

A FEW WORDS
CONCERNING
CONSCIENCE,

WHAT IT IS;

And what estate it was in before transgression.

AND HOW IT BECAME DARKENED, DEFILED AND CORRUPTED.

AND HOW AGAIN IT MAY BE ENLIGHTENED, CLEANSED, PURIFIED, AND SET AT LIBERTY,
AS IT WAS BEFORE SIN ENTERED.

INTERMIXED WITH A FEW WORDS CONCERNING PERSECUTION AMONG THE DIVERS SECTS IN
CHRISTENDOM, AND UPON THE FACE OF ALL THE EARTH, SHOWING THAT
THEY ALL ARISE FROM WANT OF TRUE LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE,
AND WHAT THAT LIBERTY IS.

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READER – I would have thee seriously weigh and consider what thou readest in this small treatise, and with the measure of divine light, which shines in thy mind, heart, and conscience, (whether thou be darkness or light, a believer or an infidel,) take a perfect view of thyself, and thou mayst by the light thereof infallibly perceive and know, whether thou art a member of the holy catholic church,* or whether thou art of some private opinion or sect, which only calls itself so; and whether thy mind, heart, and conscience are cleansed, or whether thou art corrupted and defiled, captivated and bound under with the chains of darkness, superstitious education, corrupt tradition, and selfish opinions, kindling thy sacrifices with coals from thy own altar, and walking in the light of thy own sparks. By the eye or light of God, which runs to and fro through the earth, and searcheth thy heart, tryeth thy reins, and showeth unto thee thy thoughts, thou mayst see thy state and condition, how thou standest in the sight of the Lord: and if thy mind be spiritual, thou hast life and peace. If thy heart be pure, thou seest the Lord; if thy conscience be purged from dead works, thou art a servant of the living God, and findest acceptance with him, being alive to righteousness, and dead to sin. But if thou dost evil, sin lies at thy door, and he that saves his people from their sins thou art ignorant of, and death, the wages thereof, attends thee, profess what thou wilt, and let thy notions or opinion be what it will, let thy form and fashion of worship and religion be what it will, whether thou art a Jew, Mahometan, Papist, or Protestant. This is the word of truth to thee, whether thou wilt hear or forbear; thou shalt find it sealed upon thee in the day of the Lord.

*None can be of the holy catholic church, further than they walk in the light, learn of the grace, and profit by the manifestation of the spirit of God, given to them, and is present with them, convincing, reprovng, and judging all and every appearance of evil, and ready to teach and lead into all good; and it is those only that are led and guided by the spirit of God, that are his sons and daughters, and members of the holy church, which is in God: he that can receive it let him.

A FEW WORDS CONCERNING CONSCIENCE,

WHAT IT IS, &c.

Conscience is generally to be understood to be such a being, subject, faculty or capacity in mankind, which is wanting in all the beasts of the field, fish of the sea, and fowls of the air.* And in this capacity, mankind differs from and excels them all; being created in and endowed with such a capacity, wherein and whereby he is enabled to participate of the divine nature, and to partake of the beams of its glory, to meditate, contemplate, console, delight, and refresh himself in the light, law, and glory of his maker; which capacity is not to be found in all the elements of this world, but only in mankind.

Now, in the beginning man's mind, heart, and conscience† were a heavenly and pure receptacle, tabernacle, and dwelling place for the Almighty; his power, wisdom, light, and glory were displayed therein, and mankind was highly exalted thereby, above all the works of his hands. And while mankind stood here in this high and heavenly estate, he lived in the paradise of God, enjoying the light of his countenance,‡ and had unity with his maker, and could behold his face with joy, and receive the reflections of the beams of divine glory shining in his conscience with delight, living in dominion over all the creation. His conscience being pure, he held the mystery of faith in it, eyeing the invisible God through, above, and beyond all things, visible and invisible.

*Which capacity is as a book, capable to contain what is written or imprinted therein; and may be not only opened and shut, but blotted and stained also.

†These three are so inseparable, that that which defiles the one, defiles the other, and that which purifies the one, purifies the other.

‡The blessed estate of man before the fall.

This was the state of mankind before the fall, while his conscience was pure and undefiled. While he remained in that estate God made him and placed him in, who was a pure, innocent subject, holy in his being, and harmless in his nature, all within him and without him was good, yea, very good. Now the wisdom is to understand, how that which was holy and harmless, innocent, pure, and undefiled, did become evil and corrupted; seeing in this state and time evil had not a being, whence could, or did, the temptations arise? The wisdom of all men living in the fallen defiled estate, cannot find out nor search into the depth of these things; they are only revealed and made known by the shining of the same light which was in the beginning, and gives the children thereof to see the same.* Therefore to the same light and spirit of God, which moved upon the face of the waters, in the beginning, before the sun, moon, and stars were created, or the mountains formed, which light now shineth in the heart of mankind (though darkness,) which light also God hath caused to shine out of darkness in the hearts of thousands in this our day and age; I say, to this light I chiefly refer and commend thee, being indeed the key of the mysteries of God and godliness; yet a few words for the sake of the captivated, and for the opening of that eye that is blinded, that such may come to see and discern the things of God, and that the enlightened may by seeing perceive how mankind at first came to make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience, and avoid doing the like.

