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Lecture XXX. Critical Examination of a Sermon of Bishop Atterbury's.

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LECTURE XXX.

CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF A SERMON OF BISHOP ATTERBURY'S.

LECT.
XXX.

THE last Lecture was employed in observations on the peculiar and distinguishing Characters of the Eloquence proper for the Pulpit. But as rules and directions, when delivered in the abstract, are never so useful as when they are illustrated by particular instances, it may, perhaps, be of some benefit to those who are designed for the Church, that I should analyse an English Sermon, and consider the matter of it, together with the manner. For this purpose, I have chosen Bishop Atterbury as my example, who is deservedly accounted one of our most eloquent writers of Sermons, and whom I mentioned as such in the last Lecture. At the same time, he is more distinguished for elegance and purity of expression, than for profoundness of thought. His Style, though sometimes careless, is, upon the whole, neat and chaste; and more beautiful than that of most writers of Sermons. In his sentiments he is not only rational; but pious and devotional, which is a great excellency. The Sermon which I

have singled out, is, that upon Praise and Thanks-
 giving, the first Sermon of the first Volume, which is reckoned one of his best. In examining it, it is necessary that I should use full liberty, and, together with the beauties, point out any defects that occur to me in the matter, as well as in the Style.

L E C T.
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PSALM l. 14. *Offer unto God Thanksgiving.*

" AMONG the many excellencies of this pious
 " collection of Hymns, for which so particular a
 " value hath been set upon it by the Church of
 " God in all ages, this is not the least, that the
 " true price of duties is there justly stated; men
 " are called off from resting in the outward show
 " of religion, in ceremonies and ritual observan-
 " ces; and taught, rather to practise (that which
 " was shadowed out by these rites, and to which
 " they are designed to lead) sound inward piety
 " and virtue.

" THE several composers of these Hymns were
 " *Prophets*; persons, whose business it was not
 " only to foretel events, for the benefit of the
 " Church in succeeding times, but to correct and
 " reform also what was amiss among that race of
 " men, with whom they lived and conversed;
 " to preserve a foolish people from idolatry, and
 " false worship; to rescue the law from corrupt
 " glosses, and superstitious abuses; and to put
 " men in mind of (what they are so willing to
 " forget) that eternal and invariable rule, which
 " was before these *positive* duties, would continue

LECT. "after them, and was to be observed, even then,
 XXX. "in preference to them.

"THE discharge, I say, of this part of the
 "prophetic office taking up so much room in
 "the book of *Psalms*; this hath been one reason,
 "among many others, why they have always
 "been so highly esteemed; because we are from
 "hence furnished with a proper reply to an
 "argument commonly made use of by unbe-
 "lievers, who look upon all revealed religions
 "as pious frauds and impostures, on account
 "of the prejudices they have entertained in rela-
 "tion to that of the *Jews*; the whole of which
 "they first suppose to lie in external performan-
 "ces, and then easily persuade themselves, that
 "God could never be the Author of such a mere
 "piece of pageantry and empty formality, nor
 "delight in a worship which consisted purely in
 "a number of odd unaccountable ceremonies.
 "Which objection of theirs, we should not be
 "able thoroughly to answer, unless we could
 "prove (chiefly out of the *Psalms*, and other
 "parts of the prophetic writings) that the Jewish
 "religion was somewhat more than bare outside
 "and show; and that inward purity, and the
 "devotion of the heart, was a duty then, as
 "well as now."

THIS appears to me an excellent Introduction.
 The thought on which it rests is solid and judi-
 cious; that in the book of *Psalms*, the attention
 of men is called to the moral and spiritual part
 of religion; and the Jewish dispensation thereby

vindicated from the fuspicion of requiring nothing more from its votaries, than the obfervance of the external rites and ceremonies of the law. Such views of religion are proper to be often difplayed; and deferve to be infifted on, by all who wifh to render preaching conducive to the great purpofe of promoting righteoufnefs and virtue. The Style, as far as we have gone, is not only free from faults, but elegant and happy.

It is a great beauty in an introduction, when it can be made to turn on fome one thought, fully brought out and illuftrated; efpecially, if that thought has a clofe connection with the following difcourfe, and, at the fame time, does not anticipate any thing that is afterwards to be introduced in a more proper place. This Introduction of Atterbury's has all thefe advantages. The encomium which he makes on the ftrain of David's Pfalms, is not fuch as might as well have been prefixed to any other difcourfe, the text of which was taken from any of the Pfalms. Had this been the cafe, the Introduction would have loft much of its beauty. We fhall fee from what follows, how naturally the introductory thought connects with his text, and how happily it ufhers it in.

