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AN  
**EXAMINATION**  
OF THE  
Lord Bishop of LONDON'S DISCOURSES  
CONCERNING  
The Use and Intent of PROPHECY.

WITH  
Some cursory Animadversions on his late APPENDIX,  
OR ADDITIONAL DISSERTATION,  
Containing a farther Inquiry into the Mosaic  
Account of the FALL.

IN WHICH  
These following Points are chiefly explained and affirmed.

- I. That the use of Prophecy, as it was taught and practised by Christ, His Apostles, and Evangelists, was drawn intirely from single and separate prædictions, gathered by them from the books of the Law and the Prophets, and applied, independently on each other, to the several acts and circumstances of the Life of Jesus, as so many distinct proofs of his Divine Mission. And consequently, that His Lordship's pretended chain of Antediluvian Prophecies, is nothing else, but a fancifull conceit, which has no connection at all with the evidences of the Gospel.
- II. That the Bishop's exposition of his text is forced, unnatural, and inconsistent with the sense of St. Peter, from whose Epistle it is taken.
- III. That the Historical Interpretation, which He gives to the Account of the Fall, is absurd and contradictory to reason: and that the said account cannot be considered, under any other character, than that of Allegory, Apologue, or Moral Fable.
- IV. That the Oracles of the Heathen World, which His Lordship declares to have been given out by the Devil, in the form of a Serpent, were all impostures, wholly managed by human craft, without any supernatural aid, or interposition whatsoever.

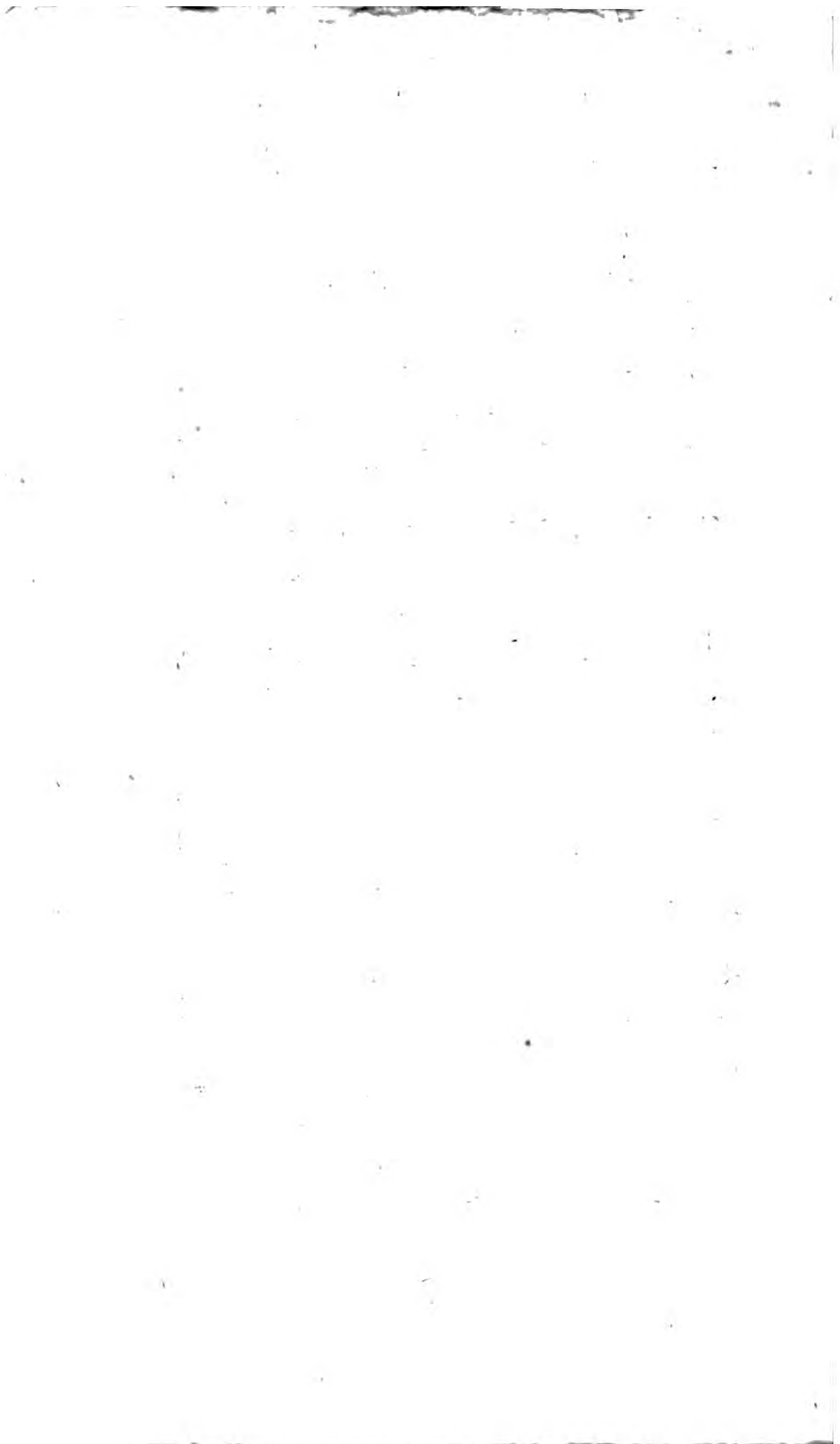
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By CONYERS MIDDLETON, D. D.