Moses, or the author of Genesis, was endued with an excellent spirit of wisdom and discerning, when he comprised the history of the creation, and the state of mankind therein; and indeed I must tell my reader, that nothing short of a measure of the same spirit and divine wisdom can lead thee into a true discerning and understanding of the same.‡ He hath exposed the shell, but hath locked up the kernel from

*The mysteries of God are hid from the wise and prudent, and revealed to babes.

‡Nothing short of the inspiration of the Almighty, gives a true understanding of the things of his kingdom.

the prudent wit and comprehension of man under divers similitudes and hieroglyphics. Thou mayst read the history, and walk in the field of the creation; yet if thou diggest not deep, and findest the pearl and purchasest it, and like a wise merchant-man, sellest all for it, thou wilt be ignorant of the mystery, and remain poor, blind, and miserable: for I intend not to throw pearls before swine, neither dare I, like Hezekiah, show the treasures of the Lord's house to the Babylonians, lest both I and it are carried into captivity therefor.

Now it is said, "They were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed." † There was then no cause of shame in being, no temptation entered into, no sin committed, which is the cause of shame. And it is also said, "The serpent was more subtile than all the beasts of the field which God had made." Now God made nothing but what was good, which keeping in its state and bounds, wherein God had set and appointed it, would so have remained. But there being a possibility to break those bounds, and disobey that law that God had set over him, God gave man a warning thereof, and acquainted him with the penalty thereof also, that in the day he did eat it, he should die the death.

Now, mankind had faith in his Maker, and in his conscience found himself bound to obey the command given him, and had strength to resist the temptation, till the woman, (the weaker vessel,) believed a lie, and looked upon the beauty of the thing presented, and let up a

† Many carnal conceits and imaginations are, and have been, at work among men to understand these things, but they have not come to the opening of the seals, nor to the key of the mysteries of God, and so have divulged their own carnal and Luciferian conceptions, comprehensions, and notions, for the divine knowledge of God; and many have thereby grown rich, tall and great in brain and head-knowledge; but poor, low, and small in experimental heart-understanding, and of the work of God therein.

desire to be wise, and to know good and evil, and to be as God's;* so in this hope of gaining and bettering their estate, became subject unto vanity,† and hereby the light that shined in the heart and conscience, became veiled, and the image and glory of God that appeared therein, became lost. As the image of the selfish will and desire rose up and became prevalent, the image of God declined and departed.‡ And when man lost his faith which was held in the pure conscience, which faith was an anchor, by which conscience, as a ship in a storm, was stayed for a while, from being made a wreck: I say, when he lost this faith in the word and command of God, and believed the serpent's lies, he soon made shipwreck of both.§ And no sooner were their own eyes opened, but the eye and light of God which shined in them, became stopped and veiled, and they lost the glory and benefit of it. No sooner their own wisdom and knowledge sprung up, but the wisdom of God departed, and innocency, the heavenly clothing, became lost, and nakedness appeared, faith and a good conscience destroyed, shame, guilt, fear, and hiding, the effects of it, succeeded. So, though conscience, in its primitive estate, was pure, clean, and undefiled, yet was liable and capable to be corrupted, darkened, and defiled,# even as the mind departed from a due regard and obedience of the law and command of God, and slighted his light and glory which shined, and

*These things are to be seen and known in the light and wisdom of God, beyond what words can express.

†Rom. viii. 20.

‡Every particular within themselves must come to know the loss and fall, crucifixion and death of the one, and the life and resurrection of the other, before restoration can be known.

§The same befalls mankind at this day when they loose their anchor.

#The same danger is still, even among such as are presented as a chaste virgin to Christ, and have attained to an innocent sinless estate, and a dwelling-place in paradise. Therefore the duty of all such is to watch and pray, that they enter not into temptation, and are beguiled as the serpent did Eve.

illuminated his heart and conscience. Then clouds of error, and mists, and fogs of self-will, thoughts, and imaginations soon arose, and darkened the pure air, and eclipsed the glory of that sun that before shined in him, and drew a veil before the light of God's countenance, which to behold was his joy and delight, but now it becomes his fear and terror. Now a night comes over him, and he runs in the darkness thereof to hide himself among the trees of the garden from the presence of God. This was the way and work of the first Adam in the beginning, and his children are found in the same at this day upon the face of the whole earth. He that readeth, let him understand.

Now when this noble part or capacity in man is thus clouded, and darkened, and defiled through disobedience to the law of his God, he then goeth astray more and more, corrupteth himself through his imaginations and inventions more and more, and according to that he entertaineth and joins himself to, so becomes even darkness and a child of it.* And of the most excellent, and best part of the creation becomes the worst, and the principal instrument in the hand of the wicked one to lead, even nature itself out of its course, and to burden, oppress, corrupt, and abuse all things under his power; verifying that maxim among men, "The best of things corrupted, become the worst."

Now in this degenerate, fallen, clouded, darkened, and corrupted estate, the sun of righteousness, the holy principle of light, which at first shined clear in the conscience,† remains in itself the same, pure, and undefiled, and doth glance forth its eternal beams of light into this darkness, and gives mankind in that estate some sense and knowledge of their lost, degenerated, corrupted, miserable estate; and in the cool of the day calls transgressing man to an account, as it did Adam and Cain, and convinceth him of his evil deeds, and calls to a repentance

*1 Cor. vi. 16, 17.