"ONE great inftance of this proof, we have
"in the words now before us; which are taken
"from a Pfalm of *Afaph*, written on purpofe
"to fet out the weaknefs and worthleffnefs of
"external performances, when compared with

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- LECT. " more substantial and vital duties. To enforce
 XXX. " which doctrine, God himself is brought in as
 " delivering it. *Hear O my people, and I will*
 " *Speak; O Israel, and I will testify against thee:*
 " *I am God, even thy God.* The Preface is very
 " solemn, and therefore what it ushers in, we
 " may be sure is of no common importance; I
 " *will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices or thy burnt*
 " *offerings, to have been continually before me.* That
 " is, I will not so reprove thee for any failures
 " in thy sacrifices and burnt-offerings, as if these
 " were the only, or the chief things I required
 " of thee. *I will take no bullock out of thy house,*
 " *nor he-goat out of thy folds;* I prescribed not
 " sacrifices to thee for my own sake, because
 " I needed them; *For every beast of the forest is*
 " *mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills.* Mine
 " they are, and were, before I commanded thee
 " to offer them to me; so that, as it follows,
 " *If I were hungry, yet would I not tell thee, for*
 " *the world is mine, and the fulness thereof.* But
 " can ye be so gross and senseless, as to think
 " me liable to hunger and thirst? as to imagine
 " that wants of that kind can touch me? *Will*
 " *I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of*
 " *goats?*—Thus doth he expostulate severely
 " with them, after the most graceful manner of
 " the Eastern Poetry. The issue of which is a
 " plain and full resolution of the case, in those
 " few words of the text.—*Offer unto God thanks-*
 " *giving.* Would you do your homage the most
 " agreeable way? would you render the most
 acceptable

"acceptable of services? *offer unto God thanks- L E C T.*
giving." XXX.

It is often a difficult matter to illustrate gracefully the text of a Sermon from the context, and to point out the connection between them. This is a part of the discourse which is apt to become dry and tedious, especially when pursued into a minute commentary. And therefore, except as far as such illustration from the context is necessary for explaining the meaning, or in cases where it serves to give dignity and force to the text, I would advise it to be always treated with brevity. Sometimes it may even be wholly omitted, and the text assumed merely as an independent proposition, if the connection with the context be obscure, and would require a laborious explanation. In the present case, the illustration from the context is singularly happy. The passage of the Psalm on which it is founded is noble and spirited, and connected in such a manner with the text, as to introduce it with a very striking emphasis. On the language I have little to observe, except that the phrase, *one great instance of this proof*, is a clumsy expression. It was sufficient to have said, *one great proof*, or *one great instance, of this*. In the same sentence, when he speaks of *setting out the weakness and worthlessness of external performances*, we may observe, that the word *worthlessness*, as it is now commonly used, signifies more than the deficiency of worth, which is all that the Author means. It generally imports, a considerable

LECT. degree of badness or blame. It would be more
 XXX. proper, therefore, to say, the *imperfection*, or
 the *insignificancy*, of external performances.

“THE use I intend to make of these words,
 “is, from hence to raise some thoughts about
 “that very excellent and important duty of
 “Praise and Thanksgiving, a subject not unfit
 “to be discoursed of at this time; whether we
 “consider, either the more than ordinary cold-
 “ness that appears of late in men’s tempers
 “towards the practice of this or any other
 “part of a warm and affecting devotion; the
 “great occasion of setting aside this particular
 “day in the calendar, some years ago; or the
 “new instances of mercy and goodness, which
 “God hath lately been pleased to bestow upon
 “us; answering at last the many *prayers* and
 “*fastings*, by which we have besought him so
 “long for the establishment of their Majesties
 “Throne, and for the success of their arms;
 “and giving us in his good time, an opportu-
 “nity of appearing before him in the more
 “delightful part of our duty, *with the voice of*
 “*joy and praise, with a multitude that keep holidays.*”

IN this paragraph there is nothing remarkable;
 no particular beauty or neatness of expression;
 and the Sentence which it forms is long and
 tiresome — *to raise some thoughts about that very*
excellent, &c. is rather loose and awkward; —
 better — *to recommend that very excellent*, &c. and
 when he mentions *setting aside* a particular day
 in the calendar, one would imagine, that *setting*

apart would have been more proper, as to *set* L E C T.
aside, seems rather to suggest a different idea. XXX.

“*Offer unto God Thanksgiving.* — Which that
 “we may do, let us enquire first, how we are
 “to *understand* this command of offering Praise
 “and Thanksgiving unto God; and then, how
 “reasonable it is that we should comply with it.”

THIS is the general division of the discourse.
 An excellent one it is, and corresponds to many
 subjects of this kind, where particular duties are
 to be treated of; first to explain, and then to
 recommend or enforce them. A division should
 always be simple and natural; and much depends
 on the proper view which it gives of the subject.

“OUR enquiry into what is meant here, will
 “be very short; for who is there, that under-
 “stands any thing of religion, but knows, that
 “the offering Praise and Thanks to God, implies,
 “our having a lively and devout sense of his
 “excellencies, and of his benefits; our recollect-
 “ing them with humility and thankfulness of
 “heart; and our expressing these inward affec-
 “tions by suitable outward signs, by reverent
 “and lowly postures of body, by songs and
 “hymns, and spiritual ejaculations; either publicly
 “or privately; either in the customary and daily
 “service of the Church, or in its more solemn
 “Assemblies, convened upon extraordinary occa-
 “sions? This is the account which every Christian
 “easily gives himself of it; and which therefore,
 “it would be needless to enlarge upon. I shall
 “only take notice upon this head that Praise