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A N  
E X A M I N A T I O N  
O F T H E  
L o r d B i s h o p o f L O N D O N ' s D I S C O U R S E S  
O N T H E  
U s e a n d I n t e n t o f P R O P H E C Y .

**T**HE Reader perhaps may wonder, that these Discourses, which I am going to examine, concerning *the Use and Intent of Prophecy*, published so many years ago by Dr. *Sherlock*, now Bishop of *London*, and since corrected and enlarged by him in several successive editions, should meet with a Censurer at last so hardy, as to call the merit of them into question. But the truth is, I had never read them till very lately; or otherwise these animadversions might have made their appearance probably much earlier. My omission however to read them did not flow from any contempt either of

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the subject, or of the Author's capacity to adorn it. I knew the subject to be important ; and, for that reason, did not chuse to take my notion of it upon trust : I knew His Lordship also to be eminently qualified, to dress up any subject into any form, which would best serve his own views, and was jealous of warping my judgement by some bias, which his authority might be apt to imprint : for as far as my experience has reached, I have ever found authority a treacherous guide to a searcher after truth ; and theories in all Sciences, the chief obstacles of real knowledge.

In questions therefore, relating to the evidences of the Christian religion, instead of paying any regard to the confident assertions of angry disputants, who generally come determined to support the particular systems, which are embraced by their own party : it has been my custom, to recurr directly to the Scriptures, as the common source of all religious opinions to Christians, and  
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the sole standard, by which the truth of them can be tried. Thus when the Nature of Prophecy, considered as an evidence of the Gospel, was made the subject of a controversy, which gave birth to these same Discourses, I endeavoured to inform myself, what sort of character was given to it in the New Testament, and what use was actually made of it by Christ himself and his Apostles, towards illustrating the divinity of his mission; and having settled in my mind a notion of it, agreeable to the testimonies of the sacred writers, I thought it an idle curiosity and waste of time, to inquire, what any modern Divine had preached or written about it; because the whole, that can be known authentically concerning it's relation to Christianity, must be learnt from those, who first planted Christianity, and were instructed by the Author of it, on what foundation it rested, and how far the argument of Prophecy was usefull to it's propagation and support.

