

to Opinions full of Contradiction and Impossibility, and at the same time look upon the smallest Difficulty in an Article of Faith as a sufficient Reason for rejecting it. Notions that fall in with the common Reason of Mankind, that are conformable to the Sense of all Ages and all Nations, not to mention their Tendency for promoting the Happiness of Societies, or of particular Persons, are exploded as Errors and Prejudices; and Schemes erected in their stead that are altogether monstrous and irrational, and require the most extravagant Credulity to embrace them. I would fain ask one of these bigotted Infidels, supposing all the great Points of Atheism, as the casual or eternal Formation of the World, the Materiality of a thinking Substance, the Mortality of the Soul, the fortuitous Organization of the Body, the Motions and Gravitation of Matter, with the like Particulars, were laid together and formed into a kind of Creed, according to the Opinions of the most celebrated Atheists; I say, supposing such a Creed as this were formed, and imposed upon any one People in the World, whether it would not require an infinitely greater measure of Faith, than any Set of Articles which they so violently oppose. Let me therefore advise this Generation of Wranglers, for their own and for the publick Good, to act at least so consistently with themselves, as not to burn with Zeal for Irreligion, and with Bigotry for Nonsense. C



N^o 186. Wednesday, October 3.

Cælum ipsum petimus sultitiâ. ——— Hor.

UPON my Return to my Lodgings last Night I found a Letter from my worthy Friend the Clergyman, whom I have given some Account of in my former Papers. He tells me in it that he was particularly pleased with the latter Part of my Yesterday's Speculation; and at the same time inclosed the following Essay, which he desires me to publish as the Sequel of that Discourse.

Discourse. It consists partly of uncommon Reflexions, and partly of such as have been already used, but now set in a stronger Light.

‘ A Believer may be excused by the most hardened Atheist for endeavouring to make him a Convert, because he does it with an Eye to both their Interests. The Atheist is inexcusable who tries to gain over a Believer, because he does not propose the doing himself or Believer any Good by such a Conversion.

‘ THE Prospect of a future State is the secret Comfort and Refreshment of my Soul, it is that which makes Nature look gay about me; it doubles all my Pleasures, and supports me under all my Afflictions. I can look at Disappointments and Misfortunes, Pain and Sicknefs, Death it self, and what is worse than Death, the Loss of those who are dearest to me, with Indifference, so long as I keep in view the Pleasures of Eternity, and the State of Being in which there will be no Fears nor Apprehensions, Pains nor Sorrows, Sicknefs nor Separation. Why will any Man be so impertinently Officious as to tell me all this is only Fancy and Delusion? Is there any Merit in being the Messenger of ill News? If it is a Dream, let me enjoy it, since it makes me both the happier and better Man.

‘ I must confess I do not know how to trust a Man who believes neither Heaven nor Hell, or in other Words, a future State of Rewards and Punishments. Not only natural Self-love, but Reason directs us to promote our own Interest above all Things. It can never be for the Interest of a Believer to do me a Mischief, because he is sure upon the Balance of Accounts to find himself a Loser by it. On the contrary, if he considers his own Welfare in his Behaviour towards me, it will lead him to do me all the Good he can, and at the same Time restrain him from doing me any Injury. An Unbeliever does not act like a reasonable Creature, if he favours me contrary to his present Interest, or does not distress me when it turns to his present Advantage. Honour and Good-nature may indeed tie up his Hands; but as these would be
‘ very

very much strengthened by Reason and Principle, so without them they are only Instincts, or wavering unsettled Notions, which rest on no Foundation.

INFIDELITY has been attack'd with so good Success of late Years, that it is driven out of all its Outworks. The Atheist has not found his Post tenable, and is therefore retired into Deism, and a Disbelief of revealed Religion only. But the Truth of it is, the greatest Number of this Set of Men, are those who, for want of a virtuous Education, or examining the Grounds of Religion, know so very little of the Matter in Question, that their Infidelity is but another Term for their Ignorance.

AS Folly and Inconsiderateness are the Foundations of Infidelity, the great Pillars and Supports of it are either a Vanity of appearing wiser than the rest of Mankind, or an Ostentation of Courage in despising the Terrors of another World, which have so great an Influence on what they call weaker Minds; or an Aversion to a Belief that must cut them off from many of those Pleasures they propose to themselves, and fill them with Remorse for many of those they have already tasted.

THE great received Articles of the Christian Religion have been so clearly proved, from the Authority of that Divine Revelation in which they are delivered, that it is impossible for those who have Ears to hear, and Eyes to see, not to be convinced of them. But were it possible for any thing in the Christian Faith to be erroneous, I can find no ill Consequences in adhering to it. The great Points of the Incarnation and Sufferings of our Saviour, produce naturally such Habits of Virtue in the Mind of Man, that I say, supposing it were possible for us to be mistaken in them, the Infidel himself must at least allow that no other System of Religion could so effectually contribute to the heightning of Morality. They give us great Ideas of the Dignity of human Nature, and of the Love which the supreme Being bears to his Creatures, and consequently engage us in the highest Acts of Duty towards our Creator, our Neighbour and our selves. How ma-

ny

ny noble Arguments has Saint *Paul* raised from the chief Articles of our Religion, for the advancing of Morality in its three great Branches? To give a single Example in each Kind: What can be a stronger Motive to a firm Trust and Reliance on the Mercies of our Maker, than the giving us his Son to suffer for us? What can make us love and esteem even the most inconsiderable of Mankind, more than the Thought that Christ died for him? Or what dispose us to set a stricter Guard upon the Purity of our own Hearts, than our being Members of Christ, and a Part of the Society of which that immaculate Person is the Head? But these are only a Specimen of those admirable Enforcements of Morality, which the Apostle has drawn from the History of our blessed Saviour.

IF our modern Infidels considered these Matters with that Candour and Seriousness which they deserve, we should not see them act with such a Spirit of Bitterness, Arrogance, and Malice: They would not be raising such insignificant Cavils, Doubts, and Scruples, as may be started against every thing that is not capable of mathematical Demonstration; in order to unsettle the Minds of the Ignorant, disturb the publick Peace, subvert Morality, and throw all things into Confusion and Disorder. If none of these Reflexions can have any Influence on them, there is one that perhaps may, because it is adapted to their Vanity, by which they seem to be guided much more than their Reason. I would therefore have them consider, that the wisest and best of Men in all Ages of the World, have been those who lived up to the Religion of their Country, when they saw nothing in it opposite to Morality, and to the best Lights they had of the Divine Nature. *Pythagoras's* first Rule directs us to worship the Gods as it is ordained by Law, for that is the most natural Interpretation of the Precept. *Socrates*, who was the most renowned among the Heathens both for Wisdom and Virtue, in his last Moments desires his Friends to offer a Cock to *Æsculapius*; doubtless out of a submissive Deference to the established Worship of his Country. *Xenophon* tells us, that his Prince (whom he sets forth as a Pattern of Perfection) when he found

V o L. III. D his