this eternal nature, all is an eternal, silent, still, unmovable, unperceivable nothingness; and this eternal nature is the first manifestation, the first opening of the divine omnipotence; and in it are included, in its own infinite bounds, all the height and depth, and extent, of the divine wisdom and powers. All that God is, and can do, or bring forth from himself, is done in and by the working of his triune spirit in this eternal nature.

This is the great scene of his eternal wisdom and omnipotence, in which new wonders are eternally rising up, and declaring the fathomless depths of the riches of the invisible triune Deity. And to say, that God can do no more, than what he can do through and by the possible powers of this eternal nature, is only saying, that he can do more than what he can do by himself, because this eternal nature is the eternal manifestation of the total God, or an out-birth of that which the Deity is, in its invisible power and Deity.

Out of this transcendent eternal nature, which is as universal and immense as the Deity itself, do all the highest beings, cherubims and seraphims, all

the hosts of angels, and all intelligent spirits, receive their birth, existence, substance, and form. They are all so many different, finite, bounded forms of the heavenly fire, and light of eternal nature, into which creaturely beings the invisible triune God breatheth his invisible Spirit, by which they become both the true children and likeness of the invisible Deity, and also the true offspring of his eternal nature; and are fitted to rejoice with God, to live in the life of God, and live and work, and have their being, in that eternal nature, or kingdom of heaven, in which the Deity itself liveth and worketh. And they are one, united in one, God in them, and they in God, according to the prayer of Christ for his disciples; that they, and he, and his holy Father, might be united in one. (John 16.)

This is in part what you are first to understand concerning the mystery.

But, secondly, it is a mystery, in which the creation and fall of angels, with all its consequences in them, and their kingdom; in which the system of this visible universe, why, and from what, and how it came to be as it is; the birth of the sun and the planets, why and how they come to have such difference in nature, place, and office, as also of all the stars; the nature of every creaturely life, and ground of its vast variety; the cause of every inanimate dead thing; a mystery in which the creation, dignity, and perfection, of the first angelic man in paradise; the whole kingdom of nature, and kingdom of grace; their connection, difference, and mutually affecting and working upon one another under the providence of the invisible Spirit of God, from the beginning to the end of time, are all unfolded from their first root and cause.

Thirdly, it is a mystery, in which the ground of Christian redemption, its whole nature, absolute necessity, and the working of all its parts both in the redeemer and in the redeemed, are set forth in the utmost degree of clearness; where the whole process of Christ, as incarnate, living, suffering, dying, rising from the dead, ascending into heaven, and sitting at the right hand of God, and governing his church on earth by his Holy Spirit; and all the practical duties of the gospel, whether of faith and hope, or of self-denial; dying to this world, and strict conformity to the life and Spirit of Christ; are all demonstrated from the deepest ground of the nature of things, to be absolutely necessary to the recovery and redemption of the fallen human nature.

This, sir, is, in some degree, the mystery which it has pleased the Spirit of God to open in this plain and unlearned man.

Academicus. Well, Theophilus, I entirely consent to this account you have given of it, and think it is sufficiently supported by what is to be found in his books; they seem to mean all these great matters which you mentioned. But then, sir, give me leave to tell you, that I think it is impossible for you to defend what you have said above concerning reason; or to show the unreasonableness of my demanding rational illustrations and comments. For if this is the truth, that his works contain the ground and philosophy of nature, and all creatures; surely they must not only allow the use of our reason, but call for the highest and most acute exercise of it. For what can enter into the reasons and philosophy of things, but reason? Or what do all these great matters appeal to, but to our reason? I see no possibility of denying this; and if this be granted, all that has been said about silencing our reason, must be given up.

Theophilus. The conclusion, my friend, that you here think to be so just and strong, as not possible to be denied, is so far from being so, that it is a glaring absurdity; and the quite contrary to that one only true conclusion, which you should have made, and which so easily and naturally flowed from what was said. For if the mystery is the deep ground of all things, of all nature, and all creatures, etc. then the one conclusion that infallibly flows from it, is this, that no acuteness or ability of natural reason can so much as look into it. For natural reason is no older than flesh and blood; it has no higher a nature or birth than natural doubting; it had no existence when nature began its first workings, and therefore can bear no witness to them. It was not present, had no eyes, when things first came forth; it never stood in the center, from whence the birth of everything must arise; it never saw the forming of the first seeds of every life: and yet the mystery, you see, contains all this: and therefore the one plain and necessary conclusion is this; that natural reason is, and must be, as incapable of entering into this mystery, as flesh and blood is incapable of entering into the kingdom of heaven.

Behold, now, what a flagrant proof you have given of the vanity, weakness, and blindness of natural reason in divine matters. Your reason saw, with the utmost certainty, that the mystery must be an appeal to

reason, merely because it contained such an height and depth of a divine philosophy; and yet the height and depth of its matters is the one full proof, that reason can have nothing to do with it. This may show you by what means Babel has built itself all over the Christian world. For, by the light of this Babylonian reason, the defenders and opposers of doctrines confute one another with such a certainty and strength of reason, as you saw, that reason must be the only judge of the mystery, from which it is just as much excluded by its own nature, as the mole under ground is, by its nature, excluded from the flight and sight of the towering eagle.

Academicus. Pray then tell me, how a man is to attain the knowledge of the mystery, or have any share in the light of it.

Theophilus. There is but one possible way, and that is this: it must be born in you. All true knowledge, either of God or nature, must be born in you. You cannot possibly know anything of God, but so far as God is manifested in you; so far as his light and Holy Spirit is born in you, as it is born in him, and liveth and worketh in you, as it liveth and worketh in him. A distant, absent, separate God, is an unknown God. For God can only manifest God, as light can only manifest light, and darkness make darkness to be known.

Again, you can have no real knowledge of nature, and its inward working power, but so far as the workings of nature, and the birth of things, are a working and birth in yourself. Natural reason may trade in the outside of things; it may measure, and make drafts of magnitude, height, and distance of things on the earth, and above the earth; it may make many and fine experiments of the powers of every element: but then this is going no farther into the ground of nature, than when the potter makes curious vessels with his clay and fire.

To count the stars, to observe their places or motions, is just the same height of natural knowledge, as when the shepherd counts his sheep, and observes their time of breeding.

This world, with all its stars, elements, and creatures, is come out of the invisible world; it has not the smallest thing, or the smallest quality of anything, but what is come forth from thence; and therefore every quality of everything is what it is, and worketh that which worketh, by a secret

power and nature in and from the invisible world. Bitter, sweet, sour, hard, soft, hot, cold, etc. have all of them their first seed and birth in the invisible world, called eternal nature. The irrational animals of this world feel all these things: the rational man goes farther; he can reason and dispute about their outward causes and effects: but the mystery of eternal nature must first be opened in man, before he can give the divine philosophy of them. For as they all come from thence, have their nature, birth, and growth, from thence; so no philosophy, but that which comes from thence, can give the true ground of them.

If man himself was not all these three things, viz., (1.) a birth of the holy Deity; (2.) a birth of eternal nature; and, (3.) also a microcosm of all this great outward world; that is, of everything in it, its stars and elements; and if the properties of every creaturely life were not in an hidden birth in him; no omnipotence of God could open the knowledge of divine and natural things in him.

For God can only manifest that, which there is to be manifested; and therefore only open that, which before lay unopened, and as in a state of hiddenness or death. Nothing can come forth from man, or any creature, but that which first had its seed in him; and to think, that any knowledge can be put into him, but that which is a birth of his own life, is as absurd as to think, that the tree and its branches may first grow, and then be brought to the root.

We are led into mistakes about this matter from the common practice of the world, which calls everything knowledge, that the reason, wit, or humor of man prompts him to discourse about; whether it be fiction, conjecture, report, history, criticism, rhetoric, or oratory: all this passes for sterling knowledge; whereas it is only the activity of reason, playing with its own empty notions.

From this idea of knowledge it is, that when this rational man turns his thoughts to the study of divinity, he is content with the same knowledge of divine matters, as he had in these exercises of his reason; and he proceeds in the same manner, as when he studied history and rhetoric.

He turns his mind to hearsay, to conjecture, to criticism, and great names; and thinks he is then a member of the true church, when he knows it as

plainly as he knows the ancient commonwealth of Rome. His knowledge of the being of God stands upon the same bottom, and is made known to him by the same means and methods of proof, as he comes to be assured, that once upon a time there was a first man, and his name was Adam. His knowledge of the kingdom of heaven is looked upon to be sufficient, as soon as he knows it, as he knows that there is such a place as Constantinople. When he turns his inquiries into the mysteries of Christian redemption, he looks as much out of himself as when he is searching into the antiquities of Greece; and appeals to the same helps for his knowledge, as when he wants to know the inward structure of Solomon's temple, and all its services, etc.

This is the great delusion which has long over-spread the Christian world; and all countries, and all libraries, are the proof of it. It is this power and dominion of reason in religious matters, that Jacob Behmen so justly calls the anti-Christ in Babel; for it leads men from the life and truth of the mysteries of Christ, to put a carnal trust in a confused multitude of contrary notions, inventions, and opinions. And the thing is unavoidable, it cannot be otherwise with reason; it cannot do more good with, or make a better use of, gospel doctrines; it is anti-Christ as soon as ever it is admitted to debate and state the nature of any divine truth. And that for these two great reasons: first, because it has absolutely the same incapacity for it, as the man that is born blind hath for the light. Wherein now lieth the incapacity of the blind man, to speak or think anything truly about light? It is because he is born and bred in another world, where nothing of light ever did or can enter; it is because there is the gulf of a whole birth betwixt him and the light of this world; and therefore, though he lives ever so long, reasons ever so much, or hears ever so many speeches, about the light, all that he gets by it is only more false ideas of the unknown thing.

Now this is strictly the incapacity of reason, to speak, or think anything truly of the divine life. It is because it is born and bred in another world, in the darkness of flesh and blood, into which no perception or sensibility of God and heaven can enter; it is because there is the gulf of a whole birth betwixt it, and the light of God and heaven; and therefore, let reason, from age to age, hear, read, and dispute ever so much about the light of God and

heaven, all that it can get by it, is only to be enriched with more and more fictions and falsities about the unknown thing.

Secondly, natural reason, whenever judging or ruling in divine matters, must be anti-Christ, because it cannot make any other use of the mysteries of religion, or do anything else with them, but in the same spirit, and for the same ends, that it receiveth and useth the things of this world. It matters not, what are the names or natures of the things, whether you call them spiritual or temporal: natural reason can make but one and the same use of them; it can only turn them to an earthly use, to worldly prosperity, to private interest, honor, power, or distinction. And the thing is unavoidable, it is impossible to be otherwise; it is not a fault that reason might amend, if it would; but is as much its own nature, as it is natural to flame to ascend. Now everything must act according to its nature; every kind of life must be for itself, for its own good. Now reason has no higher a birth and nature, than the spirit of this world; it must be as worldly as its birth is, and cannot possibly have anything else but worldly views, and the interests of its own flesh and blood, in everything that it can make any use of. This is as essential to the natural reason of man, as to the natural subtlety of every beast; for they have both the same original from the light and life of this world, have both the same earthly nature, and can act only in an earthly manner, to serve the same ends of an earthly life. The reason of the one has no more of God and the divine nature in it, than the subtlety of the other. And hence it is, that man, following only the cunning of his natural reason, is often more mischievous than the worst of beasts. And thus, you see how reason, ruling in divine things, is and must be anti-Christ: first, as it turns the living mysteries of God into lifeless ideas, and vain opinions; and, secondly, as it sets up a worldly kingdom of strife, hatred, envy, division, and persecution, in defense of them. And therefore it is a fundamental truth, that man has no capacity for divine knowledge, till the particle of divine life, lost in the fall, is awakened; in which alone, the mystery of God and the divine nature can have a birth.

Academicus. You have carried your point, Theophilus, with a high hand, and I rejoice in seeing this matter so well proved. But still I would ask you something, that I know not how to express; I would fain understand more clearly, how this mystery of God, and eternal nature, is to be born in me.

Theophilus. Everything, Academicus, is, and must be, its own proof; and can only be known from and by itself. There is no knowledge of anything, but where the thing itself is, and is found, and possessed. Life, and every kind and degree of life, is only known by life; and so far as life reaches, so far is there knowledge, and no farther. Whatever knowledge you can get by the searching and working of your own active reason, is only like that knowledge, which you may be said to have got, when you have searched for a needle in a load of straw, till you have found it.

For nothing that is brought into the mind from without, or is only an idea beheld by our reasoning faculty, is any more our knowledge, than the seeing our natural face in a glass, is seeing our own selves. And all the ideas or images that your reason can form of any absent, unpossessed thing, is no more a part of your own knowledge, than your drawing a picture of your own hand is making a member of your own body. It is therefore a vain and fruitless inquiry, to be asking beforehand for the knowledge of any unpossessed matters; for knowledge can only be yours, as sickness and health is yours, not conveyed into you by a hearsay notion, but the fruit of your own perception and sensibility of that which you are, and that which you have in yourself. How often have you been warned against this procedure, in words like these? “Therefore let the reader be warned not to dive farther into these very deep writings, nor plunge his will deeper, than so far as he apprehendeth: he should always rest satisfied with his apprehension for in his apprehension, he standeth yet in that which hath its reality; and therefore he erreth not, how deep soever the Spirit leadeth him: for to one more will be given than to another. And this is the only mark to be observed, that every one continue steadfast in humility towards God, and submit himself, that he may make the will and the deed as he pleaseth. When you do that, you are in yourself as dead; for you desire nothing but God’s will, and the will of God is your life, which goeth inward even to the opening of the highest mysteries.” (Threefold L. p. 158.)

One would have thought, Academicus, that this advice, if only from the uncommon nature of it, should have had more effect upon you. For it is not only new to you, but to every reader; there being nothing like it, either for the sense, the sobriety, or the depth of its matter, ever given by the wisest of philosophers to their readers.

Truth, my friend, whatever you may think of it, is no less than the savior and redeemer of the world.

Hear therefore its own language: "If any man will be my disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and come after me." He does not say, "Let him get a clear and distinct idea of me, what, and how I am God and man in the unity of my person"; he only tells him what he is to part with, what he must put off, to be made a child of the light. Search and look where you will, this denial of self is the one only possible way to the truth. For nothing has separated us from truth, nothing stands betwixt us and truth, but this self of an earthly life, which is not from God, but from our wandering out of our first created state.

God created us in and for the light; and had Adam kept his first state, he had not been an ignorant, blind pilgrim in the darkness of this world, but the illustrious opener of all its wonders in the light of God. But as this light and knowledge was lost in Adam, so it can only be recovered by him who came to restore all that was lost, and who justly called himself the light of the world. Would you therefore be a disciple of truth, you must not, with Pilate, ask, "What is truth?" or consult the schools, how you shall form an idea of it: but you must alter your life, put a stop to all earthly lusts, renounce all that you are, and have from self; give up all the workings of your own reason, and your own will; and then, and then only, are you fitted for that unction from above which can teach you all things. But till Christ, who is the one fountain of life and light, be opened in you; it is in vain, that you rise up early, and late take rest, in quest of truth; for he himself hath said, "Without me, ye can do nothing." And every son of earthly Adam, however naturally enriched with the spirit, and light, and arts of this world, is born, and must remain, a spirit in prison, till Christ is found to be an inward preacher, and light within him. As he is the one resurrection from the dead, so is he the one deliverer from everything that has the nature of death, darkness, and ignorance. And to expect seeing eyes, hearing ears, and sensibility of heart, from anything but that eternal Word, by which we were at first made, is robbing God and Christ of more honor, is a more idolatrous departure from the true worship and dependence upon him, than if we sometimes hoped to have good from this or that saint's praying for us. For this is a truth, that admits of no restriction, but reaches from one end of the earth to the other, that as no

man can come unto the Father, but through the Son; so no one can come at any divine knowledge either in grace or nature, but through him alone.