†Though mankind fell from and lost the light and glory of God, yet that in itself remained the same, and became his judge and reprover, which before was his comforter.

or returning again into the same way he went out of, even by the help and guidance of that light and holy spirit which at first shined in his heart and conscience; wherein he enjoyed the light of God's countenance, and walked and lived in his presence without rebuke. But being departed, degenerated, and turned in his mind from the good into the evil, from the glory and light that once shined in him, and was pleasant for his eye to behold, into sin and transgression; he is by it pursued, reprov'd, and convinc'd, in order to turn him back again. And whosoever hearkens to this reproof, and obeys the spirit of truth, which convinceth of sin, and loves the hand that smites them, and submitteth to the same, shall come to witness and enjoy the undefiled, regenerate, happy estate again, and enter in through the gate into the city and paradise of God again.* But he that hates the reproofs thereof, and rebels against the spirit, and humbleth not himself under the mighty hand of God, which smites for transgression, goes forward into utter darkness, stumbles and falls, and rises no more to the resurrection of life and felicity, but is filled with fear, and encompassed with terrors round about, upwards and downwards; nothing but tribulation, anguish, and vexation of spirit attends mankind in this estate, wherein his chief companions are a guilty, defiled conscience, wherein are written grievous things against him, and a wounded spirit; a burden too heavy for Cain to bear, though but the fruit of his own doings, and crop of his own sowing.

Now, in this state of loss, misery, and bondage, wherein the heart and conscience are defiled and corrupted, there is a great working and contriving in the minds of mankind how to find that again which is lost, and how to be delivered from the misery and bondage wherein he is fallen. And this is the nature of all mankind in the fall, to seek out many inventions, and to go down to Egypt for help, and to walk by the light of his own fire, and the sparks that he hath kindled, and in the crooked ways of his finding out, and to reject the help, counsel, and

*The way to paradise and an undefiled estate again.

straight way of the Lord. He being darkened and deceived, and the light of Christ in his conscience veiled, he ever did, and doth at this day, in that estate, take one thing for another, viz. good for evil, and evil for good, light for darkness, and darkness for light, &c.* and being thus far deceived, exalts and sets up the one for the other. So when he hath found out a way and worship that liketh him, and sewed something together, though but leaves, he will endeavour to cover his nakedness therewith, and to hide himself from the wrath that is revealed in him, and awakened against him, and when he hath invented a medicine to cure his sickness, and a salve to heal his wound, though deceitfully, and found mortar to daub up the breach, though it be untempered, his conscience for the use of the same, and sets them up as the only remedies to be found, &c. So natural is it for degenerate man to worship the works of his own hands, and to follow the inventions, conceivings, thoughts and imaginations of his own corrupt heart, and yet call it the way of the Lord. And if any of his neighbours, or brethren, come to hear and obey and voice of God, and to follow the light and guidance of his spirit, and to find acceptance with him, and refuse in a good conscience to God to follow his direction, and to make use of his invented means, and to bow down and worship the image he hath set up, † then envy and hatred arise, and violence breaks forth, and blood toucheth blood, even because such will not, nor cannot for conscience sake, see, and say, and do as he doth; bow to his image and invention, and worship as he doth, though he finds not acceptance of God, nor the light of his countenance towards him in his worship, no more than Cain, that religious murderer, did, whose offering was the fruit of that

*Degenerate man, in all ages, ever was mistaken, and always took one thing for another; good for evil, and evil for good; light for darkness, and darkness for light, &c. which mistake is the ground of all error and mischief in the world in matters of religion.

†The cause of Cain's anger against his brother, or the wicked against the righteous in this age.

ground that is cursed, which never did, nor ever will bring forth fruit well-pleasing to God. And it is from mankind labouring in this ground, being driven out of the paradise and garden of God, that all the diversity of opinions, notions, conceivings, thoughts, imaginations, and contrivances, forms, and fashions, of invented worship, upon the face of the whole earth, spring and arise; and all the envy, hatred, cruelty, bloodshed, compelling, forcing, and persecution about fashions of worship and religion, among all the sects in Christendom, arise from this ground; and all that are found in the work thereof, though they may pretend conscience, and zeal to God, and the maintenance of the gospel, and the good of souls, are of the spirit of Cain, the first murderer about religion; and his reward they will find measured into their own bosoms from the hand of God.

Now, the divers sects, and formal worshippers in Christendom, are ready to stand up, plead, and contend for their forms and invention, and way and manner of worship, and also cry out for liberty of conscience in their way, and for the practice of their fashion in worship, and will also, in their infancy, cry out against persecution; when they want only number, power, and strength to persecute themselves;* which when they attain unto, and their horns grow strong, and get crowns upon them, they will, and have been found doing the same work, as might be demonstrated at large; but being obvious to the observation of the judicious, and intending brevity, I forbear. And indeed they can do no otherwise, being of a private, narrow, self-conceited spirit, ignorant of the true liberty of conscience, which liberty stands not in this or that, or the other invented form or fashion of worship, conceiving, or opinion; but in the light and power of God, which every particular man and woman upon the face of all the whole earth ought to know, and experience enlightening and ruling in his conscience; and conscience can never enjoy its true liberty till it come into this estate.

