to mature by sun and ſhowers, the firſt pair muſt have periſhed before a single vegetable could be fit to furniſh them with food; and we may ſuppoſe that it was to prevent this diſaſter that the garden of Eden was miraculouſly ſtored at once with full grown trees and fruit in perfect maturity, whilſt the rest of the earth was left under the ordinary laws of vegetation. There is, however, no evidence that they were only the se*eds* of vegetables that God created. On the contrary, Moſes says expreſsly @@\*, that God made the earth on the third day bring forth the herb *yielding* seed after his kind, and the *tree yielding fruit* whole s*eed* was in itſelf after his kind :” and when he recapitulates the hiſtory of the creation, he ſays, that God made, not every seed, but every *plant* of the field *before* it was in the earth, and every *herb* of the field *before* it grew. From the proceſs of vege­tation, therefore, nothing can be inferred with reſpect to the time of Adam’s introduction into Paradiſe, or to aſcertain the duration of his original ſtate of nature. If angels were created during the six days of which the Hebrew law­giver writes the hiſtory, an hypothesis very generally received (ſee Angel), though in the opinion of the preſent writer not very probable, there can be no doubt but our firſt pa­rents lived a conſiderable time under the law of nature before they were raiſed to a ſuperior ſtation in the garden of Eden ; for it ſeems very evident that the period of their continu­ance *in* that ſtation was not long. Of this, however, no­thing can be ſaid with certainty. They may have lived for years or only a few days in their original ſtate ; but it is very neceſſary to diſtinguiſh between that ſtate in which they were under no other diſpenſation than what is com­monly called *natural religion,* entitled, upon their obedience, to the indefinite rewards of piety and virtue, and their ſtate in Paradiſe when they were put under a new law, and by the free grace of God promiſed, if they ſhould be obedient, a ſupernatural and eternal reward. Into that ſtate we muſt now attend them, and aſcertain, if we can, the preciſe terms of the firſt covenant.

Moſes, who in this inveſtigation is our only guide, tells us, that the Lord God, after he had formed the firſt pair, “ planted a garden eaſtward in Eden, and took the man and put him into the garden to dreſs it and to keep it. And the Lord God (continues he) commanded the man, faying, of every tree of the garden thou mayeſt freely eat ; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil thou ſhalt not eat of it ; for in the day that thou eateſt thereof, thou ſhalt ſurely died@@\*’’ Here is no mention made of the laws of piety and moral virtue reſulting from the relation in which the various individuals of the human race ſtand to each other, and in which all as creatures ſtand to God their Almighty and beneficient Creator. With theſe laws Adam was aheady well acquainted ; and he muſt have been ſenſible, that as they were founded in his nature no ſubſequent law could diſpense with their obligation. They have been equally binding upon all men in every ſtate and under every diſpenſation ; and they will continue to be so as long as the general practice of juſtice, mercy, and piety, ſhall contribute to the sum of human happiness. The new law peculiar to his paradiſaical ſtate was the command not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This was a poſitive precept, not founded in the nature of man, but very proper to be the teſt of his obedience to the will of his Creator. The laws of piety and virtue are ſanctioned by nature, or by that general ſyſtem of rules according to which God governs the physical and moral worlds, and by which he has ſecured, in ſome ſtate or other, happineſs to the pious and virtuous man, and miſery to ſuch as ſhall prove incorrigibly wicked. The law respecting the forbidden fruit was ſanctioned by the penalty of *death* denounced againſt diſobedience ; and by the ſubjects of that law the nature of this penalty muſt have been perfectly underſtood : but Chriſtian divines, as we ſhall afterwards ſee, have differed widely in opinion respecting the full import of the Hebrew words which our tranſlators have rendered by the phraſe *thou ſhalt ſurely die.* All, however, agree that they threaten­ed death, in the common acceptation of the word, or the ſeparation of the soul and body as one part of the puniſhment to be incurred by eating the forbidden fruit ; and hence we muſt infer, that had the forbidden fruit not been eaten, our firſt parents would never have died, becauſe the penalty of death was denounced againſt no other tranſgreſſion. What therefore is ſaid reſpecting the fruit of the tree of knowledge, implies not only a law but also a covenant @@(l), promiſing to man, upon the obſervance of one poſitive pre­cept, immortality or eternal life ; which is not eſſential to the nature of any created being, and cannot be claimed as the merited reward of the greateſt virtue or the most ser­vent piety.

This obvious truth will enable us to diſpoſe of the ob­jections which have been sometimes brought by free-think­ing divines againſt the wiſdom and juſtice of puniſhing ſo ſeverely as by death the breach of a mere poſitive precept ; which, considered in itſelf, or as connected with the general principles of moral obligation, appears to be a precept of very little importance. We have only to reply, that as an exemption from death is not due either to the nature or to the virtue of man, it was wise and juſt to make it depend upon the obſervance of a poſitive precept, to impreſs upon the minds of our firſt parents a conſtant conviction that they were to be preſerved immortal, not in the ordinary courſe of divine pro­vidence, but by the ſpecial grace and favour of God. The same conſideration will ſhow us the folly of thoſe men who, becauſe the terms of the firſt covenant, as ſtated in ſome ſyſtems of theology, agree not with certain philoſophical maxims which they have adopted, are for turning all that is ſaid of the trees of knowledge and of life into figure and allegory. But the other trees which Adam and Eve were permitted to eat were certainly real trees, or they muſt have periſhed for want of food. And what rules of interpretation will authoriſe us to interpret *eating* and *trees* literally in one part of the ſentence and figuratively in the other ? A garden

@@@[m]\* Gen. i. 12.

@@@[m]\* Gen. ii. 8, 15, 16, 17.

@@@(l) It does not appear that any tranſaction between God and mankind in general was denominated by a word equiva­lent to the Engliſh word *covenant* till the end of the fourth century, when ſuch phraſeology was introduced into the church by the celebrated Auguſtine, biſhop of Hippo. That the phraſeology is ſtrictly proper, no man can ſuppoſe who reflects on the infinite diſtance between the contracting parties, and the abſolute dominion of the one over the other, To be capable of entering into a *covenant,* in the proper ſenſe of the word, both parties muſt have a right either to agree to the terms propoſed or to reject them ; but ſurely Adam had no right to bargain with his Maker, or to refuse the gift of immortality on the terms on which it was offered to him. The word *diſpenſation* would more accurately denote what is here meant by the word *covenant ;* but as this laſt is in general uſe, we have retained it as ſufficient, when thus explained, to diſtinguiſh what man received from God upon certain poſitive conditions, from what he had a claim to by the conſtitution of his nature.