The schools of this world are of no higher a nature, than the markets of this world; and, when rightly used, serve only to the end of this earthly life. But as markets and traffic seldom keep within their just bounds, but become serviceable to vanity, earthly lusts, and all the luxury of life; so it mostly happens in our learned labors; we grow old, and blear-eyed, in studies that nourish pride and envy, division and contention; and only help our old man to be content with the riches of his fallen nature, and feel no necessity of being born again.

Would you therefore be a divine philosopher, you must be a true Christian; for darkness is everywhere, but in the kingdom of God, and truth nowhere to be found by man, but in a new birth from above. Man was created in and for the truth; that is, he was created in the truth of the divine light, to see and hear, to taste and feel, to find and enjoy all things in the truth of the divine life brought forth in him. And therefore it is, that for fallen man there is but one remedy; it is only the truth that can make him free. Truth is the one only resting-place of the soul; it is its atonement and peace with God; all is, and must be, disquiet, a succession of lying vanities, till the soul is again in the truth, in which God at first created it. And therefore said the Truth, "Learn of me; for I am meek, and lowly of heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls."

Academicus. Pray, Theophilus, stop a while: surely your zeal carries you too far. All ages of the world have seemed to agree in this, that the gospel teaches purely the simplicity of a godly life; calls no man to be a philosopher, nor gives the smallest instruction in matters that relate to philosophy.

Theophilus. All this, Academicus, is very true; but then, this very simplicity and plainness of the gospel, turning man only from this world, to a faith, and hope, and desire of God, is the one reason, and full proof, that it alone is a true guide into the highest school of divine wisdom and philosophy; not only because goodness is our greatest wisdom, but because the mysteries of God, of grace, of nature, of time and eternity, can no other possible way be opened in man, but by this simplicity of a godly

life taught in the gospel; because only the godly life hath knowledge of God; just as the creaturely life hath only knowledge of the creature, and the painful life hath knowledge of pain. The scripture saith, “that only the Spirit of God knoweth the things of God.” And indeed, how can it possibly be otherwise? For since the Spirit of God is the spirit and life that goeth through all nature and creature, and only openeth its own hidden powers therein; since it is that which is the former of everything; that which makes everything to have the life that it hath, and to work as it worketh; nothing but the Spirit of God can possibly know the things of God: and therefore, of necessity, this Spirit of God must be in man, and work in man, as it is in nature, and worketh in nature, before man can enter into the knowledge and working of God in nature. And therefore here you have two immutable, and fundamental truths:

- (1.) that all our ignorance of God and nature is, and must be, purely and solely, the want of the Spirit and life of God in us: and,
- (2.) that therefore the one only way to divine knowledge is the way of the gospel, which calls and leads us to a new birth of the divine nature brought forth in us.

Academicus. I have nothing that I can, or would, object to what you have said. But still I must say, that I do not enough apprehend how the Spirit and life of God must thus, of all necessity, be born in us; nor, indeed, do I entirely comprehend how it is done. Human reason, or human instruction, I see plain enough, cannot help me to any divine light. But suppose God should send an angel to instruct me, and that frequently, would not divine knowledge be then imparted to me? And yet this would not be a birth of God in me. Or, will you say, that God cannot sufficiently instruct me, even by the highest of his angels?

Theophilus. An angel, sir, may instruct you, as the scriptures instruct you; but it is only such an instruction, as may direct you where and how to obtain that light, which neither the letter of scripture, nor the voice of an angel, can bring forth in you. The highest angel neither hath, nor ever can have, any more of a redeeming power in it, than the dead paper on which the scriptures are written. But you are to observe, and mark it well, that you cannot have divine light from any other thing, but that which hath

full power to redeem you: for light is not only life, but the perfection, and highest state of it; and therefore nothing can bring forth light, but that which can bring forth the truth and perfection of life.

Every other thing, besides the life and light of God, stands only in a state of ministerial service towards you: whether it be words of message from God, written on paper, engraven on tables of stone, or spoken by the mouth of an angel, a prophet, or apostle; be it what it will, it is only a creaturely thing; and its creaturely service can rise no higher, nor go any farther, than to show the true way to him, who only himself can be the truth, the life, and the light in you. For the light of God cannot, even by God himself, be communicated to you by any creature; and the reason is, because the light of God is God himself: it is the light of his own life: and therefore only himself can bring it forth wherever it is; and no creature can possibly partake of his light, but by having a birth in and from the divine nature: for the light of God can never be separate from the divine nature, or be anywhere but where the divine birth is. And thus you fully see, that all that can be divinely known, either in heaven, or on earth, can only be known in that one way, and by that one means, by which fallen man can be saved; namely, by a new birth of the light and Spirit of God within us. And therefore the simple way of the gospel is the one only way to attain all the knowledge of all that, which can be known of God and nature: for nothing can manifest God and nature, but the Spirit of God working in man, as he worketh in nature, which can only be done by a new birth of the divine nature, brought forth in man: but when man is thus born again of God, then the life and Spirit of God is in him, and worketh in him, as it doth in nature. And thus it is, that man can only be a divine philosopher, when Christ, who is the light of God, and the light of nature, is revealed in him. Then he is in that living Word, and that living Word is in him, by which all things were at first made; and which maketh, createth, and worketh in him, as it worketh in all things, both in heaven and earth.

Academicus. I never expected to have seen the gospel new birth proved to be the only gate to all that divine knowledge which any son of Adam ever had, or can have. But you have proved it to be so, beyond all possibility of denial. And I now only want to have you go on in this doctrine of the new birth; for I am persuaded, you can still add something to that, which

has already been said upon it, both as to the ground, and nature, and fruits of it.

Theophilus. You must remember, Academicus, that all that I can by discourse, from the beginning to the end of this matter, do for you, amounts only to thus much: it is like giving you a full assurance of a wonderful pearl of glorious virtues, hidden in the ground of a certain field, and showing you every step of the way you must take to find it. Now, if from month to month, you should be inquiring and hearing of some new powers and virtues of this heavenly pearl; what good does all this discourse and hearsay do you? You are just as far from the pearl itself, and have no more of it, than when you first heard of it; and would be in the same distance from it, though you was always, to the end of your life, loving to hear and talk about it. I have had no other end in all that is said of the new birth, but to assure you of the truth of the thing, and the true way to it. Now the way to the new birth lies wholly in your will to it; and every step that you can take, consists in a continual dying to that selfish corrupt will, which you have from flesh and blood. Nothing can make any change in you, but the change of your will. For everything, be it what it will, is a birth of that will, which worketh in you. You have nothing therefore to inquire after, nor anything that you can judge of yourself by, but the state of your mind, the working of your will and desire. These will give you more light than all the men or books in the world can give you: where these are, there are you; and what these are, that are you: there you live, and to that you belong; and there you must have all the good or evil that can be called yours.

For nothing leads or carries you anywhere, nothing generates either life or death in you, but the working of your mind, will, and desire. If your will is angelic, you are an angel, and angelic happiness must be yours. If your will is with God, you work with God; God is then the life of your soul, and you will have your life with God to all eternity. If you follow an earthly will, every step you take is a departure from God, till you become as incapable of God, and the life of God, as the animals of this world. If your will worketh in pride and self-exaltation, in envy and wrath, in hatred and ill will, in deceit, hypocrisy, and falseness, you work with the devil, you are generating his nature within you, and making yourself ready for the kingdom of hell. And thus it is, that our works follow us; and that

everyone will be rewarded according to his works; and none can reap anything else but that which he hath sown. And the seed of everything that can grow in us, is our will. The will maketh the beginning, the middle, and the end of everything; it is the only workman in nature; and everything is its work. It has all power; its works cannot be hindered; it carries all before it; it creates as it goes; and all things are possible to it. It enters wherever it wills, and finds everything that it seeks; for its seeking is its finding. The will overrules all nature, because nature is its offspring, and born of it; for all the properties of nature, whether they be good or evil, in darkness or in light, in love or in hatred, in wrath or in meekness, in pride or humility, in trouble or joy, are all of them the offspring or birth of the will; as that liveth, so they live; and as that changeth, so they change. So that whatever you are, or whatever you feel, is all owing to the working and creating power of your own will. This is your God or your devil, your heaven or your hell; and you have only so much of one, or the other, as your will, which is the first mover, is either given up to the one, or to the other.

For where the will of man is not, there he hath nothing; and where his will is, there is all that something, which he hath, be it of what kind it will; and it is inseparable from him, till his will worketh contrary to it.

Academicus. Whence hath the will of man this mighty power, that it can have nothing, but that which itself hath willed?

Theophilus. You might as well ask, why a circle must be perfectly round, or a straight line free from every degree of crookedness. For as it is not a circle till it is perfectly round, nor a straight line till it is free from crookedness; so the will is not in being, but so far as it is free, is its own mover, and can have nothing but that which it willeth. Secondly, the will is not a made thing, which is made out of something, or that came out of some different state, into the state of a will. But the free will of man is a true and real birth from the free, eternal, uncreated will of God, which willed to have a creaturely offspring of itself, or to see itself in a creaturely state. And therefore the will of man hath the nature of divine freedom; hath the nature of eternity, and the nature of omnipotence in it; because it is what it is, and hath what it hath, as a spark, a ray, a genuine birth of the eternal, free, omnipotent will of God. And therefore, as the will of God is

superior to, and ruleth over all nature; so the will of man, derived from the will of God, is superior to, and ruleth over all his own nature. And thence it is, that as to itself, and so far as its own nature reacheth, it hath the freedom and omnipotence of that will from which it is descended; and can have or receive nothing, but what itself doth, and worketh, in and to itself.

And herein consisteth the infinite goodness of God, in the birth of all intelligent creatures; and also the exceeding height, perfection, and happiness of their created state: they are descended from God, full of divine power; they can will and work with God, and partake of the divine happiness. They can receive no injustice, hurt, or violence, either from nature or creature; but must be only that, which they generate, and have no evil or hurt, but that which they do in and to themselves. All things stand in the will, and everything animate or inanimate is the effect and produce of that will, which worketh in it, and formeth it to be that which it is. And every will, wherever found, is the birth and effect of some antecedent will; for will can only proceed from will, till you come to the first working will, which is God himself.

And here, my friend, you have an easy entrance into the true meaning of many important passages in the books of Jacob Behmen, like those that follow: "All," says he, "is magical; the eternity is magical: Magic is the mother of all things. I speak from a magic ground. Here the reader must have magical eyes. This hath a magical understanding," etc. Vulgar reason is offended at these expressions, because the word "magic" has, for many ages, been mostly used in a bad sense. But don't you be frighted at the sound of these words; they are not only innocent, but truly good and wise, and deeply founded on the truth of things. They have the most Christian and divine meaning; are strictly conformable to the spirit of the gospel, as shall be shown by and by; and are used for the best of ends; namely, to open the true ground of eternal and temporal nature, and the birth of creatures in each of them. They are to show how the hidden, invisible Deity acteth and worketh all its wonders in both these worlds, in one and the same uniform way; as also, how everything in religion, whether it be a mystery of God, a grace of God, or a duty of man, hath its whole ground, and nature and efficacy, therein.

Now magic power meaneth nothing but the working of the will, whether it be the divine, or the creaturely will; and everything that is the work of the will, and is produced by it, is called its magic work, which only means, that it is generated by and from the will, as a birth brought forth by it. The will is the workman, and the work is that, which it bringeth forth out of itself. So that by these words you are always to understand these two things, the working, and the work of the will. And now, you may already sufficiently see, that their meaning is not only innocent and good, but as necessarily, and divinely, to be ascribed to God, as the power of bringing things into existence by the working of his will. For here you have the true ground and original of the creating power of God; how everything that is not God; is yet come from him, and out of him, as so many births of his invisible power, breaking forth into visibility, and sensible qualities of an outward life.

The first manifestation of the invisible God, is that which is called, and is, eternal nature; which is the eternity of all possible powers and qualities of life, the first source of every natural power that can be in any creature. All these qualities of life, in their eternal birth, and rising from one another by the working will of God, are the outbirth, or outward glory of God, in which he manifests his triune, invisible Deity in a threefold life of fire, light, and spirit, which are the ground of all the qualities of life, sensibility, power, and spirit, that ever were, or can be found in any creature. Everything that exists, or thinks, or moves, or finds itself in any kind or degree of sensibility, is from, and out of, this glassy sea of these united powers of life. And this whole manifestation of all the possible powers, and perfection of life and glory, is called that kingdom of heaven, in which God dwelleth; and is, as it were, his divine workhouse, out of which he is perpetually giving forth new works, and forms of wonder.

This manifestation of God is a magic birth from the triune working will of the hidden Deity, which willed to see itself in this opened, outward show of all the possible powers of life and glory; and from whence new worlds of finite divine beings, as so many living images of God, might have a possibility of coming forth. For without nature, God must be by himself, and continue an unmanifested God. For no form or creature can be, unless there be something antecedent to it, that can be formed. Life must be, before there can be any finite living creatures; just as light must be, before

there can be any seeing eyes. And therefore the manifestation of God in an outward glory of all the possible powers, qualities, perfections of life, called eternal nature, must be, or there could be no possibility for the existence of any creature.

Now this same working will of the triune Deity, which manifested itself in an eternal nature, manifesteth itself in creaturely forms, all generated from, all enlivened and animated with, that same trinity of fire, light, and spirit, that constitutes eternal nature. So that all intelligent creatures are that in their finite being, which eternal nature is in its infinite state. And thus all of them are from God, and from heaven, live in God, and may work with God, as God is in heaven, and heaven in him; one life, one power, one will, and one happiness with God.

Now everything that is not God, but after him, and distinct from him, must be that which it is, from the working will of the Deity. For since it cometh into being, only because it is willed to be, it can have nothing in it, or be any other thing, but that which the working or creating will brought forth. And as all things began in and from this working will; so all things must go on in it; and there can be no other creator, worker, or former of things to all eternity, but the working will of God, either mediately or immediately. Nor can there be any other nature in anything, but that which is the birth, or magic effect, of a working will within it. And everything that is done by the creature, everything which it seeks and likes, or abhors and resists, is all driven on by a working will, or magic power, which stirs, and generates, and works within it.

Would you know now the true ground of all this? It is this: it is because will is the first original of all power, and the omnipotence of God consisteth in nothing else but his working will; and therefore no power ever was, or ever can be, anywhere else, but as it is in God, and if the creature hath any power, it must have it, as God hath it, in the working will. For since all nature, with all its qualities, births, and creatures, are all brought into being by the working will of God; it evidently follows, that every creature, with every quality, power, and property in it, is magically born, and therefore must have a magic nature, that is, a nature that cometh from, and standeth in, a working will.

And now, sir, you are come into a full view of the most important matter of the mystery of all things; a matter which, if rightly apprehended in the inward ground of your soul, puts an entire end to all the jargon of a false philosophy, and to all those fictions of doctrines and disputes, which reason has built upon the written Word of God.

For nothing is effected by fiction and invention, by any contrived arts or searchings of rational inquiries; all this is nothing, because it toucheth not nature, but leaveth it to itself; which carrieth on its own works by its own power, and can only work in its own way; and must bring forth its own births independent of everything but its own working life. But all lieth in the will and working desire of the soul, because will began and brought forth all that nature that lives in the soul, and is the only life in it; and this life can work and grow from nothing else, but that which first brought it forth. Hence you see the full meaning of these words of our author, “All is magical and that magic is the mother of all things,” and consequently, the only opener of all divine knowledge. All which expressions only imply thus much, that the will, whether in God, or the creature, is the ground and seed of everything; is the generating working power, which maketh and worketh all things to be in that state and condition which they are; and that everything begins, goes on, and ends, in the working of the will; and that nothing can be otherwise, than as its will worketh; and therefore eternity and time is magical; and magic is, and must be, the mother of all things.