*Every selfish, private, narrow spirit, sect, and opinion, though in its rise it may pretend otherwise, hath persecution at the bottom.

The consciences of men are generally weak, darkened, defiled, corrupted, vitiated, and, which is worst of all, some who have lost the day of their visitation, are seared as with a hot iron, and in this state have a bond and tie upon their consciences, which ought to be broken and cast off; till which, they are liable to make conscience of such things as they ought not; as might be instanced through all sects, both among Indians, Turks, Jews, and titular Christians; and the evils and mischiefs that ensue from hence are very many. Conscience in the state above, is the great troubler of the world of mankind, and the evils that are brought forth and committed under the notion, pretence, and seal of conscience, are evils of the greatest magnitude.

Now nothing under heaven is able to rectify the conscience, enlighten, cleanse, and purify, and redeem it into true liberty, but the light and power of God, shining and operating in the conscience, as it did before transgression entered, before sin was committed, and before opinion, invention, dark thoughts, and imaginations sprung up. This alone is able to purge and cleanse the conscience from darkness and dead works, and make it an undefiled habitation for God again, as it was in the beginning. This is the state wherein liberty of conscience is known and enjoyed, even when man comes to have his conscience exercised in, and ruled and governed by the light, spirit, and power of God. Then man's heart becomes his throne, and he sits and rules therein; and that which usurped it, is cast down, and the prince of the air, which got his rule and place there by disobedience, is cast out.

And all those that come not to know this brought to pass within themselves, nor are in the way that leadeth thereto, are but of a private, selfish opinion and sect. Though, as above, while they are little and low, and small in number, they may plead for liberty of conscience, and cry against persecution, force, imposition, and violence, about religion; yet when their opinion prevails, and the horns thereof grow strong thereby, they will push towards the east, west, north, and south, and will smite their fellow servants: and, as I have said before, it

can be no otherwise than so, until man comes to know the universal light and spirit of God to shine and rule in his conscience, and establish it in perfect liberty, and love to the whole creation of God, and to all the works of his hands, and in obedience to all his holy commandments. In this stands the perfect liberty of conscience.

Now, for want of this the titular Christians of all sorts and sects, are so wedded to their private and selfish opinions, traditions, notions, conceptions, apprehensions, comprehensions, thoughts, and imaginations, about religion, church, and worship, and matters relating to conscience, that they envy, hate, bite, and devour one another about them. One will persecute about his *mass-book* and *sacrament of the altar*; another about his common *prayer-book*, *maintenance*, and *church discipline*, another about his *directory*; another about his *church-faith* and *agreement of the assembly of divines*, (so called,) and *about bread and wine*, and *water*, *days*, and *times*, and other outward things. They will quarrel with, tear, and devour one another, and all, like so many ravenous beasts, will prey upon the sheep: Ephraim against Manasses, and Manasses against Ephraim; but both against *Judah*. Every sect in Christendom, one against another, divided like the builders of Babel: yet all against the tender, meek, harmless, lamb-like spirit of Jesus, in whomsoever it appears, that in all ages, since the fall and apostacy grew up, [has been] as a lily among thorns, pricked on every side, and as a lamb among wolves, which, though hurt and preyed upon, wants the very nature and capacity of hurting again, or rendering evil for evil, even as an outward lily doth a thorn, or a lamb a wolf.*

So that this is an infallible sign and token, both of the one and the other; of him whose conscience is at liberty to serve the Lord, and loves his whole creation, and is at unity and peace therewith; and of him who hath his conscience bound under a private opinion, corrupted and defiled with envy, hatred, and evil will against his brother and neighbour, about matters of sacrifice, religion, faith, and worship. And

*A thorn may hurt a lily, but a lily cannot hurt a thorn.

whosoever thou art, and of what opinion soever thou art, hereby thou mayst measure and try thyself, and find of what generation and stock thou art, whether of the righteous, or the wicked; whether thou art a lily or a thorn, a lamb or a wolf; and whether thy conscience be at liberty or bound. If thou find a mind, will, or inclination in thee, to envy, hate, persecute, and lay violent hands, like Cain, upon thy brother and neighbour, thou mayst assure thyself, and infallibly know, that thy conscience is degenerated and defiled, and that thou art born of the flesh, and that thou art a thorn, and no lily, a wolf, and no lamb.* And this flesh thou art born of, is the flesh of the whore, the false church, which hath drunk the blood of the saints and martyrs, in all ages; and this whore, thy mother, hath not only nursed thee up, but made thee drunk with the wine of her fornication; and thou art a citizen of “mystery Babylon, the great,” and a stranger to the beloved city of God, and a hater of those, that dwell therein. Notwithstanding thou mayst have a golden cup of profession, which thy mother holds forth to the nations; yet thy conscience is defiled, and thy heart corrupted, and so far darkened and captivated under bondage and strong delusion, that notwithstanding thou appearest like a thorn, and in the nature of a wolf, hurting the lily, and worrying the lamb; yet thou thinkest, thou art doing God good service therein, being made so drunk with the whore’s cup, and blinded in thy superstitious zeal, that thou takest the lily for a thorn, and the lamb for a wolf, and the whore, thy mother, for the lamb’s wife. †

And now this is an infallible sign, where liberty of conscience is enjoyed,‡ where the light, love, and power of God rule in the conscience: such, if his brother or neighbour hath his conscience in bondage, or is weak, being veiled and darkened so far as to believe a lie, and to make conscience of doing that which he ought not to do, wheth-

*An infallible sign whether conscience be at liberty.