LECT. " and Thanksgiving do, in strictness of speech,
 XXX. " signify things somewhat different. Our *Praise*
 " properly terminates in God, on account of
 " his natural excellencies and perfections; and
 " is that act of devotion, by which we confess
 " and admire his several attributes: but *Thanks-*
 " *giving* is a narrower duty, and imports only
 " a grateful sense and acknowledgment of past
 " mercies. We praise God for all his glorious
 " acts of every kind, that regard either us or
 " other men, for his very *vengeance*, and those
 " *judgments* which he sometimes sends *abroad* in
 " *the earth*; but we thank him, properly speak-
 " ing, for the instances of his *goodness* alone;
 " and for such only of these, as we ourselves
 " are someway concerned in. This, I say, is what
 " the two words strictly imply; but since the
 " language of Scripture is generally less exact and
 " useth either of them often to express the other
 " by, I shall not think myself obliged, in what
 " follows, thus nicely always to distinguish them."

THERE was room here for insisting more fully
 on the nature of the duty, than the Author
 has done under this head; in particular, this
 was the place for correcting the mistake, to
 which men are always prone, of making Thanks-
 giving to consist merely in outward expressions;
 and for showing them, that the essence of the
 duty lies in the inward feelings of the heart.
 In general, it is of much use to give full and
 distinct explications of religious duties. But, as
 our Author intended only one discourse on the

subject, he could not enlarge with equal fulness on every part of it; and he has chosen to dwell on that part, on which indeed it is most necessary to enlarge, the motives enforcing the duty. For, as it is an easier matter to know, than to practice duty, the persuasive part of the discourse is that to which the Speaker should always bend his chief strength. The account given in this head, of the nature of Praise and Thanksgiving, though short, is yet comprehensive and distinct, and the language is smooth and elegant.

“ Now the great *reasonableness* of this duty of Praise or Thanksgiving, and our several obligations to it, will appear, if we either consider it *absolutely* in itself, as the debt of our natures; or *compare* it with other duties, and show the rank it bears among them; or set out, in the last place, some of its peculiar properties and advantages, with regard to the devout performance of it.”

THE author here enters upon the main part of his subject. the reasonableness of the duty, and mentions three arguments for proving it. These are well stated, and are in themselves proper and weighty considerations. How far he has handled each of them to advantage, will appear as we proceed. I cannot, however, but think that he has omitted one very material part of the argument, which was to have shown the obligations we are under to this duty, from the various subjects of Thanksgiving afforded us by the divine goodness. This would have led him to review the chief benefits

LECT. of Creation, Providence, and Redemption : and
 XXX. certainly, they are these which lay the foundation of the whole argument for Thanksgiving. The heart must first be affected with a suitable sense of the divine benefits, before one can be excited to praise God. If you would persuade me to be thankful to a benefactor, you must not employ such considerations merely as those upon which the Author here rests, taken from gratitude's being the law of my nature, or bearing a high rank among moral duties, or being attended with peculiar advantages. These are considerations but of a secondary nature. You must begin with setting before me all that my friend has done for me, if you mean to touch my heart, and to call forth the emotions of gratitude. The case is perfectly similar, when we are exhorted to give thanks to God; and, therefore, in giving a full view of the subject, the blessings conferred on us by divine goodness should have been taken into the argument.

It may be said, however, in apology for our Author, that this would have led him into too wide a field for one discourse, and into a field also, which is difficult, because so beaten, the enumeration of the divine benefits. He therefore seems to take it for granted, that we have upon our minds a just sense of these benefits. He assumes them as known and acknowledged; and setting aside what may be called the pathetic part of the subject, or what was calculated to warm the heart, he goes on to the reasoning part. In this management, I cannot altogether blame

him. I do not by any means say, that it is necessary in every discourse to take in all that belongs to the doctrine of which we treat. Many a discourse is spoiled, by attempting to render it too copious and comprehensive. The Preacher may, without reprehension, take up any part of a great subject to which his genius at the time leads him, and make that his theme. But when he omits any thing which may be thought essential, he ought to give notice, that this is a part, which for the time he lays aside. Something of this sort, would perhaps have been proper here. Our Author might have begun, by saying, that the reasonableness of this duty must appear to every thinking being, who reflects upon the infinite obligations which are laid upon us by creating, preserving, and redeeming love; and after taking notice that the field which these open, was too wide for him to enter upon at that time, have proceeded to his other heads. Let us now consider these separately.

“ THE duty of Praise and Thanksgiving, considered *absolutely* in itself, is, I say, the debt and law of our nature. We had such faculties bestowed on us by our Creator, as made us capable of satisfying this debt, and obeying this law; and they never, therefore, work more naturally and freely, than when they are thus employed.