Now here you see, in the utmost degree of clearness, how all true and false religion divide from one another. For if nothing worketh but the will, if nothing else carries on the work of nature; then all is false and vain in religion but the working of the will; and nothing is saving, or redeeming the life of the soul, but that which helps the will to work towards God.

Hence it is, that our author so often tells his reader, that when he sees and finds this magic birth of things, he is “delivered from Babel”; not by running from one place to another, or from one system of opinions to another, but by inwardly leaving all the workings of the earthly self, all the paper buildings of natural reason, and turning to God with the whole will and working desire of his heart. This is the right coming out of our own Babel of vain opinions into the truth and reality of nature, where the living

God of nature is found; not in notions, but in the living working of the soul, and worshipped in spirit and in truth.

I said, into the truth and reality of nature, because nature is the standard of truth, and all is Babel but that which worketh with nature, that is, with eternal nature; for as eternal nature is the manifestation of the unchangeable God, so it must be as unchangeable in itself, and its own workings, as God is; because it hath nothing in it, but what is in and from the unchangeable God. And therefore, God cannot be manifest, or work in any creature, but as he is manifest, and worketh in eternal nature; and therefore all that the creature doth is labor lost, and a vain beating of the air, but that which it worketh with, and according to eternal nature. Because God never was, nor ever can be, or be found, anywhere else but in his own heaven, or eternal nature. And no soul can by any one possible thing find, or be found by God, but by standing before him in the same will and working as eternal nature doth. And therefore all is fiction and Babel but the working of the will, because nothing but the will can work with nature; and that for this reason, because all life, and all nature, eternal and temporal, is what it is, merely and solely, from the working of the will. All things in heaven and in earth stand in this magic birth; and nothing can change its state, either for better or worse, but as the working of its will changes. Justly therefore is it said, that where this truth is found, there is a full and true deliverance from Babel; that is, from all strife, and zeal, and division about opinions, sects, and churches; since the one thing that works either to life, or to death, the one thing that alone opens heaven or hell for us, is with every individual man in every place, and in every age of the world; and that one thing is the working of the will. And when, in any such man, his will is turned from his own earthly self, and this earthly life and worketh with its desire to God, then all these sayings of the scripture are true of him; viz., that he is redeemed from this evil world — that he has his conversation in heaven — that he is of God, and heareth God's Word — that he is saved by faith — that Christ is revealed in him — that he is Christ's, and Christ is his — that Christ is in him of a truth — and that he is led by the Spirit of Christ. All these texts would be true of him, though he had never seen, nor heard, a syllable of the written Word of God.

For the Word of God which saveth and redeemeth, which giveth life and light to the soul, is not the word printed on paper, but is that eternal, ever-speaking Word, which is the Son of God, who in the beginning was with God, and was the God by whom all things were made. This is the universal teacher and enlightener of all that are in heaven, and on earth, who from the beginning to the end of time, without respect of persons, stands at the door of every heart of man, speaking into it not human words, but divine goodness; calling and knocking, not with outward sounds, but by the inward stirring of an awakened divine life. And therefore, as sure as that is true, which St. John saith, that this eternal Word “is the light of men, and the light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world,” so sure is it, that our savior and salvation, our teacher and enlightener, from whom we have every good thought, is Christ within us; not within this or that man, but in every man wherever born, and in whom the light of life ariseth. And indeed how can it be otherwise? For if God is the God of all men; and the Word of God the life and light of all men; and all men are capable of goodness; and all goodness can only be from God; and no goodness can belong to man, but that which is within him; then every man must have the Word, or Christ of God within him, and can have it nowhere else. All teachers therefore, who teach men to look for life or salvation in anything but from the Word and Spirit of God within them, stand chargeable with the blood and death of souls; because, in all the possibility of things, nothing can overcome that death which is in the soul, but the Word, or Christ of God living and working in it. For, observe, man must have goodness in the same way as God hath goodness, that is, from the divine nature; for goodness is nowhere else, neither is anything else capable of it; and therefore, if goodness is to be in man, the divine nature must, of all necessity, be first brought to life within him. But this cannot be, till the working will of our heart turns and gives up itself wholly to the Word and Spirit of God within us. For we can have nothing but that, towards which the earnestness of our will goeth.

Again, see here in a still higher degree of proof the absolute necessity, and unspeakable benefit, of the spirit of prayer; how it does, and must, in spite of all opposition, raise the fallen soul out of the poverty of flesh and blood, into the riches of an heavenly nature brought forth in it. For since all things in heaven and earth stand in a magic birth, or working of the will;

the will is that, which hath all power; it unites all that is united in heaven or on earth; it divides and separates all that is divided in nature; it makes heaven, and it makes hell; for there is no hell, but where the will of the creature is turned from God; nor any heaven, but where the will of the creature worketh with God. Therefore, as we pray, so we are; and as our will-spirit secretly worketh, so are we either swallowed up in the vanity of time, or called forth into the riches of eternity. And therefore the spirit of prayer is most justly conceived, and most simply expressed, when it is said to be the rising of the soul out of the vanity of time into the riches of eternity: for all the vanity which the soul hath, is from its living in, and loving the things of time; and therefore it can only come out of the vanity of its state, by loving and living in the truths, which are the riches of eternity: for the spirit of prayer is the hunger of the soul; and as every hunger is, so it eats; it always eateth that which it hungereth after, and hath a life suitable to the nature, state, and condition, both of its hunger, and its food. If it hungereth after the things of flesh and blood, it eateth nothing else, and only groweth in the bestial life; and of the flesh must reap the corruption that belongs to flesh: and if it hungereth after God, it eateth the food which giveth life to the angels; it eateth the bread that is come down from heaven; namely, the real heavenly body and blood of Christ, which surely may be called the riches of eternity.

All the mysteries of religion, and the necessity of the whole process of Christ in our redemption, have all of them their ground, and necessity, and efficacy, in this magic nature of things, and are all of them only for this one end; to help fallen man to have a working will towards that first life, which he has lost. And therefore no one joins with the mysteries of redemption, or can have any share in them, but he whose will turns wholly from this world, and hath all its workings towards God and heaven. And now, sir, see the plain, and easy, and certain deliverance from all perplexity and vain labor in the disputes and divisions of religion. It is but opening your natural eyes, that is, letting simple nature work with its own power, and all difficulties are removed; and the way to God and goodness is as natural, and as free from all perplexity, as the opening our eyes to see the light of the sun. For what is so natural to man as the working of the will? And yet he can have nothing, or be anything, different from that, to which his will worketh.

Nor does this at all too much exalt the human will, or make our salvation not to be the pure grace and gift of God to us, but quite the contrary. For the will here spoken of, is not the will of flesh and blood, but that heavenly will, which is the only spark of the Deity in us, given by the free grace of God to all mankind, as soon as fallen, and called in scripture the inspoken Word of God in paradise; which was the beginning of the redemption, when God first entered into a covenant of salvation with Adam, and all his posterity. This inspoken Word is Christ, or the spark of the divine nature, which is the light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world. And here, in this Christ in us, lieth the will that hath the power of salvation in it; and all its salvation is the salvation of Christ. For it is the will of this heavenly nature, hid in every man, that is the working will, that bringeth forth the new birth of heaven in us; and therefore is the pure free salvation of Christ, given to be a redeemer within us. So that all our salvation, though wrought out by this working will within us, is, from the beginning to the end, the pure grace of God to us, and no salvation of our own.

And thus, sir, you see, that every soul of man is partly human, and partly divine; and is united to an earthly and an heavenly nature; and so not only can, but must, always work either with one or the other, and has nothing else to work with; and must and can be, or have nothing else, but as he followeth or worketh with either of these wills. So that, infallibly to know both your present and future state, what you are, and to what you belong, you need only to see, what you cannot help seeing, how, and where, and to what, your will worketh.

And thus, from this knowledge of the magic nature of things, which all are that which they are, solely from the working of the will in everything, you are delivered from all vain labor and party zeal; and are brought back to that pure and safe ground, on which God has placed you to work out your own salvation, without any hindrance from any builders of Babel, of whatever denomination.

The short is this: the whole matter of religion relates only to life and death. But life and death are both of them immutable, and founded in the unchangeable nature of things. Nothing can alter them, or invent a new way, either to or from either of them. To what purpose then, is all this

dividing into so many parties? Why all this strife and zeal about opinions? Death and life go on their way, carry on their own work, and stay for no opinions. Does the stone stop, or alter its tendency towards the earth? Do the sparks and flame cease to fly upwards, because philosophers dispute and quarrel about the reasons of one or the other? No; nature goes on in its own way, let reason say what it will. Now death and life have their own unchangeable nature and working in and from themselves; and are just as distinct from, and independent of, all opinions of men about them, as the things just now mentioned: so that to will and work, as life willeth and worketh, and to will and work, as death willeth and worketh, is the one only possible way to partake either of life or death. What a delusion is it therefore, to grow grey headed in balancing ancient and modern opinions; to waste the precious uncertain fire of life in critical zeal, and verbal animosities; when nothing but the kindling of our working will into a faith, that overcometh the world, into a steadfast hope, and ever -burning love, and desire of the divine life, can hinder us from falling into eternal death!

Academicus. Oh! Theophilus, you have led me into a depth, that I never thought of seeing into.

For this magic power of everything, that works in all nature and creature, shows me everything in a new view. You might well say, that reason has no power in this mystery; that nothing is proposed to it: for since life and death have their own working within themselves, and must at last, when time is at an end, divide and take possession of everything, according as its will has worked either with one or the other, it signifies no more to them what reason has been all this time discoursing about, than in what language a man used to talk. But before you go any farther, I beg a word or two on these matters. First, how I am to understand our author, when he says, “Here the reader must have magical eyes”; and, “This or that hath a magical understanding.” And, secondly, that you would, as you promised, show, how the speaking thus of this magical power of life, is strictly conformable to the spirit of the gospel.

Theophilus. As to your first matter, concerning magical eyes; I should have thought the thing plain enough already. But you may understand it thus. When a carpenter cuts timber into various shapes and forms, and then joins one piece to another, till it is formed into the shape of a house;

this is no magical work, because one part does not grow from the other, till the whole is brought forth, and therefore there is no need of magical eyes to see what this work is. But when an oak groweth from an acorn, or a plant from a seed in the ground, here the work is magical; that is, it is a birth or product generated from the working will in the acorn and seed, from whence the stem, and all its branches and fruits, grow forth; which working will continueth till the plant or tree hath reached its limit, that is, till the working will in the seed hath spent itself. Now all this is a magical work, and therefore can only be seen by such magical eyes as can see into the beginning, and go on with the working of that which works and generates in the tree or plant.

As to your other matter, how this language of the magical working of the will is entirely conformable to the spirit of the gospel; the answer is easy, because the thing is plain. For the first possible beginning of the Christian life, is, by the founder of it, expressly laid in a new birth from above, and therefore plainly declared to be a magical work, and to have no other nature; because a generating work, and a magical work, are only different expressions for the same thing. And as the beginning, so every following advancement in the Christian life, is as really and truly only a growth of life, or magical birth from the powers of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, upon the working will in the soul, as the plant, from its first stirring in the seed, to its last state, is only a growth from the powers of the sun, stars, and elements, upon the working will in the seed.

Everything that is outward in religion, whether it be men or things, planting or watering, is only for the sake of this inward birth; either to direct man to it, to help him to work in it, or warn him of that eternal death, which the will, working according to flesh and blood, must inherit as its own genuine fruit. And whoever fancies the Christian life to be anything else than a birth growing up in God, till it comes to the perfection of the divine life, by the same way of a gradual growth from the seed, has not a syllable in the gospel, nor an instance in nature, to plead in excuse of his fanciful error.

For nothing worketh in all nature or grace, but what worketh as a birth, or magical growth of life. For nothing can come from the living God but life, nor for any other end, but to manifest some kind or degree of life. There

are no dead forms, or lifeless inventions to be found, till you come to the mechanic works of men's hands, and the cobweb schemes of dead knowledge, brought forth by human reason. For reason is the old serpent called subtlety, the first and the last grand deceiver of mankind, that takes them from the powerful workings of nature, to follow the shadows of empty sounds, till all is swallowed up either by final life or death, which will at last reap everything into its own unchangeable barn.

Again, faith and hope, and love and desire towards God, are the only gospel means of bringing forth the new birth; and therefore all that the gospel requires, is a magical working of the will.

For all these powers, whether of faith, hope, love, and desire towards God and the divine life, are only so many different powers of the working of the will, and have all their efficacy, as so many parts of it; and only alter, raise, and bring forth a new life, because the working of the will is magical, and generates as it works, and unites with that which it willeth. And thus Christ, or the new man in Christ Jesus, is formed in us, from a seed of heaven, which is the will that can work towards God, till it becomes a godly birth, as the seed works towards the sun, till it is changed into the birth of a beauteous fragrant flower.

Again, hence it is, namely, from this magic power of the working of the will, that our blessed Lord speaks so often of the omnipotence of faith; viz., "that all things are possible to him that believeth. Whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive. If ye had faith but as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say to this tree, be thou plucked up by the root; and to this mountain, be thou cast into the sea; and it should be done. Thy faith hath saved thee. According to thy faith, so be it done unto thee."

Hence all these truths plainly follow: first, that faith, which is in itself only the working of the will, is the source of all power; and that all that is done in nature is done by it alone; and that therefore all nature standeth in a magic working of the will. For all things could not be possible to him that believeth, but because faith, or the working of the will, is the true source of all power in or over nature. Secondly, here is a full demonstration of the high and powerful state, in which man was at first created! A Lord over all

this outward world; who could, by the working of his will, command the obedience of all things about him.

This was the dominion he had over all the creatures on the earth, in the sea, and in the air; not such a poor power as invented weapons, or the strength of his hands and feet, could help him to; but a power here mentioned, of standing still, and, by the faith or will of his mind, making every creature to come or go, just as the faithful disciple of Christ was, by his faith, to have power over every outward thing of this world.

Now all this high state of his first power is undeniable from the words of our savior. For it is not to be supposed, that he would turn men's thoughts to any such powers, as to have all things obedient to their faith, or the working will of their minds, if this had not been man's first created state, or such powers as did then belong to it. For no man or creature can have any higher power, than that which belongs to his first created state.

And therefore all gospel faith, however wonderful in its power, can only have somewhat of that first powerful faith, which man had when he first came out of the hands of God. And faith now in a redeemer can only be the means of obtaining salvation, for this reason; because faith was then that original high power in man, which could have preserved him in his first perfection and glory of life. Thus, when Christ saith, "Thy faith hath saved thee," it is the same thing as if he had said, faith had always such power; that faith was the strength and glory of the first man, that could have saved him from falling under the power of the stars and elements; that it was faith alone which could and did put an end to his first paradisiacal glory, by turning its strength and desire into the life of this world. Again, when our Lord saith, "According to thy faith, so be it done unto thee"; this was no new thing, or new operation in the power of faith, but was only a declaration of a truth as old as nature and creature, and was in reality so much said of the powerful faith of the first man; and infallibly shows, that as now, so then, nothing was done to him in his fall, but that which was done according to the faith and working of his will. For this is God's immutable righteous procedure with man, that nothing but his own works can follow him; and that, from first to last, whether standing or falling, according to his faith, and working will, so must it be done unto him. And therefore man's faith, and working will, was his divine power of

living superior to, and independent of all the stars and elements of this world, in his own angelic perfection of a divine life.

For if the revival of faith, in so small a degree, as to be compared to a grain of mustard seed, could bring forth in man such a divine power over all the things of this world, is it not a sufficient proof of the high power of his first lost faith; which only thus coming again, as the smallest of seeds, yet comes with such mighty power over all outward nature, the flesh and the devil? And thus, all that is said in the gospel, of the power of faith, is, in the strictest truth, so much said of the power and perfection of our first father, over whom this earthly system had no power: but whether he stood, or fell, or was to rise again, all was, and is, and must be done, by his faith, or the working of his will.