†A perfect sign of one that is made drunk with the wine of fornication.

‡A true, infallible sign where liberty of conscience is enjoyed.

er it be to worship as the mass-book prescribes, or as the common-prayer book, directory, church-faith, assembly of divines, (so called,) or as any other invented platform of religion commands: I say, he that hath his conscience truly enlightened, and is a Christian indeed, doth not hate and envy his brother or neighbour therefor, neither hath he any evil will towards him in this estate, and hath no more inclination to put forth his hand against his person, life, liberty, or estate, because of his conscientious errors, and religious practices, than he hath against his own life; but instead thereof, in the universal love of God, finds it his duty to pity such in his heart. And having obtained liberty of conscience himself, and found the universal medicine, which if applied, is able to cure all sick and feeble minds, wounded spirits, weak and dis-tempered consciences, he is willing and ready to tell his brother and neighbour, what the Lord hath done for his soul, and how and where he came to find the precious pearl, and to inform and instruct them how they may find the same, and exhort and persuade them to receive and make use and trial of the same medicine that hath cured him; though for this his love and good will, he meet with much exercise and hardship from the ill-natured and ignorant, and much opposition and scorn from the selfish-wise and prudent. This was the portion of the righteous, and ministers of the everlasting gospel, from the ungrateful world, in all ages, who were constrained in the love of God to run to and fro among them, that knowledge might be increased, and to warn men to flee from the wrath which is to come; and, knowing the terrors of the Lord, persuaded men to be reconciled to God. Thus they did and do, in obedience to him, and love to their souls, and not for gold and silver, and selfish ends; but to discharge their consciences in the sight of God. This hath been the labour of love, and travail of the righteous in all ages, who come to have their consciences made tender, and truly enlightened, cleansed, purified, and set at liberty from all that did defile them. They never persecuted, hated, hurt, or destroyed any about matters of conscience and religion, though erroneous in their opinions, and superstitious in their practices; neither ought any to be troubled,

vexed, and ruined in their persons, liberties, lives, and estates, because of those things, especially when their opinions tend not to the ruin, hurt, and destruction of mankind, and his outward well being, and human society. But some such opinions there are, which indeed are as monsters in nature, destroying natural affection, violating the bounds of humanity, under the cloak and pretence of religion and Christianity; and some are so far besotted in their opinions, that they will plead conscience for the prosecution of them, though thereby they lay waste the property, life, and liberty of persons that are of a contrary or different mind and judgment to them, though better livers than themselves.

Now the end of all good order and government among men, is to preserve and defend their properties, liberties, and lives, from the teeth and mouths of such as would spoil and rob them of either.* And among all the beasts of prey, this blind zeal, misguided conscience, and dark, selfish opinion, is most ravenous.. This wolf in sheep's clothing hath sharp teeth and cruel claws, and a wild, untamed, devouring spirit, notwithstanding his pretence of zeal and conscience for the Christian religion; it is the spirit of Cain and Saul, that murderer and persecutor about sacrifice and worship, which will be rising up against his brother and neighbour.† As it hath been, so it is at this day: he that is born of the flesh will persecute him that is born of the spirit, &c. But whosoever is led by his religious, or rather, irreligious opinions, to endeavour the hurt and ruin of his brother or neighbour, about matters of religion and conscience; if he accomplish and effect the same, he is an evil-doer, and ought to suffer as an evil-doer: and he that hath good will to all, and seeks the good of all, and hurts no man, though he be of a contrary mind and judgment to him, and of a defiled conscience, and erroneous opinions, he is a well-doer. And the laws of God and all good men, who are appointed to rule for God, are a terror

*The end of Magistracy and true government.

†Blind zeal, a defiled conscience, private, selfish, dark opinions, the ground of divers massacres and much bloodshed in Christendom.

to the one, and a praise and encouragement to the other. And such brutish unnatural *opinionists*, whose consciences are not only darkened, defiled, and corrupted, but scared as with a hot iron; who, under the profession of Christianity, dare entertain and assert such cruel, impious tenets or opinions, as, that it is lawful to destroy the property, liberty, and life of men about the Christian religion, and to account all that conform not to his form and fashion of religion, tradition, and invention, no better than weeds and vermin, corrupt and cankered members, fit to be pulled up, cut off, burnt and destroyed – where this ravenous beast is prevalent, as in some countries beyond the seas, it destroys every green thing. This spirit and *bloody opinion* is hated of God and all good men, and is as a monster risen out of the bottomless pit, and as the great Apollyon, or destroyer, to be chained and shut up therein again. “O God! hasten the time thereof,” is the breathing of the righteous.

Oh! how lamentable is it to consider what work and havoc this spirit hath made, under a corrupt, blind, misguided conscience, and ignorant zeal, especially in this part of the world, called Christendom, about church, religion, and worship! The mind and conscience, the best and noblest capacity of man in its primitive estate, when darkened, defiled, corrupted, hardened, and seared, becomes the worst, even a habitation for devils, formed and transformed like unto an angel of light; so that those that are not deceived and ruled by the one, may be by the other. But in all ages the transformed devil, who assumeth the form of religion and profession of godliness, hath proved the greater deceiver, and the most cruel, as might be evidenced at large by his work in this present age, and throughout the records of many generations.*

*The greatest and strongest poison of souls, bodies, lives, &c. of men is in the whore’s golden cup; and all that drink thereof, (or are compelled thereto,) are deeply infected therewith. And the nations reel with the wine of her fornications.