“ ’Tis one of the earliest instructions given us by philosophy, and which hath ever since been approved and inculcated by the wisest men of all ages, that the original design of making man was, that he might praise and honour him

- LECT. " who made him. When God had finished this
 XXX. " goodly frame of things we call *the world*, and
 " put together the several parts of it, according
 " to his infinite wisdom, in exact number, weight,
 " and measure; there was still wanting a creature,
 " in these lower regions, that could apprehend
 " the beauty, order, and exquisite contrivance
 " of it; that from contemplating the gift, might
 " be able to raise itself to the great Giver, and
 " do honour to all his attributes. Every thing in-
 " deed that God made, did, in some sense, glorify
 " its author, inasmuch as it carried upon it the
 " plain mark and impress of the Deity, and was
 " an effect worthy of that first cause from whence
 " it flowed; and thus might the *Heavens* be said,
 " at the first moment in which they stood forth,
 " to declare his glory, and the firmament to show his
 " handy-work: But this was an imperfect and de-
 " fective glory; the sign was of no signification
 " here below, whilst there was no one here as
 " yet to take notice of it. Man, therefore, was
 " formed to supply this want, endowed with
 " powers fit to find out, and to acknowledge
 " these unlimited perfections; and then put into
 " this Temple of God, this lower world, as the
 " priest of nature, to offer up the incense of
 " Thanks and Praise for the mute and insensible
 " part of the Creation.
- " THIS, I say, hath been the opinion all along of
 " the most thoughtful men, down from the most an-
 " cient times: and though it be not demonstrative,
 " yet it is what we cannot but judge highly reason-
 " able, if we do but allow, that man was made for

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"some end or other; and that he is capable of
 "perceiving that end. For, then, let us search
 "and enquire never so much, we shall find no
 "other account of him that we can rest upon so
 "well. If we say, that he was made purely for
 "the good pleasure of God; this is, in effect, to
 "say, that he was made for no determinate end;
 "or for none, at least, that we can discern.
 "If we say, that he was designed as an instance
 "of the wisdom, and power and goodness of
 "God; this, indeed, may be the reason of his
 "*being* in general; for 'tis the common reason of
 "the being of every thing besides. But it gives
 "no account, why he was made *such* a being
 "as he is, a reflecting, thoughtful, inquisitive
 "being. The particular reason of this, seems
 "most aptly to be drawn from the praise and
 "honour that was not only to redound to God
 "from him, but to be given to God by him."

THE thought which runs through all this pas-
 sage, of man's being the Priest of Nature, and
 of his existence being calculated chiefly for this
 end, that he might offer up the Praises of the
 mute part of the creation, is an ingenious thought,
 and well illustrated. It was a favourite idea among
 some of the ancient philosophers; and it is not
 the worse on that account, as it thereby appears
 to have been a natural sentiment of the human
 mind. In composing a Sermon, however, it might
 have been better to have introduced it as a sort
 of collateral argument, or an incidental illustration,
 than to have displayed it with so much pomp,

LECT. and to have placed it in the front of the arguments
 XXX. for this duty. It does not seem to me, when placed in this station, to bear all the stress which the Author lays upon it. When the divine goodness brought man into existence, we cannot well conceive that its chief purpose was, to form a being who might sing Praises to his Maker. Prompted by infinite benevolence, the Supreme Creator formed the human race, that they might rise to happiness, and to the enjoyment of himself through a course of virtue, or proper action. The sentiment on which our Author dwells, however beautiful, appears too loose and rhetorical, to be a principal head of discourse.

" THIS duty, therefore, is the debt and law
 " of our nature. And it will more distinctly appear to be such, if we consider the two ruling
 " faculties of our mind, the *Understanding* and the
 " *Will* apart, in both which it is deeply founded: in the *Understanding*, as in the principle
 " of Reason, which owns and acknowledges it;
 " in the *Will*, as in the fountain of gratitude
 " and return, which prompts, and even constrains
 " us to pay it.

" *Reason* was given us as a rule and measure
 " by the help of which we were to proportion
 " our esteem of every thing, according to the
 " degrees of perfection and goodness which we
 " found therein. It cannot, therefore, if it doth
 " its office at all, but apprehend God as the best
 " and most perfect being; it must needs see,
 " and own, and admire his infinite perfections.

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 " And this is what is strictly meant by *praise*; which,
 " therefore is expressed in Scripture, by *confessing*
 " to *God*, and *acknowledging* him; by *ascribing* to
 " him what is his due; and as far as this sense
 " of the words reaches, 'tis impossible to *think*
 " of God without praising him; for it depends
 " not on the understanding, how it shall appre-
 " hend things, any more than it doth on the eye,
 " how visible objects shall appear to it.

" THE duty takes the further and surer hold
 " of us, by the means of the will, and that strong
 " bent towards gratitude, which the Author of our
 " Nature hath implanted in it. There is not a more
 " active principle than this in the mind of man; and
 " surely that which deserves its utmost force, and
 " should set all its springs awork, is God; the
 " great and universal Benefactor, from whom
 " alone we received whatever we either have,
 " or are, and to whom we can possibly repay
 " nothing but our Praises, or to speak more pro-
 " perly on this head, and according to the strict
 " import of the word, our Thanksgiving. *Who*
 " *hath first given to God* (saith the great Apostle,
 " in his usual figure) *and it shall be recompensed unto*
 " *him again*? A gift, it seems, always requires
 " a recompense: nay, *but of him, and through him,*
 " *and to him, are all things: of him,* as the Author;
 " *through him,* as the Preserver and Governor; *to him,*
 " as the end and perfection of all things: *to whom,*
 " *therefore,* (as it follows) *be glory for ever, Amen.*"

I CANNOT much approve of the light in which
 our Author places his argument in these paragraphs.