And thus also, you see, that all that was said of the nature and extent of the magic power of the will, is not only conformable to, but is the very spirit of the gospel, and all the written word of God. For from the first promise made to Adam, to the last written words of scripture, man is only called and directed to the true exercise of these magic, generating powers of the will; namely, to believe, to hope, to trust in God; to love, desire, and expect the renewal of a divine life from the goodness of God.

Humanus. Give me leave only to add, that in these words of our savior, “According to thy faith, so be it done unto thee,” and other such-like sayings, he has not only opened the true nature and power of faith, but has discovered more of the true philosophy of nature, than ever was told the world before. Faith is generally considered as a speculative thing, as an assent of the mind to the credibility of things related. This may sometimes, as well in the scriptures, as in other books, be called faith, as the same word may be used in various senses. But the faith in question, about which our savior speaks, and to which he ascribes so much power, and which alone can do a man any real good or harm, is quite of another nature: I say, good or harm; because all that is good or bad proceeds from it, and it carries its power which way it will: as it can work all wonders, and overcome the world, so it alone has power over life and heaven in the soul, can drive them out, and set up the kingdom of hell and death instead of them.

Now this faith may be thus understood; it is that power by which a man gives himself up to anything, seeks, wills, adheres to, and unites with it, so that his life lives in it and belongs to it. Now to whatever the soul gives itself up; whatever it hungereth after; and in which it delights, and seeks to be united there, and there only, is its faith; that faith which can work either life or death, and according to which faith everything is, and must be done to man.

Now this faith is not a matter of choice, so that a man may live without it, if he pleases; but is essential to his life, and altogether inseparable from it. For whatever the life drives at, to whatever it is given up, there is its living and powerful faith. Therefore, be a man given up to what he will, seeking, delighting, and acquiescing in whatever it be, temporal or eternal, whether it be Christianity, idolatry, Deism, or atheism; this is a certain conclusion, that every man in the world is a man of faith, lives by faith, and that equally so; because every man's life is equally given up to the seeking, and delighting in, and uniting itself to, something or other; and therefore every man equally lives by faith, and that in its highest degree. It matters not, whether a man delights and acquiesces in the philosophy of Epicurus, or Spinoza; whether he be given up to luxury and sensuality, or to syllogisms and definitions, to mysteries of redemption, or mysteries of atheism: he is neither more nor less a man of faith for all this; but is equally under the power of faith, whether it be divine, earthly, sensual, or devilish. For which way soever the life of man tends, or drives; to whatever he gives up himself; there he is, and lives by faith, and that in its highest degree; for no faith can rise higher than this. Nor can a man's faith be anywhere, but where his life is, and to which it belongs; nor can he be said to live to anything, but by faith. For faith is as much the one working power of life, as thought is the one working power of understanding; and the understanding of man may as easily proceed without being led by thought, as the life of man go on without being led by faith; that is, without giving itself up to something, or other, with which it would be united, and to which it would belong, as its desired good; which, as I said before, is the highest degree of the most living faith.

The debate therefore, set up by the Deists, about reason and faith, as two principles of life; the one appropriated to Christians, and the other to themselves, is founded on the grossest ignorance of both their natures; as

great as that of supposing, that there are two principles of seeing and smelling; viz., reason and the senses. And the Deist, who turns from all faith, to have a life of reason, proceeds as much according to nature, as if he was to leave it to Christians, to see and smell by their senses; but himself and brethren to see and smell by the power of reason. For reason is no more the power of life, than it is the power of the senses; but must stand below them both, and follow them both, in the same degree of inability to alter, increase, or lessen the natural power of either of them, as the eye hath to alter the vegetation, or color, or smell, of the plant on which it looks. For reason like the eye, is only an outward looker on; and can no more form, or model, or alter the life of the soul, than it can alter the life and vegetation of the body. But this saying, "According to thy faith, so be it done unto thee," contains the unchangeable ground, and true philosophy of life, and the power of life. And this saying takes in every individual of human nature and the Deist may as well think of turning death over to the Christians, and reserving immortality for himself, as to think of being anything else, either here or hereafter, but purely and solely that, which his faith has brought to pass in him. He may, indeed, easily enough keep himself free from all Christian faith; but, whether he will or no, a faith must do all in him, and for him, just in the same degree, as it does for the Christian. Let him make ever so many declarations against the superstition and blindness of faith; ever so many encomiums upon the beauty of axioms, syllogisms, and deductions of reason; his life is just as far from being a life of reason, as the Christian's is, who declares only for a life of faith. For as the eye and the nose have just the same nature, office, and power; and he cannot, as such, have either more or less from them, or be more or less helped by them; so reason and faith have just the same nature, office and power, in a man, and are always in him, and will always do the same for him, whether he be Christian or Deist. And was the Deist to change sides, he would be neither more nor less a man of faith and reason, than he was before; nor have got or lost any power either of faith or reason. He would only be under a divine, instead of an earthly and sensual faith; and his reason would not have changed its state, or office, or power, but only be the servant of a better master; that is, of a divine faith.

Now, was not faith the power of life in every man, no man could live by faith, nor could it be the principle or power of life in any man. But seeing

every man, whether earthly or heavenly, is that which he is, by faith; and faith will and must have its work in every man; and he cannot live without it, or free from it; hence is the absolute necessity of the one right faith, in order to salvation, and the impossibility of anything else to avail in the stead of it. Thence also it is, that Christianity applies not to the reason of any man, because reason is not the principle of life, or the former of it; but it calls the heart to a right faith, because man is only lost and separate from God and heaven by his faith in the things and powers of this world. And therefore all salvation does, and only can, arise from a faith turned to God; and also all damnation from faith in the things of this world. And no man can turn either to God, or to this world, but by faith; that is, by giving up himself either to the one, or the other; which is the highest act or power of faith. For there is nothing that works either to life or death, in any man, but that to which he is given up, by faith in it. And reason never had, nor ever can have, or do, anything else, but one and the same underwork, or office, let faith take which way it will.

The delusion of the Deist lies here: he refuses an assent to the history of facts and doctrines of the gospel; and this is his proof to himself, that he lives by reason, and that it is the real principle of his life. On the other hand, he that assents to the history of facts and doctrines of the gospel, is, by the Deist, reckoned to be a man of gospel faith, and that lives by it. But this is all mistake on both sides. For this assent on one side, and dissent on the other, touches not the matter either of reason or faith. For both these persons, notwithstanding this difference of assenting, may not only be equally governed by faith; but have strictly one and the same faith. For if the things of this world have the heart of both of them, which very easily may be; then they have but one and the same faith, and are equally governed by it; for they both equally live by a faith in this world.

The Deist therefore hath no other possible way of showing, that he is not as much a man of faith, as any Christian can be, but by showing, that he has no will, no desire, no inclination of heart left in him; that his life drives no way, is given up to no one thing, as its end and good; but that reason, without affection, carries him only from syllogism to syllogism, in quest of nothing. Then it is, that he may deem himself to be a man of reason, but not till then; for if he has any heart that hath any inclination to be united with, or belong to anything; then he becomes a man of faith, and he lives

by faith in that to which he is given up, as much as any Christian does, who is given up to the mysteries of Christian redemption.

I could not help saying thus much on this delusion, in which I have been so long ensnared myself, and therefore have the utmost good will and earnestness to help others out of it. And, to this end, I shall add the following passages, taken from a book, where this whole matter is justly said to be examined to the bottom. “We have no want of religion, but so far as we want to better our state in God; or so far as we are unpossessed of God, or less possessed of him than we might be, and our nature requires. This is the true and only ground of religion; viz., to alter our state of existence in God, and to have more of the divine nature and perfections communicated to us. Nothing therefore is our good in religion, but that which alters our state of existence in God for the better, and puts us in possession of something of God; or makes us partakers of the divine nature in such a manner and degree, as we wanted it. Everything that is in life, has its degree of life in and from God; it lives and moves and has its being in God. This is as true of devils, as of the highest and most perfect angels. Therefore, all the happiness or misery of all creatures consists only in this; viz., as they are more or less possessed of God, or as they differently partake of the divine nature, or according to their different state of excellence in God. But if this be a truth (and who can deny it?) then we have the certainty of demonstration, that nothing can be our good in religion, but that which communicates to us something of God, or the divine nature, or that which betters our state and manner of existence in God.

“For if devils are what they are, because of their state and manner of existence in God; if blessed angels are what they are, because of their state, and manner of existence in God; then it undeniably follows, that all that is betwixt angels and devils, all beings, from the happiness of the one, to the misery of the other, must and can have no other happiness or misery, but according to their state and manner of existence in God, or according as they have more or less of the state of angels, or the state of devils, in them. Therefore nothing can be our good in religion, but that which alters our state and manner of existence in God, and renders us possessed of him in a different and better manner.

“Now, if you was to send to the fallen spirits of darkness all the systems of your religion of reason, that have been published, to let them know that they have the power of their own restoration and happiness within themselves; that they need seek to nothing, but their own natural reason and understanding, and the strength and activity of their own powers, to raise them to all the happiness they are capable of; such a religion would be so far from altering or mending their state of existence in God, or doing them any good, that it would add strength to all their chains; and the more firmly they believed and relied upon it, the more would they be confirmed and fixed in their separation from God. And yet, a religion that must necessarily keep them in hell, is the only religion, that you have to carry you to heaven. May God deliver you from this error!

“Hence it sufficiently appears, that your way of natural religion cannot be the way of salvation; because the want of salvation is nothing else, but the wanting to have our state and manner of existence in God altered for the better, or to have something of God communicated to us, which we want, and are capable of receiving. But if this is, and must be, the nature of salvation; then no religion can save us, or do us our proper good, or supply our proper want, but that which has power to alter our state of existence in God, or to communicate to us that of God, which we want, and are capable of. And therefore, nothing but that same power of God, which created us, which gave us our state and manner of existence in God, and communicated to us that which we possess in him, can redeem us, or help us to that state and manner of existence in him, which we have lost, and are in want of.

“There never could have been any dispute about the possibility of saving ourselves by our own natural faculties, had not men lost all true knowledge both of God and themselves. For this dispute cannot happen, till men suppose God to be some outward being; that our relation to him is some outward relation; that religion is an outward thing, that passes between God and us, like terms of behavior between man and man; that sin hurts, and separates us from God, only as a misdemeanor hurts, and separates us from our prince; that an offended God either gives or refuses pardon to us, as an angry prince does to his subjects; and that, what he gives or forgives to us, is something as distinct or different from himself, as when a prince,

sitting upon his throne, gives or forgives something to an offender, that is an hundred miles from him.

“Now all this is the same total ignorance of God, what he is in himself, and what he is in relation to us, and the manner of his being our good, as when the old idolators took men to be gods. And yet nothing is more plain, than that your religion of reason is wholly founded upon all these gross and false notions of God. You have not an argument in its defense, but what supposes, that our relation to God is an outward relation, like that of subjects to their prince; and that what we do to and for God, as our service to him, is, and must be done, by our own power, as that which we do to and for our prince, must be done by our own power. And from these errors it is, that you draw this false conclusion, that if our own reason and natural power were not sufficient to obtain for us all that we want, and God requires of us; God must be less good than a good earthly prince, who requires no more of us, than that which we have a natural strength to do, or can do by our own power. And yet all this is pure absurdity, and has all the grounds of idolatry in it, as soon as you know, that God is no outward or separate being; but that we are what we are, have what we have, and do that which we can do, because he has brought us to this state of life, power, and existence in himself; because he has made us, so far as we are made, partakers or possessors of a life in him, and has communicated to us, such a life in himself; or in the words of scripture, because ‘in him we live and move and have our being,’ and consequently have no life, motion, or being, out of him. For from this state of our existence in God, it necessarily follows; first, that by the nature of our creation, we are only put into a capacity of receiving good. A creature, as such, can be in no other state; it is as impossible for him to enrich himself, or communicate more good to himself, as it was to create himself. Secondly, that nothing but God can do us any good. Thirdly, that God himself cannot do us any good, but by the communication of himself, in some manner, to us. Hence it is plain, that your religion of reason, which supposes, that we have natural powers, that can put us in possession of that which we want to be possessed of in God; or, that we need no more divine assistance to recover what we have lost of God, than to obtain a pardon from a prince; or, that God need communicate no more of himself to us in our reconciliation to him, than a prince communicates of himself to his pardoned subject; has all

the mistakes, error, and ignorance of God, that is in idolatry, when it takes God to be something that he is not; and has all the false devotion that is in idolatry, when it puts the same trust in, and expects the same benefit from, its own powers and faculties, which idolators did in and from their idols. Your religion of reason, therefore, which you esteem as the modern refinement of the human mind, and more excellent and rational, than the faith and humility of the gospel, has all the dregs of the grossest heathen idolatry in it; and has changed nothing in idolatry, but the idol; and only differs in such a degree of philosophy, as the religion of worshiping the sun differs from the religion of worshiping an onion.

“For as soon as it is known and confessed, that God is all in all; that in him we live and move and have our being; that we have nothing separately, or at a distance, from him, but everything in him; that we have no degree of being, nor any degree of good, but in him; that the almighty can give us nothing, but that which is something of himself; nor any degree of amendment or salvation, but in such degree as he communicates something more of himself to us; as soon as this great immutable truth is known, then it is known with the utmost certainty, that to put our trust in the sun, or an onion, or our own reason, if not equally absurd, is yet equally idolatrous, and equally prejudicial to our salvation.” (A Demonstration of the gross and fundamental Errors of a late Book, entitled, A Plain Account of the Sacrament, etc. p. 161, etc. etc.)

And now, Theophilus, if you please, you may proceed in the matter you was upon.

Theophilus. We have discoursed long enough for this time. Let silence, recollection, inward and outward retirement, have their work for a few days. They purify the heart; they weaken and disarm self; they strengthen the spirit of prayer, and help us not only to pray, but to find, to love, and live in God. Let us all desire such an interval as this; and then we shall be fitter to meet again for our mutual benefit. My friends, adieu.

The End of the Second Dialogue

THE THIRD DIALOGUE

Academicus. If you please, Theophilus, pray go on, just where you left off at our last meeting. For this mystery seems to be at daybreak with me; and the approach of its light leaves me no power to be content without it.

Theophilus. You have seen, that all nature begins and stands in a magic birth; and is only a large display of its working power in every kind of creature. You now want to see farther into this mystery, how eternal nature begins; and how God, the first, hidden, imperceptible cause of all after-things, manifests himself in the properties of a visible and working nature. Now I would, to the best of my power, gladly assist you in this matter, if I could find out a way of doing it, by opening in your heart a knowledge of God, of nature, and yourself, without helping you to a mere opinion, or increasing your thirst after ideal speculation. Tell me, therefore, what you propose by the gratification of this desire; or what effect you expect from such knowledge, as you here seek.

Academicus. All that I desire by it is, to strengthen and confirm the ground on which I stand; that, seeing the true philosophy of religion, I may have nothing to fear from all that variety of attacks which now, more than ever, are made upon it by infidel reason. I hope, therefore, it is no vain curiosity, to desire to enter into the depth of this mystery, since I only desire thereby strength to resist all the enemies of religion.

Theophilus. All this is right, and very well; provided you do but know who, and what, are the great and powerful enemies of religion. But this, perhaps, you do not so well apprehend, as you may imagine. Your own reason, born, and bred, and governed, by your own flesh and blood, is the most powerful enemy of religion that you have to do with, and whom you have the most to fear from.