These Discourses therefore might have passed still unregarded by me, if they had not been accidentally recommended to my perusal, by a late conversation, in which they were urged in contradiction to something advanced on the subject of Prophecy, which I took to be both reasonable and important. This gave me an inclination to review the whole question, for the sake either of confirming or correcting my own notion of it; and to take these Discourses at the same time into consideration; especially, as it would free me from the reproach of slighting that information, which I might possibly receive from them. Upon this task I soon after entered, and found this capital work of his Lordship to be just such as I expected; exhibiting a species of reasoning peculiar to himself, ever subtil and refined, yet never convincing; and proper rather to perplex, than to illustrate the notion of Prophecy; and to amuse rather, than instruct an inquisitive reader. I found much art and  
pains



pains employed, to dress up an imaginary scheme, of which I had not discovered the least trace in any of the four Gospels; and in which, as far as I was able to judge, he seemed to have rejected the whole evidence of Prophecy, as it was understood and applied by the Apostles and Evangelists; and to have substituted in its place a romantic system, or fanciful chain of antediluvian predictions, as the sole ground, on which any solid argument of the prophetick kind could be urged in favor of Christianity.

This, tho' it must needs appear strange in Discourses delivered from the pulpit, He prepares us to expect, by a short Preface, in which He says—  
 “ They who consider the Prophecies  
 “ under the Old Testament, as so many  
 “ predictions onely, independent on  
 “ each other, can never form a right  
 “ judgement, of the argument for  
 “ the truth of Christianity, drawn from  
 “ this topick, nor be able to satisfy  
 “ themselves, when they are confront-

“ ed with the objections of unbelievers.  
 “ It is an easy matter, for men of lei-  
 “ sure and tolerable parts, to find dif-  
 “ ficulties in particular prædictions, and  
 “ in the application of them made by  
 “ writers, who lived many hundred  
 “ years ago, and who had many anti-  
 “ ent books and records of the Jewish  
 “ Church, from which they drew ma-  
 “ ny passages, and perhaps some Pro-  
 “ phecies, which books and records  
 “ we have not, to inable us to under-  
 “ stand and to justify their applicati-  
 “ ons, &c. [1].”

What

[1] These words are transcribed from a Preface, pre-  
 fixed to the third Edition of the Discourses, which was the  
 onely one, that I made use of, or had then seen. I have  
 since learnt, that there are two later Editions, in which  
 the Preface is omitted, tho' without any observable altera-  
 tion in the Discourses themselves, or any reason given  
 for that omission; which must needs afford matter of spe-  
 culation to the reader. The purpose of the Preface was,  
 to give the reader a proper notion of the subject of the  
 Discourses, and of his manner of treating it. If it was  
 withdrawn therefore, on the account of any change of  
 sentiments with regard to it, we might have expected from  
 him some little eclarcissement on that head, especially  
 since the Discourses, to which it related, continue still un-  
 changed. Or if, after three successive Editions, the Pre-  
 face was dropped, as being judged at last too slight and tri-  
 vial for a performance of such importance; that, tho' it  
 would have been a good reason for not giving it at the first,  
 is

What the Bishop here declares, relates, as he afterwards signifies, to the  
 case

is but a paltry one for recalling it, when once given. We love to retain every scrap of a celebrated writer, in it's natural and original form, and after twenty years possession, think it an injury to be deprived of it. As His Lordship however had some motive undoubtedly, for taking a step so unusual, so the reader will naturally be guessing, what it might probably be ; and many will be apt to think that the passage, which I have cited from it, carries in it so direct a condemnation of that use of single and separate Prophecies, which was made by the Evangelists, that it was omitted for that very reason, as tending to raise scruples in people's minds, to the disadvantage of His Lordship's scheme. But this offence, tho' now removed, as far as it was given by the Preface, remains still in it's full force in the body of the Discourses. The obvious tendency of which, as every one must see, is, to represent the weakness of all that prophetic evidence, which the Evangelists have applied, to evince the truth of the Gospel.

