

study, instead of the writings of Tauler and Behmen, those of St. Paul, James, Peter, and John ; to spew out of your mouth and out of your heart that vain philosophy, and speak neither higher nor lower things, neither more nor less, than the oracles of God ; to renounce, despise, abhor all the high-flown bombast, all the unintelligible jargon of the Mystics, and come back to the plain religion of the Bible, " We love him, because he first loved us."

LONDON,
January 6, 1756.

THOUGHTS UPON JACOB BEHMEN.

I HAVE considered the Memoirs of Jacob Behmen, of which I will speak very freely.

I believe he was a good man. But I see nothing extraordinary either in his life or in his death. I have known many, both men and women, who were far more exemplary in their lives, and far more honoured of God in their death.

I allow he wrote many truths ; but none that would have appeared at all extraordinary, had he thrown aside his hard words, and used plain and common language.

What some seem most to admire in his writings, is what I most object to ; I mean his philosophy and his phraseology. These are really his own ; and these are quite new ; therefore, they are quite wrong.

I totally object to his blending religion with philosophy ; and as vain a philosophy as ever existed : Crude, indigested ; supported neither by Scripture nor reason, nor anything but his own *ipse dixit*.

I grant, Mr. Law, by taking immense pains, has licked it into some shape. And he has made it hang tolerably together. But still it admits of no manner of proof.

And all he writes concerning religion is what very many have said before him, and in a far better manner.

To his whole scheme I object,

1. The whole foundation of it is wrong; the very attempt to explain religion, which is the most simple thing in the world, by an abstruse, complicated, philosophical theory, is the most absurd thing that can be conceived.

I pray, consider but one argument against it. Either St. Paul and St. John knew this theory, or they did not. Mr. Law supposes, they did not know it; but that Jacob knew more than them both. I verily think this needs no confutation. Let him believe it that can. But if they did know it, how did they dare to conceal any part of the counsel of God?

Upon the theory itself I shall only repeat a very little of what I observed in my printed "Letter to Mr. Law:"—

"All that can be conceived," says Mr. Law, quoting from Jacob, "is God, or nature, or creature."

Is nature created or not created? It must be one or the other; for there is no medium. If not created, it is God. If created, is it not a creature? How then can these be three,—God, nature, and creature; since nature must coincide either with God or creature?

"Nature is in itself a hungry, wrathful fire of life. Nature is and can be only a desire. Desire is the very being of nature." "Nature is only a desire, because it is for the sake of something else! Nature is only a torment, because it cannot help itself to what it wants."

Shame to human understanding, that any man should fall in love with such stark, staring nonsense as this!

"Nature, as well as God, is antecedent to all creatures. There is an eternal nature, as universal and as unlimited as God." Is then nature God? Or, are there two eternal, universal, infinite beings?

"Nothing is before eternal nature, but God." *Nothing but!* Is anything before that which is eternal?

"Nature, and darkness, and self, are but three different expressions for one and the same thing." "Nature has all evil and no evil in it."

"Nature has seven chief properties, and can have neither more nor less, because it is a birth from the Deity in nature." (Is nature a birth from the Deity in nature? Is not this a flat

contradiction?) "For God is tri-une, and nature is tri-une." (*Nature triune!* Prove it who can.) "And hence arise properties, three and three." (Why not four and four?) "And that which brings these three and three into union is another property." Sublime jargon!

"The three first properties of nature are the whole essence of that desire which is, and is called, nature." A part of its properties are the whole essence of it! Flat contradiction again!

"The three first properties of nature are, attraction, resistance, and whirling. In these three properties of the desire, you see the reason of the three great laws of matter and motion."

How does it appear that these are any of the properties of nature, if you mean by nature anything distinct from matter? And how are they properties of desire?

"The fourth property is fire; the fifth, the form of light and love;" (what is the form of love? and are light and love the same thing?) "the sixth, sound or understanding;" (the same thing doubtless!) "the seventh, a life of triumphing joy." Is then "a life of triumphing joy," "that which brings the three and three properties into union?" If so, how is it "the result of that union?"

Once more: "Attraction is an incessant working of three contrary properties,—drawing, resisting, and whirling." That is, in plain terms, drawing is incessant drawing, resistance, and whirling.

Such is the philosophy which Jacob received by immediate inspiration; (to mention only the first principles of it;) and by which he is to explain all religion, and the whole revelation of God!

1. As to his divinity, I object, First, to the very design of explaining religion by any philosophy whatever. The Scripture gives us no direction, no, nor any permission, so to do. I object, much more, to the execution of his design; the attempting to explain it by that base, unmeaning, self-contradictory jargon, which is as far remote from all true, genuine philosophy, as it is from the Scripture itself.

2. But be the foundation as it may, he builds no superstructure upon it, but what we knew before, either with regard to internal or external holiness. We knew before, "Neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith that worketh by love." And what does he

teach us by all his hard, uncouth words, more than this plain truth?