The men of speculative reason, whom you seem most to apprehend, are powerless enemies, that cannot strike at your religion with the strength of a straw. Did you but rightly see what their power is, you would see it as ridiculous, as that of a few water-engines trying to quench the fiery globe

of the sun: for reason stands in the same inability to touch the truth of religion, as the water-engine to affect the sun. Nay, its inability is much greater; for could the water, thrown from the engine, be made to reach the sun, it would have some, though an insignificant, effect upon it; but reason can no more affect the truth of religion, than nothing can affect something. If reason seems to have any power against religion, it is only where religion is become a dead form, has lost its true state, and is dwindled into opinion; and when this is the case, that religion stands only as a well-grounded opinion, then indeed it is always liable to be shaken; either by having its own credibility lessened, or that of a contrary opinion increased. But when religion is that which it should be, not a notion or opinion, but a real life growing up in God, then reason has just as much power to stop its course, as the barking dog to stop the course of the moon. For true and genuine religion is nature, is life, and the working of life; and therefore, wherever it is, reason has no more power over it, than over the roots that grow secretly in the earth, or the life that is working in the highest heavens. If therefore you are afraid of reason hurting your religion, it is a sign, that your religion is not yet as it should be, is not a self-evident growth of nature and life within you, but has much of mere opinion in it.

Observe the word “self-evident”; for there lies the truth of the matter; for you have no more of the truth of religion than what is self-evident in you. A blind man may be rich in notions and opinions about the nature, power, and good, of light; and in this case, one blind man may perplex another, and unsettle his notions; but when the light manifesteth itself, and is become self-evident, then he is at once delivered from all uncertainty about it. Now religion is light and life; but light and life can only manifest themselves, and can nowhere be known, but where they are self-evident.

You can know nothing of God, of nature, of heaven, or hell, or yourself, but so far as all these things are self-evident in you. Neither could any of these things be of any concern to you, but because they can all of them be self-evident in you. For the bare history, or hearsay of any one thing, signifies no more to you, than the hearsay of any other thing. And if God and heaven, hell and the devil, the world and the flesh, were not all of them self-evident in you, you could have no more good or hurt from any

hearsay about them, than from the hearsay of pleasant gardens, and dismal prisons, in the world of the moon.

Let it be supposed, that your ingenious reason should suggest to you, that there are no devils or hell, and therefore no occasion to believe that revelation that gives an account of them: in this case, do but turn to that which is sensible and self-evident in you, and then you must know, in the same certainty as you know yourself to be alive, that there is wrath, self-torment, envy, malice, evil-will, pride, cruelty, revenge, etc. Now say, if you please, there are no other devils but these, and that men have no other devils to resist; and then you will have said truth enough, have owned devils enough, and enough confessed, that you are in the midst of them; that you are everywhere tempted by them; and that flesh and blood is too weak to resist them, and therefore wants some kind of savior, of so contrary a nature, as has power to destroy these works of the devil in you.

Now this is the only knowledge that you can possibly have of an outward hell, and outward devils; and this knowledge is as self-evident in you as your own thoughts, and is as near to you as your own life. But to see and know an outward hell, or outward devils, that are outward living creatures, can never be your own case, till all that is divine and human in you is extinguished; and then you will have knowledge enough, how hell is a place, and how the devils of rage, wrath, envy, and pride etc., are living creatures.

Again, let it be supposed, that your skeptic reason had brought you into doubt about the being and providence of God in you: you have no occasion to consult the demonstrations which heathen philosophers, school divines, Deists, or atheists, have produced about it, from the existence of things; all concluding, as well Christians, as Deists and atheists, that there must be some eternal first cause from which all has proceeded.

For what a God is this, that is only proved to be, because something now is, and therefore something must always have been, an infinite, eternal something, with infinite power to bring forth all that is come into being? What a God, I say, is this, which the Aryan, the Deist, and the atheist, is as willing to own as the Christian; and which is as serviceable to the cause

of Arianism, Deism, idolatry, and atheism, as it is to Christianity? For the atheist has his omnipotent, eternal, first cause, as well as all the disputers for a God.

But now, if you turn from all these idle debates and demonstrations of reason, to that which is sensible and self-evident in you, then you have a sensible, self-evident proof of the true God of life, and light, and love, and goodness, as manifest to you as your own life. For with the same self-evident certainty, as you know that you think, and are alive, you know that there is goodness, love, benevolence, meekness, compassion, wisdom, peace, joy, etc. Now this is the self-evident God, that forces himself to be known, and found, and felt, in every man, in the same certainty of self-evidence, as every man feels and finds his own thoughts and life. And this is the God, whose being and providence, thus self-evident in us, calls for our worship, and love, and adoration, and obedience to him: and this worship, and love, and adoration, and conformity to the divine goodness, is our true belief in, and sure knowledge of, the self-evident God. And atheism is not the denial of a first omnipotent cause, but is purely and solely nothing else but the disowning, forsaking, and renouncing the goodness, virtue, benevolence, meekness, etc. of the divine nature, that has made itself thus self-evident in us, as the true object of our worship, conformity, love, and adoration. This is the one true God, or the Deity of goodness, virtue, and love, etc. the certainty of whose being and providence opens itself to you in the self-evident sensibility of your own nature; and inspires his likeness, and love of his goodness, into you. And as this is the only true knowledge that you can possibly have of God and the divine nature, so it is a knowledge not to be debated or lessened by any objections of reason, but is as self-evident as your own life. But to find or know God in reality, by any outward proofs, or by anything but by God himself made manifest and self-evident in you, will never be your case either here or hereafter. For neither God, nor heaven, nor hell, nor the devil, nor the world, and the flesh, can be any otherwise knowable in you, or by you, but by their own existence and manifestation in you. And all pretended knowledge of any of these things, beyond or without this self-evident sensibility of their birth within you, is only such knowledge of them, as the blind man hath of that light, that never entered into him.

And as this is our only true knowledge, so every man is, by his birth and nature, brought into a certain and self-evident sensibility of all these things. And if we bring ourselves by reasoning and dispute into an uncertainty about them, it is an uncertainty that we have created for ourselves, and comes not from God and nature. For God and nature have made that which is our greatest concern, to be our greatest certainty; and to be known by us in the same self-evidence, as our own pain or pleasure is. For nothing is religion, or the truth of religion, nothing is good or bad to you, but that which is a self-evident birth within you. So that if you call that only God, and religion, and goodness, which truly are so, and can only be known by their self-evident powers and life in you, then you are in the truth, and the truth will make you free from all doubts; and you will no more fear or regard anything that talkative reason can discourse against it, than against your own seeing, hearing, or sensible life. But if you turn from self-evidence to reason and opinion, you turn from the tree of life, and you give yourself up to certain delusion.

Wonder not therefore, my friend, that though the mystery under consideration contains the greatest truths, yet I am unwilling to help you to reason and speculate upon it; for if you attempt to go farther in it than self-evidence leads you, you only go so far out of it, or from it. For the end of this mystery is not to furnish new or better matter for reason and opinion, but to bring man home to that sensibility, which is self-evident in himself, and to lead him only by self-evident principles, to see, and find, and feel the difference between true and false religion in the same degree of self-evident certainty, as he sees and feels the difference between fire and water. This, I say, is the great intent of this mystery, to bring man into a sensibility of God and nature, to know and feel, that good and evil, life and death, are a self-evident growth and birth of nature in man, according as his will enters into and works with that which is unchangeably good, or unchangeably evil, in the working of nature. Now as the workings of nature are unchangeable in their effects, and that which is naturally good or evil, must always be so; and seeing man's life standeth in nature, and must work with it, must have only that good or evil which is unchangeable in nature; and seeing his state in nature, whether good or evil, is, and can be, only that, which the sensible, self-evident powers of his own life manifest to him; then you see the fitness and necessity of your keeping steadily to

that, which is self-evident in you, as the very tree of life, the criterion of all that truth and goodness that belongs to you. Secondly, you see with what good reason Jacob Behmen so often tells you, that all that he has written, was only to help man to seek and find himself, to see and know his place and state in nature, and how to cooperate with God and nature in generating a birth of heaven within himself. Thirdly, you may see how you and I should abase this blessed mystery, should we, instead of only and truly seeking and finding its birth within us, make it a matter of reasoning and opinion.

Academicus. I have neither power nor inclination to object to anything that you have said. But still I must desire you to assist me in your own way, and such as you judge to be suitable to the intention of this mystery. I plainly see, that the whole ground of religion lies in the knowledge of what God is in himself, as distinct from nature; what nature is in itself; what I have from God, and what I am in and from nature; and how I am to work with it, as God himself is and worketh in nature. For if this knowledge can be opened in me, then the why, and the how, of every mystery of redemption must be seen to the bottom.

Theophilus. By nature are meant, all the working, stirring properties of life, or all the various sensibilities which life is capable of finding and feeling in itself. And therefore you need only look at the working sensibilities of your own life, the several kinds and ways of feeling and finding your own state, to know by a self-evident certainty, what nature is in itself. And thus also, in the same self-evident certainty, you may know, that nature is not God. For as you find, that nature is opened in you; that all its properties have their existence in you; and yet that none of these properties of life are their own happiness, or can make themselves to be happy, full of peace, delight, and joy, and free from every want; so you have a full self-evident proof, that God is not nature, but entirely distinct from, and superior to, nature; and that, as considered in himself, he is that which alone can make nature happy, free from want, and full of all delightful satisfaction. And thus you know, not from hearsay, but from a self-evident certainty in yourself, that God, considered as in himself, is the happiness, the rest, the satisfaction, the joy, the fulfilling of all the properties and sensibilities of nature; and also that nature, in itself, is that working life of various properties and sensibilities, which want to be made

happy, which reach after something that they are not, and have not, and which cannot be happy or fulfilled, till something of an higher nature than themselves be united with them; that is, the working of nature must be in want, in pain, and dissatisfaction, till God (the blessing and fulfilling of nature) is manifested, found, and enjoyed in it.

Now suppose you knew no more of what God is in himself, distinct from nature, and what nature is as thus distinguished from God, than is already opened in you, you would know enough to be a key to all that which Jacob Behmen speaks of God, and of nature; and enough also to show you how to cooperate with God and nature, in bringing forth a new birth of the divine life within you. For as soon as you know, that nature in itself is only a working life of various sensibilities, which wants something distinct from itself, and higher than itself, to make it happy, then you have a self-evident certainty of these following truths: first, that God, considered as in himself, is the blessing, the satisfaction, the heaven, and happiness, of all and every sensibility of nature. Secondly, that therefore, as the gospel teaches, only the Word, the light, the Son of God, or Jesus Christ, can redeem fallen nature, restore it to its first state of blessedness in God. Thirdly, that therefore, as the gospel teaches, you have but one thing to do, and that one thing absolutely necessary to be done; viz., to deny yourself; that is, to turn this fallen nature from itself, from all its own wills and workings in the vanity of this life, to give up itself in faith, in hunger and thirst after that light, Word, Son, or Jesus Christ of God, who is the fullness, the satisfaction, the joy, and blessedness, of all nature; who alone can turn every working and sensibility of nature in a participation of heavenly satisfaction and joy. Now what can you desire, or need you to know of God, of nature, and the mystery of Christian redemption, more than this? And yet all this is a self-evident knowledge, born within you as soon as you turn to it.

Academicus. Oh! Sir, you quite transport me with this short, easy, and yet full explication of so great a matter, which has often perplexed me. But now I shall never be at a loss how to understand the distinction between God and nature, and also the absolute necessity of it; which, when rightly known, sets all the doctrines and mysteries of Christian redemption upon such a ground as cannot be removed. But still I must beg of you to help me to the same self-evidence of the birth and generation of the properties of

nature, as they are set forth by Jacob Behmen, especially of the three first forms, which I perceive to be the ground of all; and yet their birth and generation, their union with, and distinction from, one another, I do not enough comprehend, as he sets them forth. Thus, the first form of nature is said to be desire; which is the ground and foundation of all things. This desire (the first property), he saith, is astringing, drawing, shutting up, compressing, hardening, etc. Now all this is evident enough; for I have a sufficient sensibility, that this is the nature of desire; that, in its spiritual way, it attracts, draws, compresses, and would shut up, or enclose, etc. But then, it is immediately said, that the second property is attraction, drawing, sting, and motion, etc. Now if the first is attraction and drawing, how can the second be different from it, and yet be attraction and drawing?

Theophilus. The desire is not one property, but is in itself all the properties of nature; it is the ground in which they all dwell, and the mother out of which they are all born: so that all that is said of the three first forms of nature, is only so much said of three forms or properties of the desire. For the desire is not the first property of nature; but every property hath all that it hath in and from the desire. The first property of the desire, of that which is the peculiarity of its nature, as distinguished from the second, is, to compress, enclose, shut up, etc., whence cometh thickness, darkness, hardness, etc. But no sooner does the desire begin to compress, shut up, but it brings forth its own greatest enemy, and the highest resistance to itself: for it cannot compress or thicken, but by drawing or attracting; but drawing and attracting is quite contrary to shutting up, or compressing; because drawing or attracting is motion, and every motion is contrary to shutting up or compressing together.

And thus your difficulty is removed: attraction or drawing is rightly ascribed to the desire, and rightly called its second property, because it is born of it; and yet is directly contrary to that which is the desire's first property or intention; viz., to compress, to hold in stillness, etc.

Now as these two properties are two resistances, not in two different things, but are one and the same thing in this contrariety in and to itself, as they are inseparable, generate each other, are equal in strength, and can neither of them overcome the other, so as to go one way, but each of them stops the other in the same manner; and seeing this desire cannot cease to

be these two contrary things; viz. a holding-fast, and moving-away, a shutting-in, and a going-out, both in the same degree of strength; neither able to shut up, or to go out, nor able to cease from either; these two contrarieties become a whirling anguish in itself, and so bring forth a third property of nature. And in these properties lies the true ground of all sensibility of life, and also of every created thing. Matter, motion, darkness, fire, and every natural power or quality of anything, has its beginning from them. Considered in themselves, they are the working powers of that great and strong creaturely life, which cannot be broken, because it begets itself, and every property is included in, and generates each other. It is a band or knot of life, that can never be loosed; nor is capable of annihilation, because it is a birth of eternal nature, which is as unchangeable as God himself. And as it arises from no outward thing, but is generated in and from itself, its work is eternal, and can never be made to cease. For as one property has no power over the other, but that of forcing it to exist; as one property does not weary the other, but always gives strength to it; so there can be no cessation of their working, but they must do, as they do, to all eternity.

Now the life of these three properties is a life of three contrary wills, equally strong and powerful against each other; and therefore is a life of the highest disquiet, torment, and anguish, full of the most horrible sensibility. It is a life that can feel nothing but its own tearing contrariety, that reigns with it. And this is the life of nature separated from God; it is the life of hell, and the devils; and is that life of dark, raging distraction, which every living creature must be in, whose first properties of life are not softened and quieted, either by the light of God, or the light of this world, dwelling and making peace in them. And he that will only seek to his reason, to cool the flame of these raging first properties of life, acts as wisely as he, whose house being on fire, would only have it extinguished, by reading a lecture upon the nature of water to it.

And now, sir, you have seen plainly enough the birth, nature, and difference, of these three first properties. But let it be supposed, that you have no feeling, or inward sensibility, of these three properties in the manner they have been here described, according to Jacob Behmen; yet you have no reason to be troubled at it, or put your brain upon the rack how to conceive it, or fear that you must want the benefit of this

knowledge, till you have it as above described; for you have in yourself a most self-evident proof, that the thing is really so; and that desire hath all that in it which he so deeply declares, from its first seed, or root.

For it is a thing self-evident to you, that every desire, as such, is in itself a restless torment; that it has pain, disquiet, and anguish, in itself; and, as to itself, consists of nothing else. Now, whether you can, with Jacob Behmen, divide this restless, anguishing desire into its three essential parts, of which it consists, matters not, as to the reality of the thing itself; for you have sensibility enough, that the desire is made up of pain and anguish, till the thing desired is obtained: and therefore you have all the certainty and benefit of this knowledge; and it serves the same end, as if you knew the ground of it with the same exactness as he has set it forth.