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LECT. There is something too metaphysical and refined,
 XXX. in his deducing, in this manner, the obligation to thanksgiving, from the two faculties of the mind, Understanding and Will. Though what he says be in itself just, yet the argument is not sufficiently plain and striking. Arguments in Sermons, especially on subjects that so naturally and easily suggest them, should be palpable and popular; should not be brought from topics that appear far sought, but should directly address the heart and feelings. The Preacher ought never to depart too far from the common ways of thinking, and expressing himself. I am inclined to think, that this whole head might have been improved, if the author had taken up more obvious ground; had stated Gratitude as one of the most natural principles in the human heart; had illustrated this, by showing how odious the opposite disposition is, and with what general consent men, in all ages, have agreed in hating, and condemning the ungrateful; and then applying these reasonings to the present case, had placed in a strong view, that entire corruption of moral sentiment which it discovers, to be destitute of thankful emotions towards the Supreme Benefactor of mankind. As the most natural method of giving vent to grateful sentiments is, by external expressions of Thanksgiving, he might then have, answered the objection that is apt to occur, of the expression of our Praise being insignificant to the Almighty. But, by seeking to be too refined in his argument, he has omitted some of the most striking and ob-

vious considerations, and which, properly displayed, would have afforded as great a field for Eloquence, as the topics which he has chosen. He goes on,

L E C T.
XXX.

"GRATITUDE consists in an equal return of benefits, if we are able; of thanks, if we are not: which thanks, therefore, must rise always in proportion as the favours received are great, and the receiver incapable of making any other sort of requital. Now, since no man hath benefited God at any time, and yet every man, in each moment of his life, is continually benefited by him, what strong obligations must we needs be under to thank him? 'Tis true, our thanks are really as insignificant to him, as any other kind of return would be; in themselves, indeed, they are worthless; but his goodness hath put a value upon them: he hath declared, he will accept them in lieu of the vast debt we owe; and after that, which is fittest for us, to dispute how they came to be taken as an *equivalent*, or to pay them?

"It is, therefore, the voice of nature (as far as gratitude itself is so) that the good things we receive from above, should be sent back again thither in thanks and praises; *as the rivers run into the sea, to the place (the ocean of beneficence) from whence the rivers come, thither should they return again.*"

In these paragraphs, he has, indeed, touched some of the considerations which I mentioned. But he has only touched them; whereas, with ad-

LECT. vantage, they might have formed the main body
 XXX. of his argument.

“ WE have considered the duty *absolutely*; we
 “ are now to *compare* it with others, and to see
 “ what rank it bears among them. And here we
 “ shall find, that, among all the acts of religion
 “ immediately addressed to God, this is much
 “ the noblest and most excellent; as it must needs
 “ be, if what hath been laid down be allowed,
 “ that the end of man’s creation was to praise
 “ and glorify God. For that cannot but be the
 “ most noble and excellent act of any being,
 “ which best answers the end and design of it.
 “ Other parts of devotion, such as *confession* and
 “ *prayer*, seem not originally to have been design-
 “ ed for man, nor man for them. They imply
 “ *guilt* and *want*, with which the *state of innocence*
 “ was not acquainted. Had man continued in that
 “ state, his worship, like the devotions of angels,
 “ had been paid to Heaven in pure acts of Thanks-
 “ giving; and nothing had been left for him to
 “ do, beyond the enjoying the good things
 “ of life, as nature directed, and praising the
 “ God of nature who bestowed them. But being
 “ fallen from innocence and abundance; having
 “ contracted guilt, and forfeited his right to all
 “ sorts of mercies; prayer and confession became
 “ necessary, for a time, to retrieve the loss, and
 “ to restore him to that state wherein he should
 “ be able to live without them. These are fitted,
 “ therefore, for a lower dispensation; before
 “ which, in paradise, there was nothing but

"praise, and after which, there shall be nothing
 "but that in Heaven. Our perfect state did at
 "first, and will at last, consist in the performance
 "of this duty; and herein, therefore, lies the
 "excellence, and the honour of our nature.

"'Tis the same way of reasoning, by which
 "the Apostle hath given the preference to
 "charity, beyond faith, and hope, and every
 "spiritual gift. *Charity never faileth*, faith he;
 "meaning, that it is not a virtue useful only
 "in this life, but will accompany us also into
 "the next: *but whether there be prophecies, they shall*
fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease;
whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.
 "These are gifts of a temporary advantage,
 "and shall all perish in the using. *For we know in*
part, and we prophesy in part: our present state is
 "imperfect, and, therefore, what belongs to
 "that, and only that, must be imperfect too.
 "But *when that which is perfect is come, then that*
which is in part shall be done away. The argument
 "of St. Paul, we see, which sets charity above
 "the rest of Christian graces, will give Praise
 "also the pre-eminence over all the parts of
 "Christian worship; and we may conclude our
 "reasoning, therefore, as he doth his: *And now*
abideth confession, prayer, and praise, these three;
but the greatest of these is praise."