But all that come to return in their minds to the light and glory of God, which at first shined in the heart and conscience of mankind, and made them a fit receptacle or dwelling-place for himself, and believe, walk, and abide in the same, shall again come to *know* and *live in* the same estate man enjoyed before his conscience was defiled, before the veil came over his heart and understanding, before the image of God was lost, before any place or credit was given to the serpent's lies; where true liberty of conscience was lived in, and the light of God's countenance enjoyed, the serpent ruled over, and the earth subdued, in the paradise of God. * The light that now shineth out of darkness, in the hearts of thousands and ten thousands, leads not only into these things but farther into the life and state of the second Adam, against whom the serpent never could nor shall prevail: and the God of heaven and earth, who hath caused or commanded it to shine, hath the praise and glory thereof, both now and forevermore.

W. S.

*The way out of all selfish and private opinions, and cruelty about them, into perfect freedom and liberty of conscience.

Postscript.

Such opinions in religion, which bind men's conscience to seek and endeavour the hurt of his brother or neighbour, in his name, person,, liberty, estate, or life, because he doth not believe and practice the same manner and form of worship as he doth, are very cruel, unnatural and unreasonable.

First. Because many times people come by their opinions as heirs come by their estates, hereditarily. If their parents or tutors are of this or that sect of the Jews or Mahometans, their children commonly are trained up and educated in the same: if of one of the sects among the

Christians, (so called,) then commonly the child is trained and catechised in the same; and many parents take as much care to leave their children possessed of their religious opinions, as they do of their estates, as might be showed at large, both Jews, Turks, and Christians. And in Christendom, the greatest proof many have to prove themselves Christians, is, that their parents and tutors were so called and accounted, and they have received and walked in their traditions, and conformed to the orders and discipline of the holy church, (so called,) and they believe as the church believes; and it is their opinion, this is Christianity enough to carry them to heaven. Many are so bound in their consciences by a traditional, implicit faith to their hereditary Christianity, or the traditions of their forefathers, that they never question their way, nor title therein; they never knew any other, nor better, and dare not for fear seek further, their consciences being bound under their private traditional opinions and ceremonies. Now, that such should have their bodies hurt, and their lives destroyed, and their estates rent from them and their posterity, because they will not change and renounce their opinions they have been bred up and educated in, and conform to that opinion and form of worship that hath the sword in its hand, and is become national in the country where he lives, is both cruel, unnatural, and unreasonable, whether he be Jew, Mahometan, Christian, Papist, or Protestant.

Secondly. Because no man is able to change his own mind in religion when he pleaseth, or when commanded, nor break those chains of tradition he hath been educated in from his childhood; neither is he able to shake off those bolts and fetters of opinion, and change his faith and belief, when he pleaseth. For when man's conscience is defiled with erroneous opinions, and his mind and understanding darkened, and bound under the chains thereof, he is not able to deliver himself, nor to purify his own conscience, nor enlighten his own understanding, nor can any man deliver the soul of his brother: nothing less than the knowledge and experience of the light, spirit, and mighty power of God appearing and shining in the conscience, and enlighten-

ing the mind and understanding, breaking the prison-doors of opinion, and pulling down the strong hold of imagination, is able to effect those things. Therefore all such as have their consciences purified, their minds and understandings thereby enlightened, are delivered and redeemed from the spirit of envy and cruelty, and from all private opinions and bondage of darkness, and live and walk in the light of the glorious gospel of Christ Jesus, which brings peace on earth and good will to men; and such never envied any, nor hurt any about religion, though Jews, Turks, and infidels.

Oh! the weight and burden of this envious, bloody spirit of persecution in Christendom, which is sat down in the throne of conscience, and wrapt about with the mantle of zeal for religion, is very great and ponderous; it is the greatest burden the earth bears, and the greatest troubler of the world of mankind. It is the great whore that John saw ride upon the scarlet coloured beast, and sat upon the waters, and it is the beast he saw rise out of the earth, with two horns like a lamb, yet speaks like a dragon, and makes fire come down from heaven, in the sight of men, and causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads, that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark or name of the beast, or the number of his name. This spirit is the womb out of which springeth all the force and violence, and cruel inventions of torture, and spoil of bodies, goods, and liberties, about difference in opinion, faith, and worship, which, as is said before, is cruel, unreasonable, and unnatural; because by the laws of God and all good men, no man ought to suffer, but according to the nature of his offence. If his offence be visible, natural, and corporal, and belonging to things of this world, then his punishment ought to be natural and corporal, and visibly executed upon him: if his offence be spiritual, and relating to the invisible things of the mind, heart, and conscience, in matters of faith and worship towards God and the life and world to come, then his punishment is to be spiritual, and executed spiritually; and the weapons to be used against such, are not to be carnal. The bodies of men ought not

to be inquisitioned and tortured, nor their goods spoiled for the errors of their minds, or the difference of their religious persuasions.*