You have yourself for a proof, that desire and pain begin together; and this is a full proof of what was said; viz. that desire begins with two properties, that resist and strive against one another. Again, you have the same evidence in yourself, that the desire, left to itself, that is, without the least glimpse of any possibility of having that which it desires, is a degree of hell, and quite intolerable to itself: and this is a self-evident proof of what was said; viz. that the third and last property of the desire, is that whirling anguish, brought forth by the two first properties: for these three properties are the whole of the desire; it has nothing more in it. And when your desire cannot cease, and yet has nothing but itself, without the least mixture or feeling of hope in it, then you have a full self-evidence of all that which the desire is, in its three essential, inseparable properties, and that strictly according to the letter of Jacob Behmen.

Now all that is nature, or natural life within you, is only the working of desire in this painful state; and that which can set this painful life at rest in you, is so much of God, or the divine nature, manifested in you, and changing your restless properties of life into peace and happiness. And as the working properties of desire are your natural life, so the same working properties are the life of eternal nature; from whence, as out of the womb, your natural life is brought forth, and hath neither more nor less in it than that which is in eternal nature.

And if the working properties, which constitute the life of eternal nature, could be supposed to be without God in them, eternal nature would be a mere eternal hell: But as the eternal desire, with all its working properties, is brought forth by the magic power of the divine will, only for this end, that the holy Deity may manifest a heaven of glory in them; so eternal nature always was, and always must be, a kingdom of heaven, or the unchangeable manifestation of the invisible God in an outward sensibility of life, happiness, glory, and majesty.

Academicus. I am fully satisfied as to this point; and all that you have said, has the evidence of light at noonday. And I hope you will now go on in the birth of the four remaining properties; and show me, in the same degree of evidence, how these three properties bring forth the four following ones, which turn nature into a kingdom of heaven.

Theophilus. These three properties of nature cannot bring forth the four following ones. They can bring forth nothing but themselves to all eternity, nor can ever be anything else in themselves, but what they were at first. Nature can rise no higher than this painful state; and its painful working contrariety must always be the ground of all life, and all sensibility of life. For if

- (1.) this shutting-up, or compressing; and
- (2.) this resistance to it; and
- (3.) this whirling arising from both, was ever to cease, there life, and all sensibility, must cease with them; and therefore these three properties must always do as they do, as the only possible ground of every kind and degree of creaturely life, both in heaven, and on earth.

But if life is to be happy, something else must come into them, not to destroy their natural working, but to make every contrariety in them a strife of joy, and delightful sensibilities. Thus,

- (1.) compressing, or shutting-up, must find itself only to compress and keep in light and love;

- (2.) the attraction or drawing-motion, must find itself to be the drawing and motion of love; and,
- (3.) the whirling anguish must whirl still, but as a transport of joy unavoidably brought forth from the strife of love in the two properties of which it is born.

And thus nature remains in its full strength; it compresses, it attracts, and it whirls, as it did at first; and nothing is lost, or taken from it, but its hatred, wrath, and misery. Now here you are to observe, that every thing or creature, either in heaven, hell, or this world, hath its substance, or all that is substantiality in it, solely from these three first properties of nature. The creaturely substance of an angel, a devil, or a dead flint, all stand in these three first forms of nature. And all the difference betwixt high and low, spiritual and material, in the creatures, arises from their different participation of the four following forms of nature. But the four following forms cannot exist, or manifest themselves, but in the three first; and therefore the three first are, and must be, as well in the highest as in the lowest of creatures: they are the first something, or substantiality of nature, in which the light, and love, and Spirit of God could manifest itself; for spirit cannot work without something to work in and upon, and in which it may be found; nor could light shine, unless there was something in nature thicker than itself, to receive and reflect it: and therefore, thickness or darkness is, and must be, as eternal as the visible or shining light. Darkness is so far from being a mere negation, or only an absence, of the light, that it is the first and only substance, and the ground of all the possible substantiality in nature, and the substantial manifester of light itself, which could have no visibility, shine, or color, but in and through, and by the substantiality of darkness or thickness. This darkness, thickness, or substantiality, is not co-existent with, or independent of, God, but is the compressing, astringing, thickening work of the first property of the desire; which desire comes eternally from God, only as a magic birth from the will of the Deity, which willeth to come out of its hiddenness into an outward visibility of a working life. And therefore the desire is the beginning of nature; it compresseth and thickeneth. But what does it compress and thicken? Why, nothing but itself; viz. its own three properties. And these three properties thus brought forth, tied and bound in one another, are, from eternity to eternity, all the substantiality and

thickness, that is or ever can be in nature, or any creature, from the highest to the lowest. And they are thus brought forth in this indissoluble band in and by the desire, that the invisible light and life of the hidden Deity may have its something to move and shine in; his hidden Spirit have something to work and manifest itself in; his hidden love have something into which it may give itself; and his hidden life have something in which it can open itself in a variety of births of life. And this something is the working compressing desire, which includes itself,

- (1.) a continual thickening, which is darkness and substantiality:
- (2.) motion or resistance to this thickening, which is the ground of all sensibility; and,
- (3.) a restless state of whirling from these two properties, which is the very nature and power of life.

And thus these three properties of the desire, are that sufficient something, in which the Deity, by entering into it, can manifest his hidden power in all the substances and working properties of nature, by turning them all in their different workings into an endless variety of delightful forms and sensibilities of the creaturely life.

Now this first thickness, darkness, or substantiality, brought forth in the desire, though it is not matter, as matter is seen and found in this world; yet these two things must be affirmed of it: first, that it stands in the same place, answers the same ends, and is distinguished from light and spirit in the eternal world, just as matter in this world stands distinguished from the light and spirit of this world. Secondly, that all the darkness, thickness, and matter of every kind in this world, is nothing else in itself, but the first thickness, darkness, and substantiality in the desire, brought down by various steps into such kinds of materiality as are here to be seen. Look at what kind of materiality you will in this world; it is, in its whole nature, nothing else but the darkness or thickness of the eternal world, brought into a farther degree of thickness and compression. And now we are come to see the true ground;

- (1.) how the angels could destroy their kingdom, or lose all the light and happiness of heaven in it: and,

- (2.) how also, their wasted, spoiled, darkened habitation in the divided properties of nature, could be turned, and created by God, as it is, into this new form of a material world.

The first three properties of nature were never to have been seen or known, as they are in themselves, by any creature; their thickness, strife, and darkness, were brought forth by God, in union with the light, and glory, and majesty of heaven; and only for that end, that the holy Deity might be made manifest in them. And therefore their own nature, as they are in themselves, without God in them, could only then be first known, when the angels turned their desire backwards to search and find the ground and original of life, which could not be found, till these properties were found, in which the original ground of life lay hid. This turning of their desire into the origin of life, was their whole turning from the light of God; and therefore they found themselves where they had turned their desire; that is, in the center of nature; viz. in the first properties of nature, which is the dark center, or ground of life, which never should have been known or manifest to any creature. For by the center of nature, or the dark center, you are always to understand these three first properties; which, when without or separate from the light and godness of the Deity in them, are in themselves only the thickness, and rage, and darkness, of an omnipotent compressing, and omnipotent resistance to it, and omnipotent whirling from these two omnipotent contrarieties. I call them all omnipotent, because they cannot be stopped, but do all that they would; and though they are contrary to one another, yet each of them gives strength to the other; so that the omnipotence of the one, is the omnipotence of the other. And this is the boundless, incessant, strong rage, darkness, and strife, of the hellish life, which only is that, which these three properties of nature, when left to themselves, can feel or find. Now the angels, which turned their desire into the center of nature, fell into the life and working power of these three properties; they felt nothing else in themselves, but these properties; they had no other will or power of working, but as these properties worked; and therefore, as living and active creatures, they could only live, and act, and cooperate, or unite with that ground of nature without them, which was the same and one with their own nature; and therefore, all that they could do, was to stir up, awaken, call forth, and act with that thickness and darkness, and strife,

that was hidden in nature, just as the toad, in a fine garden, only sucks the poison that is hid in a good herb. So the fallen angels, though in heaven, having only the center of nature in themselves, could only find and work with that center and root of darkness, on which the heavenly glory stood. But from this power which they had of working in the center of nature, hence came forth a dark, wrathful substantiality, separated from the light and glory of the holy Deity; and thus a new kind of substantiality appeared in their kingdom; and their outward habitation was like their inward life; viz. a manifestation of nature fallen from God. And here now, you clearly see, how the first thickness or compression of the first property of nature, which was only the hidden substantiality of the light and glory of heaven, came into a more outward state, and made its first approach or step towards matter, as you now see it. For there was now a thickness, a darkness, and hardness, which never had been before; for the light being lost, then the first property of nature lost its beatified state of meekness, transparency, and spiritual fluidity; and became stiff, rigid, dark, and hard; and this, as I said, was its first step or descent towards the hardness and darkness of the matter of this world, till it came to be earth and stones, by the creating power of God. And thus it came to pass, as Moses speaks, that darkness was upon the face of the deep. A state, that had no possibility of existence, till the sin of angels had manifested the hidden center of nature, in the working of its three properties, without the light of God in them.

Now as a new thickness of darkness, hardness, or substantiality, was manifested by the strong working powers of the angels in the center, or the first properties of fallen nature; so God, to manifest his wisdom and goodness towards this fallen nature, took all these properties in their own working way; and made them in their own way of working, to stop and overcome the evil that was brought forth by them. For the will of God, joining with the wrathful astringency of the first compressing property of nature, became the divine fiat, which increased this compacting property to such a degree, as created or compacted the darkened substantiality into a globe of earth and stones. And this same divine fiat, or creating power, which coagulated the grossness into earth and stones, compressed or coagulated all that was substantial, or belonged to substantiality through their whole kingdom, as well the heavenly as the earthly part of it; so that

all their kingdom, as to its substantiality, lost its spirituality, and entered into a new created or compacted state of thickness, as well the spoiled as the unspoiled part of their kingdom. And as soon as this was done, the angels lost all their power in it, and over it. They could kindle no more wrath in its heavenly part, nor make any use of that which they had spoiled, because all was shut up together in this new compaction, with which the spirituality of their nature could have no communication. And so they were left prisoners in their own chains of darkness, unable to stir up wrath anywhere but in themselves. All this was done in the first day of the creation, when the fiat of God compressed or created their whole kingdom into a heaven and earth. Hence it is; viz. from a compaction of their whole kingdom into a new-created heaven and earth; that all things in this world, all its elements and stars, are a mixture of good and evil, have something of the wrath and evil of hell in them. Hence is the great variety of metallic ores and precious stones in the earth; the good and bad qualities in fire, air, and water. It is because the divine fiat, or compacting power, came at once in the utmost swiftness upon their whole kingdom, as the good and evil stood in strife against each other, and compressed all into a state of cessation and conjunction with one another, as in the prison of this new-created materiality. And thus the heavenly and hellish part of their kingdom, light and darkness, fluidity and hardness, meekness and wrath, good and evil, were all shut up together in the same sudden compaction; in which they lay, as in a state of death, till the divine fiat should awaken a life in it.

Now the three first properties of nature; the first, a shutting up; the second, a running out; and the third, a whirling; were by the divine fiat, in the three first days of the creation, become the ground of an earthly, a watery, and airy materiality, all according to the working nature of the three properties; and all of them having something of an heavenly nature shut up in them, which wanted to be delivered from its bondage. Hence this threefold materiality of earth, water, and air, became a subject fit for the birth of the fourth property of nature. And therefore, on the fourth day of the creation, the divine fiat kindled in this anguishing materiality, out of that very fire and light that was compacted and hid in it, the fourth property of nature (the eternal fire), as a globe of fire and light, which was to stand as an out-birth of the eternal fire, in the midst of this new-created

materiality, and become the opener of all the astral life and light in this world. And as the eternal fire, the fourth property of eternal nature, is not a movable thing that can change its place, but must be always in the place of its birth, standing forever, as a birth, in the midst of the seven properties, forever changing the three first properties of nature into the three last properties of the kingdom of heaven; so the sun, the true out-birth of the eternal fire, and having the same birth and office in this material world, as the eternal fire hath in eternal nature, is not, cannot be, a movable thing, or be in any other place in this world, than where it is; but is, and must be, the center or heart of this whole system, ever separating the three first properties of this material world, from the three that follow, and ever changing the three first forms of material wrath into the three following forms of terrestrial life, light, and all delightful sensibilities; in strict conformity to that, which the eternal fire does in eternal nature, changing the root, or first properties of nature, into a kingdom of God, and heavenly glory. For the sun is not a body of fire brought into the place where it is; but the kindled place is its body and birth; and therefore it is as immovable as place is, and must be as it is; viz. a place giving forth fire and light till all material nature is dissolved. The place is kindled, not by any foreign fire, but thus: in the first compaction of the whole angelic kingdom into this new materiality, the good and bad part, that is, the spoiled and unspoiled substantiality of their whole kingdom, was shut up in this new compression or materiality, in one and the same state of death. Secondly, in the beginning of the creation, God, said, "Let there be light," and there was light; not a shining light, for that came first from the birth of the sun, but a power or virtue of heavenly light, not yet in a visible, material shine, but as an uncreated power of light, entering into this whole materiality, to stir up, and awaken the good part of the heavenly substantiality, that was shut up in the compaction of this new materiality.

Without these two things, material nature must have continued in its darkness, and no fourth form of fire could ever have come forth in it. But from these two things, viz. the heavenly substantiality, stirred up by the power of light entering into it, the three first properties of darkness were brought into a mere anguishing state; from whence, by the divine fiat, the fourth form of material nature kindled itself, as a fire, and broke forth in the place of the sun, and must be ever burning and flaming in the midst of

the material system; because it is born of the three first properties of darkness, and brings forth the three last properties of light, and life, and the joy of nature; and therefore must always be in the midst of the six properties of nature, itself making the number to be seven. And thus the sun, as the fourth form of nature, must always stand in the midst of the whole material system. And this proved, not as Copernicus proved it, from reasonable conjectures, and outward arguments, but from the internal nature of its birth, the first root from which it proceeds, and the absolute impossibility of its being otherwise. And thus it is, that the truth and depth of nature is opened by the Spirit of God, in the mystery made known to our illiterate shoemaker. And thus you have a short sketch, how this world came to be as it is. It is descended as an out-birth of the eternal world, and all the seven properties of eternal nature work in it, as they work in eternity; and the eternity is manifested in the temporary working of a new world, which is only to stand in this state of thickness or compaction for a time, till the goodness of God towards fallen nature has been sufficiently manifested thereby.

For as this material system of things may, in a good sense, be said to be an unnatural state, occasioned by the disorders which the fall of angels brought into nature; and as it had no beginning, but from the will of God, commanding the first property of nature to coagulate and compress their disordered kingdom into a new thickness or materiality, only as a remedy to stop, remove, and overcome the evil in nature; so when this remedy shall have had its trial, and the will of God shall no longer will this compressing together; then all that has been brought together by it, must fall back again into its first eternity. And then, without any possibility of being otherwise, every birth in this world, that belongs to the root or center of nature, and has worked with it, must fall down into that eternal abyss of darkness, on which the light of God forever stands, unknown to it. And every life that is born of heaven, and has worked with it, must ascend into the kingdom of God, or abyss of divine glory and majesty.

Oh Academicus! Look now (whilst these thoughts are alive in you) at worldly greatness, fleshly wisdom, and earthly schemes of happiness; and tell me, if you can, what a nothingness, what a folly and delusion, there is in them? Look again at the apostle's pilgrim, abstaining from worldly lusts, desiring to know nothing but Christ, and him crucified; living in the

spirit of prayer, and thirst after God; striving in everything after the fullest conformity to the tempers, Spirit, life, and behavior of Christ in this world; and then tell me, whether heaven and earth, God and nature, and all that is great, and wise, and happy, does not call upon you to be this pilgrim.