THE Author, here, enters on the second part
 of his argument, the high rank which Thanksgiv-
 ing holds, when compared with other duties
 of religion. This he handles, with much elo-

LECT. quence and beauty. His idea, that this was the
 XXX. original worship of man, before his fall rendered
 other duties requisite, and shall continue to be
 his worship in Heaven, when the duties which
 are occasioned by a consciousness of guilt shall
 have no place, is solid and just; his illustration
 of it is very happy; and the style extremely
 flowing and sweet. Seldom do we meet with
 any piece of composition in Sermons, that has
 more merit than this head.

“ It is so, certainly, on other accounts, as
 “ well as this ; particularly , as it is the most
 “ *disinterested* branch of our religious service; such
 “ as hath the most of God, and the least of
 “ ourselves in it, of any we pay; and therefore
 “ approaches the nearest of any to a pure, and
 “ free, and perfect act of homage. For though
 “ a good action doth not grow immediately
 “ worthless by being done with the prospect of
 “ advantage, as some have strangely imagined;
 “ yet it will be allowed , I suppose, that its
 “ being done, without the mixture of that end,
 “ or with as little of it as possible, recommends
 “ it so much the more, and raises the price of it.
 “ *Doth Job fear God for nought ?* was an objection
 “ of Satan; which implied, that those duties
 “ were most valuable, where our own interest
 “ was least aimed at : and God seems, by the
 “ commission he then gave Satan, to try experi-
 “ ments upon *Job*, thus far to have allowed his
 “ plea. Now, our requests for future, and even
 “ our acknowledgments of past mercies, center
 purely

" purely in ourselves; our own interest is the
 " direct aim of them. But praise is a generous
 " and unmercenary principle, which proposes
 " no other end to itself, but to do, as is fit for
 " a creature endowed with such faculties to do,
 " towards the most perfect and beneficent of
 " beings; and to pay the willing tribute of honour
 " there, where the voice of Reason directs us
 " to pay it. God hath, indeed, annexed a blessing
 " to the duty; and when we know this, we
 " cannot chuse, while we are performing the
 " duty, but have some regard to the blessing
 " which belongs to it. However, that is not the
 " direct aim of our devotions, nor was it the first
 " motive that stirred us up to them. Had it been
 " so, we should naturally have betaken ourselves
 " to Prayer, and breathed out our desires in that
 " form wherein they are most properly conveyed.

" In short, Praise is our most excellent work,
 " a work common to the church triumphant and
 " militant, and which lifts us up into communion
 " and fellowship with Angels. The matter about
 " which it is conversant, is always the perfection
 " of God's nature; and the act itself, is the
 " perfection of ours."

OUR Author's second illustration, is taken
 from Praise being the most disinterested act of
 homage. This he explains justly and elegantly;
 though, perhaps, the consideration is rather too
 thin and refined for enforcing religious duties:
 as creatures, such as we, in approaching to the
 divine presence, can never be supposed to lay

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aside all consideration of our own wants and necessities; and certainly are not required (as the Author admits) to divest ourselves of such regards. The concluding Sentence of this head is elegant and happily expressed.

" I COME NOW, in the last place, to set out
" some of its peculiar *properties and advantages*,
" which recommend it to the devout performer.
" And,

" 1. IT is the most *pleasing* part of our devo-
" tions: it proceeds always from a lively cheerful
" temper of mind, and it cherishes and improves
" what it proceeds from. *For it is good to sing*
" *praises unto our God* (says one, whose experience,
" in this case, we may rely upon), *for it is pleasant,*
" *and praise is comely.* Petition and Confession are
" the language of the indigent and the guilty,
" the breathings of a sad and contrite spirit: *Is*
" *any afflicted? let him pray; but, Is any merry?*
" *let him sing psalms.* The most usual and natural
" way of men's expressing the mirth of their
" hearts is in a song, and songs are the very
" language of praise; to the expressing of which
" they are in a peculiar manner appropriated,
" and are scarce of any other use in Religion.
" Indeed the whole composition of this duty is
" such, as throughout speaks ease and delight to
" the mind. It proceeds from *Love* and from
" *Thankfulness*; from *Love*, the fountain of pleasure,
" the passion which gives every thing we do,
" or enjoy, its relish and agreeableness: from
" *Thankfulness*, which involves in it the memory

" of past benefits, the actual presence of them to
 " the mind, and the repeated enjoyment of them.
 " And as is its principle, such is its end also :
 " for it procureth quiet and ease to the mind,
 " by doing somewhat towards satisfying that
 " debt which it labours under; by delivering it
 " of those thoughts of praise and gratitude, those
 " exultations it is so full of; and which would
 " grow uneasy and troublesome to it, if they
 " were kept in. If the thankful *refrained*; it would
 " be pain and grief to them; but then, then is their
 " soul satisfied as with marrow and fatness, when their
 " mouth praiseth God with joyful lips."

In beginning this head of discourse, the expression which the Author uses, to *set out some of its peculiar properties and advantages*, would now be reckoned not so proper an expression as *to point out*, or *to show*. The first subdivision concerning Praise being the most pleasant part of devotion, is very just and well expressed, as far as it goes; but seems to me rather defective. Much more might have been said, upon the pleasure that accompanies such exalted acts of devotion. It was a cold thought, to dwell upon its disburdening the mind of a debt. The Author should have insisted more upon the influence of Praise and Thanksgiving, in warming, gladdening, soothing the mind; lifting it above the world, to dwell among divine and eternal objects. He should have described the peace and joy which then expand the heart; the relief which this exercise procures from the cares and agitations of

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life; the encouraging views of Providence to which it leads our attention; and the trust which it promotes in the divine mercy for the future, by the commemoration of benefits past. In short, this was the place for his pouring out a greater flow of devotional sentiments than what we here find.