Wherever this is found and practised, it may be justly called cruel and unreasonable, and bloody persecution, though under the pretence of conscience, and zeal for religion. And the true Christian and church of Christ, never had, nor ever will have a hand in such work. It is the whore, the false church, and her children, the great red dragon that gets into heaven, and the beast that ariseth out of the sea or waters, on which the whore sitteth, and the false prophet, and the three unclean spirits like frogs, that coine out their mouths, that corrupteth the earth, and fills it with violence; it is this woman, this mystery Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth, that is drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus; and by her sorceries are all the nations deceived, and in her was, and is, found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all that were and are slain upon the earth.†

Now the voice from heaven is heard, which saith, “Come out of her people, that ye partake not of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.” And all that hear, obey, and follow this heavenly voice, come to be led out of mystery Babylon, into the heavenly city Jerusalem, which comes down from God out of heaven, and to be made citizens thereof, who are at unity within themselves; and though the gates stand open, there shall in no wise enter any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie; but they which are written in the lamb’s book of life. Here all is shut out that entered in through sin and transgression, and through the subtlety and lies of the

*What persecution is.

†The beast, the whore, the false prophet, the three unclean spirits, mystery Babylon the great, the mother of harlots, &c. rule and reign not only at Rome in Italy, Spain, and other popish countries where the Romish sect prevails, as some private opinionists have imagined, but are universally to be found, reigning throughout all the sects in Christendom, and in the whole world.

serpent, and a redemption and restoration [are known] into the glorious primitive estate, that God made mankind in the beginning, where his mind, heart, and conscience are set at liberty, cleansed, and purified, from all that did defile them; and here he is delivered from following all his carnal inventions, private opinions, and notions, where the envy, anger, and wrath are exercised, into the peaceable universal light, and love to the whole creation of God.

But while people are carnally-minded, and their consciences darkened and defiled, they are captivated by a private, selfish spirit, and are bound under some dark affected opinion or other about religion. In this state some will be for Paul, some for Apollo, some for Cephas; but none for Christ: some of one sect or opinion, and of one sort and form of worship, and some of another; but all bound under one link or other of the chain of darkness, and are slaves to the prince thereof, who hath got the rule in their minds, hearts, and consciences. And such of his vassals as are inclined to seem religious, he will furnish them with a form, likeness, and pattern, if need be, even of heavenly things themselves, according to the state, place, and country they inhabit, and the region of darkness and shadow of death they dwell under; whether in Christendom, or in any other part of the world. Hence many are bound in their consciences, to worship according to the precepts and commands of Mahomet or the Turkish Alcoran; others according to the traditions of the scattered Jews and Indians; others according to the Pope and his mass-book, and other invented trumpery; others according to the divers sorts of invented liturgies and forms of worship, likenesses, and images, which they have set up in their carnal minds and darkened understandings, wherein their corrupt faiths, and defiled consciences, are employed as champions to contend for, and vindicate every one his own private, carnal opinion, tradition, and form of worship. And the same spirit of darkness, that leads into these diversities of opinions, and human, carnal inventions about the worship of God,

leads men to hate, envy, and persecute one another about them.*

And all these things come to pass amongst mankind, for want of believing in the light, grace, spirit, and power of God, that shines, appears, and operates in the mind, heart, and conscience of mankind, according to the state it finds him in, either to reprove or commend, justify or condemn; which light, grace, or spirit is one, and leads all that obey it, and follow it, into oneness of mind, and oneness of heart, and into the one standing and everlasting worship, which is in the spirit and in the truth, where acceptance is felt, and the light of God's countenance enjoyed, the partition-wall broken down, and the enmity slain, and the serpent's head bruised within, by the springing up of the promised seed, and powerful appearance of Christ within, who leadeth into the blessed love and charity, which never faileth, which thinketh no evil, where the rejoicing is not in iniquity, but in the truth.

And whoever thou art that readest these things, and art not come to witness within thyself, the virtuous efficacy of the power, life, and blood of Jesus, to cleanse, purge, and purify thy mind, heart, and conscience, from all that doth defile, and set them at perfect liberty to serve the Lord, and to lead thee into the heavenly city, where the book of life is kept, and to see thy name written therein, and also his name imprinted in thy forehead, bearing his heavenly image as thou hast borne the earthly; I say, except thou knowest these things wrought by the spirit and power of God in thee and for thee, thy mind, heart, and conscience remain defiled, and under bondage to thine own inventions, private opinions, and notions; and he that is called the prince of the air, rules in thy heart, and thou art captivated, and carried away with the windy doctrines, rudiments, and carnal ordinances, and traditions of men, and art tasting, touching, and handling those things, which perish with the using, and art prone and liable to bite, tear, murder, and devour thy brother and neighbour about them; so art as a whited wall,

*The fruit of mankind hating the light, and running, and walking and working in darkness.

and painted sepulcher, and professing hypocrite, and titular Christian, a direct fanatic, and sectarian, and art like Cain a fugitive in the earth, which God hath cursed, that brings forth briars and thorns, which tear the sheep, and hurt the lily. This is thy state and condition, let thy talk, profession, notion, opinion, form, and fashion of religion be what it will, and whether thou art a Jew, Mahometan, Papist, or Protestant, while thy mind, heart, and conscience are defiled, darkened, captivated and bound under with the chains of opinion, tradition, and precepts of men, thou canst not enjoy liberty of conscience thyself, nor suffer others. And if thou compasses sea and land to make proselytes to thy opinion and tradition, and hast power to force and compel an outward conformity to the same, thou makest them two-fold more the children of hell than before. Force, cruelty, and violence may make hypocrites and formalists, but no true worshippers of God in the spirit, nor Christians indeed.