Academicus. Truly, sir, I enough see, that all worldly wisdom, and ambitious views of a glory of life in the things and concerns of this world, are no better than vain attempts to be blessed and happy from the ruins of the angelic kingdom. For this world is only a thickness and materiality of the bestial life, built upon the ground of hell; that is, upon the first properties of fallen nature, brought into a harder, more compacted state of existence than they have in hell, and kindled into an astral, terrestrial, bestial life, by the power of the sun. The bestial life, therefore, is the highest good and happiness in it; and the creatures of this world have nothing that they seek for further in it. But man, being not created for it, but by sin fallen into it, is the only creature that makes an unnatural use of it, and seeks for that in it, and by it, which cannot be found in it. Man, having been wise, great, and happy in his creation, though they are all lost, has yet some remaining sensibility of them, though fallen into a world, that cannot help him to them. Hence it is, that he would be wise, and great, and happy in a world, that has no happiness but for beasts; and can only help man to know, that he is poor and miserable, and banished from his true native country.

But, instead of learning this one lesson of truth, from the world he is in, which is all the wisdom, greatness, and happiness, that can be had from it; he gives himself up to a wisdom that is foolishness, a greatness that is all meanness, and a happiness that begins and ends in torment and delusion. Would you see all his greatness, wisdom and happiness united, the sum total of earthly glory! It is, when he has in his cap the feathers of some birds, wears a painted ribband, laced clothes, is called by some new name, and drawn from place to place by a number of beasts. Now, poor, and mean, and unnatural as this fiction of earthly glory is; yet this is the powerful idol, that carries all before it! that destroys all sense of goodness, and divine virtue! and keeps the heart of man so earnestly devoted to it, that he has no sense of the eternity that is in him; that eternity brought him forth, and eternity will take him again!

Theophilus. It is true, Academicus, that the highest good of this world is its bestial life; and therefore it has no more, or other, happiness for a man than for a beast; can give no more to one, than to the other; viz. food and raiment; with which the bestial life in man ought to be content, as well as in the beast. But seeing man, in spite of the nature of things, will have an earthly glory of life; thence it is, that the wisdom of this world is, and must be, foolishness with God, and will be foolishness with man, as soon as he gets but a moderate knowledge of himself. But give me leave just to observe, that though this material world has no higher happiness than the bestial life; yet God hath much higher ends in creating it. For though the dark wrathful properties of fallen nature could only, in their compaction, be made the ground of a vegetable and bestial life; yet you are to observe, that in the creation of this world; viz. in the compaction of the whole angelic kingdom; the unspoiled heavenly part thereof was shut up with that, in which the wrath was kindled: and that for these two great ends; first, that, by this compaction, it might be taken out of the power of the evil angels, that they might not go on in kindling wrath in it. Secondly, that this reserved good part of their kingdom might be the foundation and ground of an heavenly paradisiacal life, and a new host of heavenly creatures, instead of the fallen angels. Now, to do this, God created an human angel, who was to call forth the paradisiacal life out of the compacted heavenly substantiality, as the sun opened a vegetable bestial life, out of the gross substantiality of the material world.

God breathed the triune Spirit of the holy Deity into a body taken out of the earth, that is, into a body of that heavenly substantiality, that was shut up in the earth, as well as in every other part of this material system; and therefore his body is rightly said to be taken or formed out of the earth; because it was formed of that substantiality, that was shut up in the earth.

But when his wandering eye had raised a longing desire to know what the earthly life was in its good and evil, and took the certain means of knowing it; then, as his soul lost the light and Spirit of God, so it lost also that heavenly luminous body, in which the light and Spirit of God could dwell, as it dwelleth in heaven. And when this heavenly luminous corporeity was lost, and shut up again in that earthly bondage and compaction, in which it lay, before it was his body; then the poor fallen soul was only clothed

with the gross corruptibility of bestial flesh and blood. You are to understand this matter thus: when his body was formed out of that heavenly substantiality, that was in the compaction of the earth, it was not entirely separated from all earthly materiality (because he was to have a body of this world, as well as of the heavenly world); but its state in the earthly materiality was entirely changed; it was till then shut up in the earthly compaction, but now it is called out of that earthly death into a state of life; it is set free from the power of the earth, in a superiority over it, to be its happiness, and open its own glory in it, and through it.

And thus you see the possibility, the truth, and the manner of the thing; how his heavenly body was taken out of the earth at his creation, set in freedom from it, and in a living superiority over it; how, at the fall, it was swallowed up, or compacted again in its own first earth; viz. the earthly body, or materiality of Adam: for as it was not separated from this earthly materiality, but only brought to life in it, and superiority over it; so when the divine light, which was the life of this body, was lost, it then fell again into a state of death in that gross materiality, under which it lay before. And thus, in the strictest truth, the body of Adam returned again to that very earth, or dust, from whence it was taken.

Now, when this happened, the fallen angels entered again into some power in their lost kingdom. There was then something found, with which they could work, and join their own power. For as the soul of man had lost the light and Spirit of heaven, so the same dark center of nature, or the three first wrathful properties, were opened in it, as are opened in the fallen angels. And thus they got entrance into the awakened hell in man, and can work in it. For as often as man stirred, followed, or worked with his will according to these properties, the devil could enter into, and work with him; and so the first son of fallen man was made a murderer. And hence it is, that sin and wickedness have known no bounds; it is because it is the joint work of fallen angels, and fallen man.

Stay a while, sir, in view of these truths: here you see the seat and ground, the birth and growth of all sin and evil; it lies in these three dark, selfish, self-willed, wrathful, hellish properties of the fallen soul. This is the dark center of nature, in which the devils have all their own power in

themselves, and all their power in you; and till you resist this hell within you, till you live in contrariety to it, the devils will not flee from you.

Here also you see, in a self-evident light, the deep ground, and absolute necessity, of that one redemption, which is called, and is, the meekness and heavenly blood of the Lamb of God. For these words in their true ground mean only the changing of the three first dark wrathful properties of fallen nature, into the three last properties of the heavenly life, light, and love, which is the life of God restored to the soul, or the light, Spirit, or Word of God born again in it. Let me only add this one word; turn from wrath of every kind, as you would flee from the most horrid devil; for it is his, it is he, and his strength in you. Whether you look at rage and anger in a tempest, a beast, or a man, it is but one and the same thing, from one and the same cause; and therefore your own wrath is to be turned from, as the same with that of hell; and which has its birth and strength from that hell or center of nature, which the fall of angels hath made known; and which only worketh thus differently, whether it be in a man, a beast, or the elements of this world. And this must be, till the center of nature is again in its place of hiddenness, by being wholly overcome by heaven. Embrace therefore every meekness of love and humility with the same eagerness as you would fall down at the feet of Jesus Christ; for it is his, (“is” missing in printed text, but see sentence 3 of this paragraph for exact parallel) it is he, and his power of salvation in you. Enter into no strife, or self-defense against anyone, that either reproaches you, or your doctrine; but remember, that if you are to join with Christ in doing good, your sword of natural wrath must be locked up in its own sheath; no weapons of the flesh are to be used; but you must work only in the meekness, the sweetness, the humility, the love and patience of the Lamb of God; who, as such, is the only doer of good, the only overcomer of wrath, and the one redemption of fallen nature. If you are reproached as an enthusiast, do not take comfort in thinking, that it is the truth of your own piety, or the want of it in others, that gives occasion to the charge; for though both of these should happen to be the case, yet they are not proper reflections for you; and if you take your peace from them, it is not the peace of God in you: but as in good report, you are to be as though you heard it not, ascribe nothing to yourself from it; so in evil report, self is just as much to be forgotten; and both of them are to be used, only as an occasion to generate

humility, meekness, love, and the Spirit of the Lamb of God, both in yourself, and all that speak either well or ill of you. For this is the will and working of heaven; it has but one will, and one work; and that is, to change all the wrath, evil, and disorder of nature, into a kingdom of God. And therefore he that would be a servant of God, and work with heaven, must will all that he willeth, do all that he doth, and bear all that he beareth, in that one Spirit, and one will, with which heaven ruleth over all the earth.

You rejoice to think, that you know the true ground of your redemption; how heaven comes again into the fallen soul, when that property of light and love, which is called the fifth property of nature, is generated in it. It is indeed a blessed knowledge; but its blessedness is only then yours, when yourself are this fifth property, that is, when your life is a life of this fifth property; when, whatever you do, wherever you go, or whatever you meet, you only do as this fifth property doth, give nothing but that which it giveth; viz. its gentle light and love to every man, and everything, whether it be good or bad. For this property hath nothing else to give, and yet is always giving; its nature is, to communicate and impart itself, not here or there, but always and everywhere; it has no other will. When therefore this property (the Christ of God, and the life of heaven) is born in you, friend and foe will have the same from you; you will have lost all resentment; you will love your enemies; bless them that curse you; pray for them that despitefully use you; and have but one will towards every man, and that is, that light and love may do that for him, which they have done for you.

Academicus. Oh! Theophilus, you have given me more than I know how to contain; and yet have increased my thirst after more still. You have so touched the cord of love within me, that all my nature stands in a trembling desire after it; I would fain feel nothing else but the gentle godlike power of love, living in my heart. Pray therefore, of all things, help me to understand how the fire, the fourth property of nature, is born; and how it turns the first three wrathful forms into the three following forms of heavenly joy, triumph, and happiness; the first of which three forms, is this fifth of light and love: therefore, help me here, I beseech you.

Theophilus. What a therefore have you here drawn? That therefore, of all things, I must need help you to an opinion, or notional knowledge, how

the fire is born, and how it turns nature into a kingdom of God. For was I to join with you in forming notions of this how, I should only help you to lose all, by being content with the shadow, instead of the substance.

You say, that your nature stands in a trembling desire after the birth of this light and love: if so, you stand in the very place of its birth, and must stand there till it is born in you. It can be born nowhere else, nor in any other manner; and all that Jacob Behmen has written, is only to direct and bring you to this place of its birth. He himself has given you all the hearsay knowledge that you can have of it; for he can give you no more from the plainest words. And therefore, to help anyone to work with his brain for clear notions, and rational conceptions, of what he has written, is helping him to do and be that, which all his works, from the beginning to the end, absolutely declare against, as contrary to the whole nature and end of them. Which speak, as he saith, with the sound of a trumpet; and chiefly to awaken man out of the dream and death of rational, notional, and hearsay knowledge; and to show him, that his own inward hunger and thirst after God, is that alone which can and must open the fountain of light and divine knowledge in him.

But to speak a word or two of the fire, whose birth you want to know. You know already, better than any words can tell you, from a self-evident knowledge, that nature is in you; that it is not God, but is that which wants God, or its true good; and must be an emptiness, a pain, and want, till God is manifested in it. If you ask why nature is only a state of want and disquiet, and unable to be content with itself; it is because the eternal, uncreated, incomprehensible light, which no creature can enter into, is that which gave birth to all nature, and from whence all nature hath its hungering, and state of want. For nature had never come into being, but that the eternal, incomprehensible light longed to be manifested in an outspoken life of nature and creatures, and in a visibility and shine of glory: therefore, as nature came forth from this first longing of the light to be manifested in it, so nature is in itself only a want and hungering, which the light alone has raised, and can only satisfy.

Now from this longing on both sides, nature wanting God, and God wanting to be manifested in nature, the union of both is effected; which is the birth of that eternal fire, or fourth form of nature, which is always

burning in the same degree, that is, always doing the same thing; viz. always overcoming and shutting up the three first forms of nature, and making them to be the hidden root and center of nature; and always bring forth out of them the three following properties of light and love, and every joyful sensibility of life; that is, changing nature into a kingdom of heaven. Now that which makes this change in the properties of nature is, and is rightly called, fire, in the strictest literal meaning of the word; because all that we can conceive as fire in this world, hath its whole nature, power, and existence, from it. Not only the fire of life in animals and vegetables, but the fire in the kitchen, and the candle, are each of them kindled as it is kindled, and doth all that it doth from this fourth property, or fire of eternal nature. The thickness and darkness in the wood, and the candle, have fire kindled in them, and light from that fire, in no other way, than as the fourth property is a fire from the thickness and darkness of nature, kindled by the light of God entering into union with it. Had the wood, and the candle, no water or oil in them, neither of them could give forth fire and light. Now water and oil have the properties of light in them: when therefore the properties of nature in the wood, and the candle, are put into strife, and begin to work in blackness and darkness (which is the beginning of every fire), they by this strife open an entrance for the properties of light in the water, and the oil, to mix and unite with them; and by this union of darkness and light, that fire is kindled, which turns the darkness of the wood and candle into a shining and light. And thus does every fire kindled in this world bear an infallible witness to the kindling, the nature, and power, of that eternal fire, which, kindled by the oil of divine light, changes the first dark properties of nature into the light and majesty of heaven. Now what would you know more of fire, or its birth, than that it is, and only can be, kindled by the light of God entering into, and uniting with, the first properties of nature in the soul? Leave off therefore all working with your reason in the way of notions; empty your heart of all vain satisfactions in earthly things, that so the first properties of nature in your soul, finding their misery, and want of God, may make you to be all hunger, and faith, and desire of him. And then the fire must kindle, nothing can hinder it; God will then infallibly come as a fire and light into your soul, changing all the wanting, empty, restless properties of your natural life, into a sweetness of a new birth of rest and peace in him.

For nothing works either in God, or nature, or creature, but desire. And as God created angels and men out of eternal nature, only through a longing desire of manifesting his own goodness and happiness in them, so every angel and man must find God, as a life of happiness and goodness in him, as soon as nature, either in angel or man, is become a hunger after God. For hunger does all in all worlds, and finds all that it wants, and hungers after. Everything had its beginning in it, and from it; and everything is led by it to all its happiness.

Academicus. I am quite satisfied in all my demands, and will ask for no more help, as to the use I am to make of our author's writings. Only tell me when they will all come forth in a new edition, or which will be published first; for I want several of them, which I could never get.

Theophilus. If you have but two or three of his books, it is enough; for everyone of them has all in it that you need be taught, and sufficiently opens the ground of the whole mystery of the Christian redemption. He himself thought his books to be too numerous; and expressed his wish, that they were all reduced into one. As he wrote without any art, and had no knowledge of regularity of composition; so whatever particular matter he occasionally entered upon, he always began again afresh from the same first ground, and full opening of the mystery of nature, from whence he explained and determined the matter he was upon. And it was this frequent, and almost constant, repetition of one and the same ground that swelled his writings into so many volumes; though it may be said, that there is nothing separately in any of his books, but what is to be found in almost every other, though not so largely set forth. You have no need therefore to run with eagerness through all his books; but the thing that you are to intend and look for, is the ground and foundation on which all his doctrines are built, which contains the true philosophy, or fundamental opening of all the powers that work both in nature and grace; and that by this knowledge you may become a true workman yourself; and know how to conform to, and concur with, all that the working powers, either of nature or grace, require of you. Now this ground and foundation of all is (as far as words can do it) opened to you in every one of his books: and you have been already also sufficiently brought into the knowledge of it, by what has been said of the birth of nature; what it is, how it works, how it came into being, how it is distinct from God, how it wants God, how

God is manifested in it, how every after-thing is from and out of it, is all that it is, and hath all that it hath, in it, and by it, and must have all its happiness or misery, according as it works with, or contrary to nature. From this fundamental ground, or opening of the working powers of nature, you have seen how angels could and did, lose their first state in nature; and how a second new creation could, and did come out of their fallen state and kingdom, all according to the powers of fallen nature, overruled, and governed, and put into a new way by the good creating fiat of God. You have seen how this new creation, with man its Lord, could, and did, lose also their first created state in nature; and how God, overruling fallen nature again, did, by his merciful redeeming fiat, or by the means of the holy Jesus, put this fallen new creation in a state of recovery, and all done according to the powers, and workings, and possibilities of nature. So that nothing is done arbitrarily, or by mere will, but everything in conformity to the unchangeable workings and powers of nature; only directed, assisted, and helped, by the mercy of his redeeming fiat, so far as nature was capable of being helped. This, sir, is the true and fundamental ground of all his doctrines; and, standing upon this ground, you stand in the center of truth, whence everything that you need to know of God, of nature, of heaven, of hell, of the fall of man, of his redemption only and solely in and by the Word or Son of God, is known in such self-evident certainty, as you find and know the workings of your own life: and also, that happiness, or misery, life or death, can only be had, or not had, lost or found, solely as a birth in nature, brought forth by the faith, or magic power of the will of man, working either with, or contrary to, the redeeming fiat of God.

