

art, and to Dust thou shalt return. Had they been left thus, they might have continued in their Labour and Sorrow for their appointed Time, and at last returned to Dust, without any well-grounded Hope or Confidence in God: They must have looked upon themselves as rejected by their Maker, delivered up to Trouble and Sorrow in this World, and as having no Hope in any other. Upon this Foot, I conceive, there could have been no Religion left in the World; for a Sense of Religion without Hope, is a State of Phrenzy and Distraction, void of all Inducements to Love and Obedience, or any thing else that is Praiseworthy. If therefore God intended to preserve them as Objects of Mercy, it was absolutely necessary to communicate *so much Hope* to them, as might be a *rational Foundation* for their future Endeavours to reconcile themselves to him by a better Obedience. This seems to be the *primary Intention* of this first Divine Prophecy; and it was necessary to the State of the World, and the Condition of Religion, which could not possibly have been supported without the Communication of such Hopes. The Prophecy is excellently adapted to this Purpose, and manifestly conveyed such Hopes to our first Parents. For let us consider, in what Sense we may suppose them to understand the Prophecy. Now they must necessarily understand the Prophecy, either according to the literal Meaning of the Words, or according to such Meaning as the whole Circumstance of the Transaction, of which they are a Part, does require. If we suppose them to understand the Words literally, and that God meant them so to be understood, this Passage must appear ridiculous. Do but imagine that you see God coming to judge the Offenders; Adam and Eve before him in the utmost Distress; that you hear God inflicting Pain, and Sorrow, and Misery, and Death upon the first of Human Race; and that in the midst of all this Scene of Woe and great Calamity, you hear God foretelling with great Solemnity a very trivial Accident, that should sometimes happen in the World; That Serpents would be apt to bite Men by the Heels, and that Men would be apt to revenge themselves by striking them on the Head. What has this Trifle to do with the Loss of Mankind, with the Corruption of the natural and moral World, and the Ruin of all the Glory and Happiness of the Creation? Great Comfort it was to Adam, doubtless, after telling him that his Days should

be short and full of Misery, and his End without Hope, to let him know that he should now and then knock a Snake on the Head, but not even that, without paying dear for his poor Victory, for the Snake should often bite him by the Heel. Adam, surely, could not understand the Prophecy in this sense, tho' some of his Sons have so understood it; a plain Indication how much more some Men are concerned to maintain a literal Interpretation of Scripture, than they are to make it speak common Sense. Leaving this therefore as absolutely absurd and ridiculous, let us consider what Meaning the Circumstances of the Transaction do necessarily fix to the Words of this Prophecy. Adam tempted by his Wife, and she by the Serpent, had fallen from their Obedience, and were now in the Presence of God expecting Judgment. They knew full well at this Juncture, that their Fall was the Victory of the Serpent, whom by Experience they found to be an Enemy to God and to Man; to Man, whom he had ruined by seducing him to Sin; to God, the noblest Work of whose Creation he had defaced. It could not therefore but be some Comfort to them to hear the Serpent first condemned, and to see that, however he had prevailed against them, he had gained no Victory over their Maker, who was able to assert his own Honour, and to this great Author of Iniquity. By this Method of God's Proceeding they were secured from thinking that there was any evil Being equal to the Creator in Power and Dominion. An Opinion which gained Ground in After-times thro' the Prevalency of Evil; and is, where it does prevail, destructive of all true Religion. The Condemnation therefore of the Serpent was the Maintenance of God's Supremacy; and that it was so understood, we have, if I mistake not, a very ancient Testimony in the Book of Job: *With God is Strength and Wisdom, the Deceived and the Deceiver are his, i. e. equally subject to his Command, Job. xii. 26.* The Belief of God's supreme Dominion, which is the Foundation of all Religion, being preserved, it was still necessary to give them such Hopes as might make them capable of Religion toward God. These Hopes they could not but conceive, when they heard from the Mouth of God that the Serpent's Victory was not a complete Victory over even themselves; that they and their Posterity should be enabled to contest his Empire; and tho' they were to suffer much in the