

N^o 459. Saturday, August 16.

— *quicquid dignum sapiente bonoque est.*

Hor.

RELIGION may be considered under two General Heads. The first comprehends what we are to believe, the other what we are to practise. By those things which we are to believe, I mean whatever is revealed to us in the Holy Writings, and which we could not have obtained the Knowledge of by the Light of Nature; by the things which we are to practise, I mean all those Duties to which we are directed by Reason or Natural Religion. The first of these I shall distinguish by the Name of Faith, the second by that of Morality.

IF we look into the more serious Part of Mankind, we find many who lay so great a Stress upon Faith, that they neglect Morality; and many who build so much upon Morality, that they do not pay a due Regard to Faith. The perfect Man should be defective in neither of these Particulars, as will be very evident to those who consider the Benefits which arise from each of them, and which I shall make the Subject of this Day's Paper.

NOTWITHSTANDING this general Division of Christian Duty into Morality and Faith, and that they have both their peculiar Excellencies, the first has the Pre-eminence in several Respects.

First, BECAUSE the greatest Part of Morality (as I have stated the Notion of it,) is of a fixt Eternal Nature, and will endure when Faith shall fail, and be lost in Conviction.

Secondly, BECAUSE a Person may be qualified to do greater Good to Mankind, and become more beneficial to the World, by Morality, without Faith, than by Faith without Morality.

Thirdly, BECAUSE Morality gives a greater Perfection to human Nature, by quieting the Mind, moderating the Passions, and advancing the Happiness of every Man in his private Capacity.

Fourthly,

Fourthly, BECAUSE the Rule of Morality is much more certain than that of Faith, all the Civilized Nations of the World agreeing in the great Points of Morality, as much as they differ in those of Faith.

Fifthly, BECAUSE Infidelity is not of so malignant a Nature as Immorality; or to put the same Reason in another Light, because it is generally owned, there may be Salvation for a virtuous Infidel, (particularly in the Case of Invincible Ignorance) but none for a vicious Believer.

Sixthly, BECAUSE Faith seems to draw its Principal, if not all its Excellency, from the Influence it has upon Morality; as we shall see more at large, if we consider wherein consists the Excellency of Faith, or the Belief of Revealed Religion; and this I think is,

First, IN explaining and carrying to greater Heights, several Points of Morality.

Secondly, IN furnishing new and stronger Motives to enforce the Practice of Morality.

Thirdly, IN giving us more amiable Ideas of the Supreme Being, more endearing Notions of one another, and a truer State of our selves; both in regard to the Grandeur and Vileness of our Natures.

Fourthly, BY shewing us the Blackness and Deformity of Vice, which in the Christian System is so very great, that he who is possessed of all Perfection and the Sovereign Judge of it, is represented by several of our Divines as hating Sin to the same Degree that he loves the Sacred Person who was made the Propitiation of it.

Fifthly, IN being the ordinary and prescribed Method of making Morality effectual to Salvation.

I have only touched on these several Heads, which every one who is conversant in Discourses of this Nature will easily enlarge upon in his own Thoughts, and draw Conclusions from them which may be useful to him in the Conduct of his Life. One I am sure is so obvious, that he cannot miss it, namely that a Man cannot be perfect in his Scheme of Morality, who does not strengthen and support it with that of the Christian Faith.

BESIDES this, I shall lay down two or three other Maxims which I think we may deduce from what has been said.

First,

First, THAT we should be particularly cautious of making any thing an Article of Faith, which does not contribute to the Confirmation or Improvement of Morality.

Secondly, THAT no Article of Faith can be true and authentick, which weakens or subverts the practical Part of Religion, or what I have hitherto called Morality.

Thirdly, THAT the greatest Friend of Morality, or Natural Religion, cannot possibly apprehend any Danger from embracing Christianity, as it is preserved pure and uncorrupt in the Doctrines of our National Church.

THERE is likewise another Maxim which I think may be drawn from the foregoing Considerations, which is this, that we should, in all dubious Points, consider any ill Consequences that may arise from them, supposing they should be Erroneous, before we give up our Assent to them.

FOR Example, In that disputable Point of Persecuting Men for Conscience Sake, besides the imbittering their Minds with Hatred, Indignation, and all the Vehemence of Resentment, and insnaring them to profess what they do not believe; we cut them off from the Pleasures and Advantages of Society, afflict their Bodies, distress their Fortunes, hurt their Reputations, ruin their Families, make their Lives painful, or put an End to them. Sure when I see such dreadful Consequences rising from a Principle, I would be as fully convinced of the Truth of it, as of a Mathematical Demonstration, before I would venture to act upon it, or make it a part of my Religion.

IN this Case the Injury done our Neighbour is plain and evident, the Principle that puts us upon doing it, of a dubious and disputable Nature. Morality seems highly violated by the one, and whether or no a Zeal for what a Man thinks the true System of Faith may justify it, is very uncertain. I cannot but think, if our Religion produces Charity as well as Zeal, it will not be for shewing it self by such cruel Instances. But, to conclude with the Words of an excellent Author, *We have just enough Religion to make us hate, but not enough to make us love one another.* C