To make therefore a right use of his writings, you should, for a sufficient time, keep solely to that part of them, which opens the ground and foundation of the powers that work in grace and nature, till by a self-evident sensibility it is opened in you, and your heart stands in a conformity to it, and true working with it: for it is your own heart, as finding the working powers of nature and grace in itself, and simply given up in faith to work with them, that is to be your key and guide to that knowledge you are to have of them; whether it be from the Holy Scripture, or the writings of this author. For to this end, he tells you, he has written all; viz. to help man to seek and find himself; what is his birth, his state

and place in nature; what he is in body, soul, and spirit; from what worlds all these three parts of him are come; how they came to be as they are at present; what his fall is, and how he must rise out of it. And therefore, if, in order to seek and find this ground in yourself, you was, for some sufficient time, to read only to the 10th chapter of his Three Principles, or to the 6th or 8th chapter of his Threefold Life; and proceed no farther, till this ground had made itself manifest in you, and your heart stood in a strict conformity to it, and working with it; you would then be in a true fitness to read farther, and reap the full benefit from any other of his books, that should fall into your hands; whether it was the Way to Christ, or the book upon the Incarnation. But, above all things, remember this advice, as of the last moment to you, Be no reasoner upon the mystery; seek for no commentaries, or rational explications of it, to entertain your reason with: for, as soon as you do this; then, however true and good this mystery may be in itself, it is, with regard to you, of no better use than that very vain philosophy, and science falsely so called, condemned by the apostle. It will only be the same snare and delusion to you, that other learning and philosophy is to other people. For if there is nothing good or divine in you but the faith, and hope, and love, and desire of your heart turned to God; if nothing can do any good, be any blessing or happiness to this faith, and love, and desire turned to God, but only God himself in his holy being; and if nothing can communicate God to you, but God himself; and if God cannot communicate himself to you under a notion, or an idea of reason, but a degree of life, good, and blessing, born or brought to life in your soul; then you see, that to give yourself up to reasoning, and notional conceptions, is to turn from God, and wander out of the way of all divine communications.

Academicus. But if it be strictly thus, Theophilus, had it not been better, that these deep matters had not been communicated to the world, since it is so natural to man to make a wrong use of them?

Theophilus. This objection, Academicus, comes with the same strength against the scriptures themselves. For, excepting the seven thousands unknown in every age, as in the days of Elijah, and a few spiritual fathers and writers in almost every age of the church, bearing faithful witness to the truth and mysteries of religion, it must be said, that human learning, governed by human reason, hath, from age to age, to this very day, not

only mistaken the true end and use of the scriptures, but hath turned them into an occasion of much evil and mischief. The scriptures speak only to the heart and conscience of man, not to amend or enlighten it with notions and opinions formed from the written letter of the Word; but solely to make the being and power of God known and adored, and to awaken in man a sensibility of his want of God; and to turn all the power, and strength, and will of the heart wholly to God, to receive light, and life, and rest, in his holy being.

But to speak now directly to your objection: if I knew of any person, who stood in the faith and simplicity of the first Christians, free from all carnal adherence, or vain trust, to party notions, doctrines, and errors, brought forth by the contention of sects and churches; whose soul was dead to the earthly nature, and all the rudiments of this world, seeking only light, life, and salvation, from God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, living and dwelling in him, redeeming and sanctifying his whole body, soul, and spirit; to such a one I could freely say, this mystery was needless; as having all that already which this mystery would do for him. For its only end is, to bring man out of all the labyrinths of false and notional religion, to this very first state and simplicity of the gospel faith and life.

And this may pass for a good reason why this mystery was not opened by God in the first ages of the church; since there was then no occasion for it. For religion began, and went on, rightly, in its own true way; it had the faith and heart of man; it stood in its own proper strength and glory, and was an awakened divine life of faith simply given up with joy and gladness to the mysteries of the gospel; not wanting any why's or wherefore's, because in the real possession of all the good, and blessing, and power, of every mystery of salvation.

But seeing a worldly spirituality, called in the scripture the whore riding upon the beast, has had its thousand years in the church; since not only every kingdom, but almost every corner of Christendom, has a Babel of its own, built upon some rational interpretation of the letter of scripture; since learned reason, within the church, knows no other use of scriptures, but to reproach and condemn all other Babels, and to find materials to strengthen its own; since reason, without the church, finds it as easy to reproach and condemn all revelation, as it is to reproach all these Babels

built upon it; since this is the finished confusion, brought forth by the reason and fleshly wisdom both of those that defend, and those that oppose the gospel; how adorable is the goodness of God in vouchsafing to these last ages of the world such a remedy (viz. the opening the ground and mystery of all things) as is suitable to the distressed and confused state of religion in the world! And how easy is it also to see the greatest reasons, why this remedy was not afforded sooner! For as true faith did not want it, and learned reason, whilst pleased with itself, could not be in a condition to receive it; so it was highly suitable to the goodness and wisdom of God, not to give forth this mystery, till reason, or fleshly wisdom, had made shipwreck of faith; and had so filled up the measure of its folly, as to stand in its last and highest state of distress, perplexity, and confusion. For any remedy is only then likely to be rightly received, when distress and perplexity makes the want of it to be sensibly felt.

Let not therefore the genuine, plain, simple Christian, who is happy and blessed in the simplicity of gospel faith, take offense at this mystery, because he has no need of it. For it is God's goodness to the distressed state of the church, fallen from the life and power of gospel faith, and groaning under the slavery, darkness, and perplexity of bewildered reason and opinions.

Neither let the orthodox divine, who sticks close to the phrases and sentiments of antiquity, reject this mystery as heretical, because it opens a ground of man, and the divine mysteries, not known or found in the primitive writers. For this is the very reason, why he should thankfully receive it with open arms, as having, and being that very thing, which the distressed divided state of the church now so greatly wants; and yet did not want, till it was fallen from its first simplicity of faith. For whilst faith and life defended the mysteries of religion, the ground and philosophy of it was not wanted. But when orthodoxy had given itself up to reason, and had nothing else for its support but reason and argument from the letter of scripture, without the least knowledge of the first ground of doctrines; then it could only be defended, as it is defended in every sect and division of the Christian world. For if reason will defend the mysteries of redemption, without knowing the true ground on which they stand, or why they must be as they are, from the nature of the thing; the more zealous and learned any man is, the more errors must he fall into in the

defense of them. For the greater the strength is, that works without light, the more extravagancies it must produce. This is too visible in all the controversies that have risen in the church. Now, that learned reason, as presiding in the divinity schools, never yet had, nor could have, any knowledge of the ground of man, and the mysteries of redemption, is plain from this one generally received opinion of every age to this day; viz. that all things were created out of nothing. For this maxim entirely excludes all possibility of giving any account of the ground and reason of anything, either in the nature of man, or religion; and is the same thing as saying, that nothing has any ground or reason. For if that which begins to be comes out of nothing, it can only have the nature of that out of which it comes; and therefore can have no more said about it, why it is this or that, than can be said of that nothing, from whence it comes. And if the mystery, or life of the human nature, is out of nothing, has no reality of any antecedent ground in it, out of which it came to be such as it is, and to have that which it hath; then it is most certain, that all the mysteries of the religion of man must come forth from the same nothing, and have no antecedent ground from whence they come, that requires them to be as they are. For man, created out of nothing, cannot have a religion that is of any higher descent than himself, unless he is to have a religion that is quite unnatural to him. But a religion that has its ground in eternity, must be an unnatural religion to man that comes up in time, and out of nothing. If therefore you will hold man to be out of nothing, you must of all necessity hold all the mysteries of the religion of man to be also out of nothing; and that therefore no possible account can be given either of the ground of man, or his religion, or why there can be either right or wrong, good or evil, in either of them.

Hence you may see why the truth has always suffered in every controversy of the church: thus, if you begin with that of St. Austin and Pelagius, about the freedom of the human will; do but suppose, what is fact, that they both of them held the human will to be created out of nothing; and then you need not wonder at that number of volumes and systems of errors, which this dispute has brought forth. For who can say, what the will is, or is not; what nature or power it must have, if it is created out of nothing? Whereas, if either of these disputants had known, from a true ground, what the human will is; that it cannot be a made thing,

much less made out of nothing; but that the will of angel or man is the eternal uncreated will become creaturely, as a true direct birth from the divine will, descended from it, born out of it, and from thence come into a creaturely state; then they had known, that the will of angel or man must have the nature and freedom of the eternal will; and that its freedom not only consisted in its self-motion, but chiefly and most gloriously in this, that it could neither receive, nor have, nor be anything, as to its happiness or misery, but according to its own working: and then all that predestinarian learning of decrees, etc. that has tormented the church ever since the time of St. Austin, had been prevented.

Look next at the Socinian controversy. The Socinians, and their opponents, met in the field of reason, to debate about the fall, original sin, its guilt, the vindictive wrath of God, and the necessity of the incarnation, sufferings, death, and satisfaction, of Christ. These were the great points to be tried at the bar of reason. Now all these disputants stood upon the old ground; viz. that the soul of man, as well as all other things, was created out of nothing. And therefore they all stood absolutely excluded from every possibility of touching the true ground or reason of any one doctrine in debate. For the soul, created out of nothing, leaves no room to affirm, or even to suppose, that anything can be affirmed of the ground and reason of Christian redemption. For surely, if the soul of man is created out of nothing, it may and must with as much sense be affirmed, that it may be redeemed by nothing; and he that affirms the one, can have no pretense to deny the other.

Just the same may be said of the present controversy betwixt the Christians and infidels, concerning Christianity itself. You need not wonder, that so many learned volumes have had so little effect; or that the defenders of Christianity seem to lose ground, though the infidels, at the same time, get no advantage to their cause, but that of increasing their numbers. For as neither side can go any higher, than a creation out of nothing; so neither side can say anything from a true ground, either for or against the mysteries of the gospel. If therefore infidelity increases, it is not because it has got more light, sees further into the depths of nature, or stands upon a more rational ground; but merely because the vanity and blindness of the dispute has a natural tendency to beget indifference and infidelity in the hearts of men.

Observe this proposition; viz. "In God we live and have our being." Now, how easy is it for anyone to see, that no one can say anything as to the ground and reasons of the mysteries of the gospel, either for or against them, till he can go to the bottom of this proposition, and plainly show, either how we do, or do not, live and move, and have our being in God! For the truth or falseness of every mystery of the Christian redemption plainly depends upon this matter. If the Christian therefore will speak to the purpose, in defense of the ground of the gospel; he must be able to show, that we so are in God, so have our life in him, as to prove, from thence, the ground, the necessity, and certainty, of the Christian means of redemption. On the other hand, the Deist cannot take one rational step, or have any true ground to stand upon, but so far as he can show, that we are not so from God, have not such a nature in and from him, do not so live and move in him, as to have any want or any fitness for that method of redemption, which the gospel teaches. But as neither side did this, though the one thing necessary to be done; so you also see, that neither side had any possibility of doing it. For the soul, created out of nothing, allows of no inquiry, whether anything of God be in it, or how it has its life in him, or stands related to him. It admits of no searching after any ground or reason of its good or evil, or how it must have its happiness or misery from the nature of the thing. For if the intelligent life itself must be supposed to come from no ground, but to be created out of nothing; then it is certain, that its good and evil, its happiness or misery, with everything else, must be supposed to have no ground or reason for being as it is, but to be created out of nothing; and may go again into nothing, just as the creator pleaseth.

And now, sir, you may enough see, how all controversy, both within and without the church, has been so vain a thing. For reason was to support doctrines and mysteries, without the least knowledge of the ground on which they stood; and reason was to oppose them in the same ignorance. You see also, why in these last ages, where literal learning has made so great a figure, that the matter has only been made worse, and division and error more triumphant. For as the ground of the truths was still wanted, and nothing appealed to, but the letter and phrase of scripture; so the more artful and learned disputants were in reasoning and criticism, the more absurdities must be defended on both sides. Why is not the learned papist

shocked at transubstantiation, or the Protestant at predestination and reprobation? It is because each of them have enough of the truth of reason, and the goodness of criticism, to draw the letter of scripture to his side. And this you may be assured of, that reason, and literal learning, have just as good eyes in every other religious matter, and will give just such an account of every other doctrine, when it comes into dispute, as the papist and Protestant have done in these two points. And the thing cannot be otherwise: as Deist and Christian both hold a creation out of nothing, they must both have only an arbitrary God, and arbitrary religion, that has no antecedent ground to stand upon, but is left to the arbitrary proof or reason of both of them. What thanks, therefore, are due to the goodness of God, for opening this great mystery of all things in our author, wherein the right and wrong, the true and false, in religion, is as manifest as anything can be to our senses! Let no one therefore take offense at the opening of this mystery, as if it brought anything new into religion; for it has nothing new in it; it alters no point of gospel-doctrine, nor adds anything to it, but only sets every article of the old Christian faith upon its true ground, and in such a degree of light, as, when seen, is irresistible. It disturbs no one, who is in possession of the truth, because it points at nothing, drives to nothing, but to the opening the heavenly life in the soul. It calls no man from any outward form of religion, as such; but only shows, that no outward form can have any good in it, but so far as it only means, and seeks, and helps, the renewed life of heaven in the soul. "A Christian," says he, "is of no sect, and yet in every sect"; a truth which all sects, as such, will dislike; and therefore a truth equally wanted to be known, and equally beneficial to all sects. For the chief hurt of a sect lies in this, that it takes itself to be necessary to the truth; whereas the truth is only then found, when it is known to be of no sect, but as free and universal as the goodness of God, and as common to all names and nations as the air and light of this world.

Suffer me now, before we part, once more to repeat what I have so often said, that you would not receive this mystery as a system of rational notions; nor do with it, as the world has, for the most part, done with the Bible, only gather opinions of reason and speculation from it. For it opens no depth of nature or grace, but to help you to the heart and spirit of the returning prodigal son, and to show you the blindness and vanity of reason

and opinions; and that truth can have no possible entrance into you, but so far as you die to your earthly nature. The gospel saith all this to you in the plainest words; and the mystery only shows you, that the whole system of the universe saith the same thing. To be a true student or disciple of the mystery, is to be a disciple of Christ; for it calls you to nothing but to the plain letter of the gospel; and wherever it enters, either into the height or depth of nature, it is only to confirm the truth of these words of Christ; viz. "He that followeth not me, walketh in darkness: and unless a man deny himself, and forsake all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple." This is the philosophy opened in this mystery. It is not to lead you after itself, but to compel you, by every truth of nature, to turn to Christ, as the one way, the one truth, the one life, and salvation of the soul; not as notionally apprehended, or historically known; but as experimentally found, living, speaking, and working, in your soul. Read as long or as much as you will of this mystery, it is all labor lost; if you intend anything else by it, or would be anything else from it, but a man dead to this world, that you may live unto God through Christ Jesus, in the power of faith, and the spirit of prayer. With these words upon our minds, my friends, let us now end this conversation.

The End of the Third Dialogue.

FINIS