In the conclusion of the same Preface, His Lordship expresses some diffidence, concerning the truth or solidity of an hypothesis, which he labors to inculcate through his whole fourth Discourse ; viz. " That the curse denounced  
 " by God against the earth, for the transgression of our first  
 " Parents, was completed and finally ceased at the Deluge,  
 " when it's original fertility was restored to it, by an express covenant with *Noah*, according to a Prophecy of  
 " his Father *Lamech*." [ *Gen. v. 28.* ] Now tho' nothing can be more weak and irrational than this hypothesis, yet when the Author proposes it with modesty, as a conjecture, or hasty thought, not duly considered by him, our disgust of course is softened, and the severity of our criticism checked : but as the case now stands, when we see a most ridiculous conceit enforced with the greatest zeal and seriousness in an Episcopal Sermon, and find the sole excuse, which could be made, and which had been made for it, deliberately suppressed, we are provoked of

case of a certain Freethinking Author, who had ridiculed the Prophecies of the Old Testament, which are cited in the New, as trifling and impertinent, and bearing no sort of relation to the particular cases or persons, to which they are applied : yet, in this attempt, that Author has not considered those Prophecies in any other method, nor under any other character ; than that, in which they were considered by the Evangelists themselves, who applied them, *singly and independently on each other*, to this or that occasion, as so many different arguments for the gene-

course to treat it with all that contempt, which it justly deserves.

But to say the truth, I have never observed a stronger instance of the public patience and blind deference to the authority of a Great name, than in the case of these very Discourses ; which, tho' in all parts greatly exceptionable, and furnishing matter of offence in every page, have yet passed through many Editions, not onely without reproof, but with some degree even of approbation. And it was this experience perhaps of what the world would bear, which made His Lordship resolve to withdraw his Preface, and to treat us no longer with any ceremony ; having seen, that notwithstanding the consciousness, which he had declared, of being in the wrong, the public was still disposed to think him in the right, and that his nonsense would go down with them, without giving him the trouble of making an excuse for it.

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ral truth of the Gospel ; so that by condemning his manner of considering them, His Lordship condemns that of the Evangelists at the same time : but since the use, which was made of Prophecy in the New Testament, is the sole rule, by which we can form a just notion of it, or determine the propriety either of His Lordship's scheme, or of these Animadversions upon it, it will be necessary in the first place, to draw out a distinct account, of what those sacred Writers have delivered concerning it.

It is affirmed then by the testimonies of all the Evangelists, how *Jesus* himself constantly taught, that his person and character were particularly foretold and marked out *by Moses and all the later Prophets*, as the *Messiah*, or that great Prophet, who was to come : and that he came accordingly, as it had been foretold to them, *not to destroy the law and the Prophets, but to fulfill them* [1]. Thus in an expostulation

[1] Matt. v. 17.

with

with the Jews, for their obstinate rejection of him, He exhorts them *to search the Scriptures* for the proofs of his character and mission, for *in them*, says he, *ye think that ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me.* To which he immediately subjoins, *there is one, that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom you trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me; for he wrote of me* [1]. When he was risen also from the dead, and appeared to the two Disciples going to *Emmaus*, who still doubted of his resurrection, tho' it had been reported to them by the women; "He said unto them; O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: ought not Christ to have suffered, and to enter into his glory? And, *beginning at Moses and all the Prophets*, he expounded unto them, in all the Scriptures, the things concerning himself [2]."

[1] Joh. v. 39.—45.

[2] Luk. xxiv. 25.

Here

Here then we see our Lord grounding the authority of his mission on the evidence of Prophecy ; and declaring that *Moses and the Prophets* had written and testified of him, in a manner so express, that those, who believed *Moses*, must of course, if they were consistent, believe also in him. In proof of which, he appeals to the Scriptures ; exhorts the Jews to search them ; and puts the trial of his veracity, on the issue of that search : and this, we may imagine, was the subject of all his discourses, as oft as he went into the Synagogues, according to his constant custom, in every place whither he came. The Evangelists however, tho' they all agree in affirming this, to have been his general way of arguing with the Jews, yet have recorded but a few of those particular Prophecies, which were alledged by him on such occasions, as prefigurative of his character and mission.