We knew before that we "must be born again;" inwardly changed from all evil tempers to all good; "from an earthly, sensual, devilish mind, to the mind that was in Christ Jesus." And what more does he teach us on this head, by all his vain, precarious, mystical philosophy?

We knew before that "the loving God with all our heart, and the loving our neighbour as ourselves, is the fulfilling of the law, the end of the commandment," the sum of all religion. And what has he told us more than this, in all his nineteen volumes?

We knew before that the whole of religion is, a heart and life totally devoted to God. Has he told us, or can he tell us, any thing more? No, nor all the angels in heaven.

We knew before that the foundation and the superstructure of religion are comprised in those words, "We love him because he first loved us." Does he teach us anything higher or deeper? In a word, does he teach any single point, either of inward or outward holiness, which we did not know before? If he does, what is it? I cannot find out one in all his writings.

3. But if his matter is not new, if this is nothing uncommon, his manner of speaking is new indeed! His language is utterly new; it was never used since the world began. And this is the very reason for which he is so admired,—because he speaks (which cannot be denied) as never man spake. Indeed, I hardly know for which he is most admired,—the novelty, or the obscurity, of his language.

But I cannot admire it at all; because it is quite unscriptural. There is no trace of it to be found in any part either of the Old or New Testament. Therefore, I cannot reconcile it to that express command, "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God."

I cannot admire it, because, Secondly, it is barbarous in the highest degree: Whatever is peculiar in his phraseology, is not authorized by any good writer whatever. It is queer-ness itself. It is mere dog-Latin. It is an insult upon the ear and the understanding of all mankind.

One allows, "None can understand it without much pains; perhaps not without reading him thrice over." I would not read him thrice over on any consideration. (1.) Because it

would be enough to crack any man's brain to brood so long over such unintelligible nonsense; and, (2.) Because such a waste of time might provoke God to give me up to a strong delusion, to believe a lie.

But I doubt whether any man understands it at all: For it is so dark and indeterminate, that I have not found any two persons in England who understand it alike. I thought, if any man living understood Behmen, Mr. Law did. "No," says one who has been studying him these forty years, "Mr. Law never understood a page of him."

4. The whole of Behmenism, including both phrase and sense, is useless. It stuns and astonishes its admirers. It fills their heads, but it does not change their hearts. It makes no eminent Christians. For many years I have diligently inquired concerning the grand patrons of it. And I have found none of them who were burning and shining lights; none who adorned the doctrine of God our Saviour.

5. But it is not barely useless; it is mischievous, and that in a high degree. For it strikes at the root of both internal and external religion, (suppose Mr. Law understood it,) by sapping the foundation of justification by faith. For Jacob affirms, "God was never angry at sinners." But, if so, he was never reconciled to them. His wrath was never turned away, if it never existed. And, admitting this, there is no place for justification; nor, consequently, for faith in a pardoning God, which is the root of both inward and outward holiness.

More particularly, it strikes at the root of humility, tending to make men admire themselves, and despise others. Never was a more melancholy proof of this than Mr. Law, who seriously believed himself the most knowing man in the kingdom, and despised all that contradicted him, even in the tenderest manner, as the mire in the streets. It strikes at the root of charity, inspiring into its strictest votaries deep censoriousness toward the world in general, and an inexpressible bitterness toward all who do not receive their new apostle. This may be observed in all the authors of the memoirs, though, in other respects, good men; and in all I have conversed with in my life who were thorough Behmenists.

Above all, it strikes at the root of external religion, by destroying zeal for good works; by laying little stress on either works of piety or mercy, and still less upon Christian

society; it particularly tends to make all men of sense and learning bury their talent in the earth, the natural effect of continually declaiming, in a loose and indiscriminate manner, against reason and learning.

It strikes at the root of all revealed religion, by making men think meanly of the Bible; a natural effect of thinking Behmen more highly illuminated than any or all of the Apostles. So Mr. S. frankly acknowledged, "While I admired him, I thought St. Paul and St. John very mean writers."

Indeed it quite spoils the taste for plain, simple religion, such as that of the Bible is; and gives a false taste, which can relish nothing so well, as high, obscure, unintelligible jargon.

December 22, 1780.

A SPECIMEN

OF

THE DIVINITY AND PHILOSOPHY OF THE HIGHLY-ILLUMINATED JACOB BEHMEN.

IN the late edition of his Works before the second volume, we have the following advertisement:—

"As he and Mr. Law were raised up by God, and highly qualified as instructors of mankind in divine wisdom, so all who are followers of Christ in simplicity of heart, and seek only the salvation of their souls, will find in their writings everything relating to their essential happiness. And all the efforts of human wisdom to depreciate them, can be but like sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal."

Mr. Law's writings are entirely out of the present question: We are only concerned with those of Jacob Behmen; a speci-