“ 2. It is another distinguishing property of
 “ divine praise, that it enlargeth the powers and
 “ capacities of our souls, turning them from low
 “ and little things, upon their greatest and no-
 “ blest object, the divine nature, and employing
 “ them in the discovery and admiration of those
 “ several perfections that adorn it. We see what
 “ difference there is between man and man, such
 “ as there is hardly greater between man and
 “ beast; and this proceeds chiefly from the diffe-
 “ rent sphere of thought which they act in, and
 “ the different objects they converse with. The
 “ mind is essentially the same, in the peasant and
 “ the prince; the force of it naturally equal, in
 “ the untaught man, and the philosopher; only
 “ the one of these is busied in mean affairs, and
 “ within narrower bounds; the other exercises
 “ himself in things of weight and moment; and
 “ this it is, that puts the wide distance between
 “ them. Noble objects are to the mind, what
 “ the sun-beams are to a bud or flower; they open
 “ and unfold, as it were, the leaves of it; put
 “ it upon exerting and spreading itself every way;
 “ and call forth all those powers that lie hid and
 “ locked up in it. The praise and admiration

“ of God, therefore, brings this advantage along
 “ with it, that it sets our faculties upon their
 “ full stretch, and improves them to all the degrees
 “ of perfection of which they are capable.”

THIS head is just, well expressed, and to censure it might appear hypercritical. Some of the expressions, however, one would think, might be amended. The simile, for instance, about the effects of the sun-beams upon the bud or flower, is pretty, but not correctly expressed. *They open and unfold as it were, the leaves of it.* If this is to be literally applied to the flower, the phrase, *as it were*, is needless; if it is to be metaphorically understood (which appears to be the case), the *leaves of the mind*, is harsh language; besides that, *put it upon exerting itself*, is rather a low expression. Nothing is more nice than to manage properly such similes and allusions, so as to preserve them perfectly correct, and at the same time to render the image lively: it might perhaps be amended in some such way as this: “As the sun-beams
 “ open the bud, and unfold the leaves of a flower, noble objects have a like effect upon the
 “ mind; they expand and spread it, and call forth
 “ those powers that before lay hid and locked up
 “ in the soul.”

“ 3. IT farther promotes in us an exquisite sense
 “ of God's honour, and an high indignation of
 “ mind at every thing that openly profanes it.
 “ For what we value and delight in, we cannot
 “ with patience hear slighted or abused. Our
 “ own praises, which we are constantly putting

LECT. " up, will be a *spur* to us toward procuring and
 XXX. " promoting the divine glory in every other
 " instance; and will make us set our faces against
 " all open and avowed impieties; which,
 " methinks, should be considered a little by
 " such as would be thought not to be wanting
 " in this duty, and yet are often silent under the
 " foulest dishonours done to Religion, and its
 " great Author: For tamely to hear God's name
 " and worship vilified by others, is no very good
 " argument that we have been used to honour
 " and reverence him, in good earnest, ourselves."

The thought here is well founded, though it is carelessly and loosely brought out. The Sentence, *our own praises which we are constantly putting up, will be a spur to us toward procuring and promoting the divine glory in every other instance*, is both negligent in language, and ambiguous in meaning; for *our own praises*, properly signifies the praises of ourselves. Much better if he had said, "Those devout praises which we constantly offer up to the Almighty, will naturally prompt us to promote the divine glory in every other instance."

" 4. It will, beyond all this, work in us a deep humility and consciousness of our own imperfections. Upon a frequent attention to God and his attributes, we shall easily discover our own weakness and emptiness, our swelling thoughts of ourselves will abate, and we shall see and feel that we are *altogether lighter to be laid in the balance than vanity*; and this is a lesson which, to the greatest part of mankind is, I think, very

" well worth learning. We are naturally pre-
 " sumptuous and vain; full of ourselves, and re-
 " gardless of every thing besides, especially when
 " some little outward privileges distinguish us
 " from the rest of mankind; then 'tis odds but
 " we look into ourselves with great degrees of
 " complacency, and are *wiser* (and better every
 " way) *in our own conceit, than seven men that can*
 " *render a reason.* Now nothing will contribute
 " so much to the cure of this vanity, as a due atten-
 " tion to God's excellencies and perfections. By
 " comparing these with those which we imagine
 " belong to us, we shall learn, *not to think more*
 " *highly of ourselves than we ought to think of our-*
 " *selves, but to think soberly;* we shall find more
 " satisfaction in looking upwards, and humbling
 " ourselves before our common Creator, than in
 " casting our eyes downward with scorn upon
 " our fellow creatures; and setting at nought any
 " part of the work of his hands. The vast dis-
 " tance we are at from real and infinite Worth,
 " will astonish us so much, that we shall not be
 " tempted to value ourselves upon these lesser de-
 " grees of pre-eminence, which custom or opinion,
 " or some little accidental advantages have given
 " us over other men."