Finally, to force and compel by corporal punishments in matters of conscience and religion, is infallibly contrary to, and inconsistent with, the very nature of true religion and being of Christianity. And among whomsoever it is found and practised, it is an evident demonstration that the pure religion they are ignorant of, and strangers to; and such are only Christians in *name and opinion*, and of a dark, narrow, private, self-conceited spirit, priding itself with its own notions and lofty imaginations, grounded upon the education and tradition received from his forefathers, and the carnal comprehensions and conceivings of his own corrupt heart, from the ancient writings of holy men. Hence it is that every sect and opinionist, like so many beasts with horns, push one against another, hate, bite, tear and devour one another, each endeavouring to sit down as a queen in the seat of the scornful, (exercising themselves in things that are too high,) imperiously measuring, trying, and judging his brother and neighbour, who differs from him, by his selfish, carnal, dark, exalted spirit, who passeth under and assumes the name of a sheep, though in nature and work he be a wolf; and if this beast of prey hath horns and claws strong enough to make

spoil according to its nature, it would hardly leave the bones till the morrow. This is the “generation whose teeth are as swords, and their jaw teeth as knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, and the needy from among men;” this is the generation also “who are pure in their own eyes, yet are not washed from their filthiness;” but are as a polluted leper, full of sores from the crowns of the head to the sole of the foot. From this generation arise the cry and violence against the innocent, as heretics, and blasphemers, haling them before magistrates, and hurrying them to jails, inquisitions, gallows, and fire, tearing the flesh from the bones, and the life from the body, about matters of religion, church, faith, worship, and conscience; all which are infallibly the fruit and effect of that spirit of Cain, that envious sacrificer, that can worship with one hand, and murder with the other, call God Father, and with the same tongue call Christ Jesus a “blasphemer,” “deceiver,” and “child of the devil,” and lay their wicked hands upon him, as an evil doer not fit to live. This is, and hath been, the work of all the private, carnal, dark, self-conceited opinionists in Christendom; who are all members of the false church, and of the great city MYSTERY BABYLON, whose citizens are all of defiled minds, corrupt hearts, and darkened, misguided, if not seared consciences. And none of this work hath been, nor ever will be found in the true church, nor among the citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem, whose defence and weapons never were, nor ever will be carnal, but spiritual and mighty through God to the breaking and casting down every thing that exalteth itself against the prosperity thereof; whose warfare was never against men’s bodies, lives, nor estates, to destroy the one, and possess the other: neither do the thoughts thereof enter into the heart of a true Christian, to hurt his brother or neighbour, because of difference in religion, and understanding of things relating thereunto. Yet the true church hath its way and means of defence, and every living member thereof is, in its place and capacity, engaged and bound by the law of the spirit of life and in the universal love of God, to be watchful and diligent against the creeping in of selfish, private opinions, and the broaching of damn-

able doctrines, or the growing up of any hurtful weeds in the garden of God. But as I have said, this defence is spiritual, viz. the light, power, and spirit of God revealed in the inward parts. This church puts on “the whole armour of light, the sword of the spirit, the helmet of salvation, the breast-plate of righteousness,” and the very “feet shod with the preparation of the gospel,” or with that which prepares the way of the gospel; I say, these are weapons of the true church, and of every member thereof, whereby those that “say they are apostles, and are not,” are tried, and found liars, and the errors and doctrines of Balaam detected, and the teachings of “the woman Jezebel, who calleth herself a prophetess,” resisted; yea, all the faults and errors of the seven churches are reprov’d and judg’d by the son of God, who holdeth “the seven stars in his right hand, and walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;”* and those that turn not at his reproof, repent, and are reformed by his judgments, will assuredly, in the end, hear the fatal sentence, “I gave her space to repent, and she repented not; behold I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her, into great tribulation; and I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know, that I am he that searcheth the reins and hearts, and giveth to every one according to his works.” He that hath an ear, let him hear what the spirit saith to the churches.

*The son of God is in the midst of his people, who are like gold tried in the fire, and made vessels of honour, to hold the heavenly treasure, and temples of the living God. This is the true church, that what she bindeth and looseth on earth, is confirmed in heaven, against which the gates of hell cannot prevail. Out of the pale of this church there is no salvation, This is the holy church that cannot err, where the infallible judgment is, even in whom the son of God lives and walks in the midst, and hath by his bright and powerful appearance broken down and removed all that is contrary to him, and set the mind, heart, and conscience at perfect liberty from all private opinions, selfish conceivings, dark thoughts, and lofty imaginations, which once did defile them. In this church is the one mind, one heart, and one judgment; and she hath the one faith, one baptism, and one Lord, and is as a coat woven from top to bottom, without seam. And all the members of this church are living stones,

fitted and squared for the house and habitation of God: in the fitting and preparing of which, the sound or noise of the workman's tool is not heard, nor self had in any reputation; but the praise and glory of all is to God, the worker of all in his people; to whom all honour is due for evermore.

THE END.