THOUGH the thought here also be just, yet
 a like deficiency in elegance and beauty appears.
 The phrase *'tis odds, but we look into ourselves with*
great degrees of complacency, is much too low and
 colloquial for a Sermon — he might have said,
we are likely, or we are prone to look into our-

LECT. felves. — *Comparing these with those which we imagine*
 XXX. *to belong to us, is also very careless style. — By*
comparing these with the virtues and abilities which
we ascribe to ourselves, we shall learn — would have
been purer and more correct.

“ 5, I SHALL mention but one use of it more,
 “ and ’tis this; that a conscientious praise of
 “ God will keep us back from all false and mean
 “ praise, all fulsome and servile flatteries, such
 “ as are in use among men. Praising, as ’tis
 “ commonly managed, is nothing else but a trial
 “ of skill upon a man, how many good things
 “ we can possibly say of him. All the treasures of
 “ Oratory are ransacked, and all the fine things
 “ that ever were said, are heaped together for
 “ his sake; and no matter whether it belongs to
 “ him or not; though there be enough on’t. Which
 “ is one deplorable instance among a thousand,
 “ of the baseness of human nature, of its small
 “ regard to truth and justice; to right or wrong;
 “ to what is, or is not to be praised. But he
 “ who hath a deep sense of the excellencies of God
 “ upon his heart, will make a God of nothing
 “ besides. He will give every one his just enco-
 “ mium, honour where honour is due, and as
 “ much as is due, because it is his duty to do
 “ so; but the honour of God will suffer him to
 “ go no further. Which rule, if it had been
 “ observed, a neighbouring prince (who now,
 “ God be thanked, needs flattery a great deal
 “ more than ever he did), would have wanted

" a great deal of that incense which hath been
" offered up to him by his adorers. "

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THIS head appears scarcely to deserve any place among the more important topics, that naturally presented themselves on this subject; at least, it had much better have wanted the application which the Author makes of his reasoning to the flatterers of Louis XIV; and the thanks which he offers to God, for the affairs of that prince being in so low a state, that he now needed flattery more than ever. This Political Satire is altogether out of place, and unworthy of the subject.

ONE would be inclined to think, upon reviewing our Author's arguments, that he has overlooked some topics, respecting the happy consequences of this duty, of fully as much importance as any that he has inserted. Particularly, he ought not to have omitted the happy tendency of praise and thanksgiving, to strengthen good dispositions in the heart; to promote love to God, and imitation of those perfections which we adore; and to infuse a spirit of ardour and zeal into the whole of religion, as the service of our benefactor. These are consequences which naturally follow from the proper performance of this duty; and which ought not to have been omitted; as no opportunity should be lost, of showing the good effect of devotion on practical religion and moral virtue; and pointing out the necessary connection of the one with the other. For certainly the great end of Preaching is, to

LECT. make men better in all the relations of life, and
 XXX. to promote that complete reformation of heart
 and conduct, in which true Christianity consists.
 Our Author, however, upon the whole, is not
 deficient in such views of religion; for, in his
 general strain of preaching, as he is extremely
 pious, so he is, at the same time, practical and
 moral.

His summing up the whole argument, in the
 next paragraph is elegant and beautiful; and such
 concluding views of the subject are frequently very
 proper and useful: "Upon these grounds doth
 " the duty of praise stand, and these are the
 " obligations that bind us to the performance of
 " it. 'Tis the end of our being, and the very
 " rule and law of our nature; flowing from the
 " two great fountains of human action, the un-
 " derstanding and the will, naturally, and almost
 " necessarily. It is the most excellent part of our
 " religious worship; enduring to eternity after
 " the rest shall be *done away*; and paid, even now,
 " in the frankest manner, with the least regard to
 " our own interest. It recommends itself to us
 " by several peculiar properties and advantages;
 " as it carries more pleasure in it, than all other
 " kinds of devotion; as it enlarges and exalts
 " the several powers of the mind; as it breeds in
 " us an exquisite sense of God's honour, and a
 " willingness to promote it in the world; as it
 " teaches us to be humble and lowly ourselves,
 " and yet preserves us from base and sordid

"flattery, from bestowing mean and undue praises
"upon others."

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AFTER this, our Author addresses himself to two classes of men, the Careless and the Profane. His address to the Careless is beautiful, and pathetic; that to the Profane, is not so well executed, and is liable to some objection. Such addresses appear to me to be, on several occasions, very useful parts of a discourse. They prevailed much in the strain of preaching before the Restoration; and, perhaps, since that period, have been too much neglected. They afford an opportunity of bringing home to the consciences of the audience, many things, which, in the course of the Sermon, were, perhaps, delivered in the abstract.

I SHALL not dwell on the Conclusion of the Sermon, which is chiefly employed in observations on the posture of public affairs at that time. Considered, upon the whole, this Discourse of Bishop Atterbury's is both useful and beautiful, though I have ventured to point out some defects in it. Seldom, or never, can we expect to meet with a composition of any kind, which is absolutely perfect in all its parts: and when we take into account the difficulties which I before showed to attend the Eloquence of the Pulpit, we have, perhaps, less reason to look for perfection in a Sermon, than in any other composition.