For instance ; at *Nazareth*, the place of his education and ordinary residence,

fidence, he applied to himself a Prophecy of *Isaiab*, in which the principal characters, ascribed by the Jews to the Messiah, are particularly enumerated: “ For upon his entrance into  
 “ the Synagogue on the Sabbath, the  
 “ book of the prophet *Isaiab* being  
 “ put into his hands, he opened it,  
 “ and found the place, where it was  
 “ written; the spirit of the Lord is  
 “ upon me, because he hath anointed  
 “ me to preach the Gospel to the poor;  
 “ he hath sent me to heal the broken-  
 “ hearted; to preach deliverance to  
 “ the Captives, and recovering of sight  
 “ to the blind; and to set at liberty  
 “ them, that are bruised; to preach  
 “ the acceptable year of the Lord—  
 “ He then closed the book, and gave  
 “ it again to the Minister, and sat  
 “ down; and, all the eyes of the Synagogue being fastened upon him,  
 “ he began to say unto them, *this day*  
 “ *is this Scripture fulfilled in your*  
 “ *ears.*” On which he preached to  
 them in such an affecting manner,  
 “ that



“ that they all bare him witness, and  
 “ wondered at the gracious words,  
 “ which proceeded out of his mouth [1].”  
 In another place also, speaking to the  
 multitude concerning the character of  
*John the Baptist*, he affirms him to be  
 the forerunner, sent by God to dispose  
 the world for the reception of his Gos-  
 pel, telling them, *This is he, of whom  
 it is written, behold I send my messenger  
 before thy face, which shall prepare thy  
 way before thee* [2]. In one of his Ser-  
 mons also to the unbelieving Jews, He  
 declares himself, to be denoted by *that  
 corner-stone*, of which the Psalmist pro-  
 phetically says, *The stone, which the  
 builders rejected, the same is become the  
 head of the corner* [3]. On another  
 occasion, where he was foretelling to  
 his Disciples the treachery of *Judas*,  
 he signifies it, to have been permitted,  
*that the Scripture might be fulfilled,  
 where it is said, He that eateth bread  
 with me, lifteth up his heel against*

[1] Luc. iv. 16. [2] Matt. xi. 10. Luc. vii. 27.

[3] Luk. xx. 17.

*me* [1]. And when he was intimating to them the approach of his death and the manner of it, he applies the words of *Isaiab*, as then ready to be fulfilled in him, saying; *that this, which is written, must yet be accomplished in me; And he was reckoned among the transgressors; for the things concerning me have an end* [2]. There are two or three instances more, where he affirms the words of *Isaiab*, and of the *Psalmist*, to be fulfilled, by the infidelity of the Jews, who would not receive him upon the testimony of their own Prophets. *In them, says he, is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaias, which saith; by hearing ye shall hear and shall not understand, and seeing ye shall see and shall not perceive* [3]. Again; when he was betrayed by *Judas* into the hands of those who came to seize him, *Peter* having drawn his sword, and wounded one of the company, *Jesus* reprov'd him, by saying; "Put up thy sword—thinkest thou, that I

[1] Jo. xiii. 1. 8 [2] Luk. xxii. 37. [3] Matt. xiii. 14.

“ cannot now pray to my Father, and  
 “ he shall presently give me more than  
 “ twelve legions of Angels ? but how  
 “ then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled,  
 “ that thus it must be ? ” to which he  
 presently adds, “ but all this was done,  
 “ that the Scriptures of the Prophets  
 “ might be fulfilled [ 1 ], ” plainly sig-  
 nifying, that there was not any circum-  
 stance of his life, which had not been  
 foretold in such a manner, that the  
 accomplishment of it, by its conformi-  
 ty with the prediction, might answer  
 the purpose intended by God of de-  
 monstrating the Divinity of his cha-  
 racter.

Lastly ; after his resurrection, having  
 spent forty days still on earth, in con-  
 firming and instructing his Apostles, in  
 things pertaining to the Kingdom of  
 God, and being just ready to ascend in-  
 to heaven, and now giving them his  
 last instructions, “ He said unto them ;  
 “ These are the words, which I spake

[ 1 ] Matt. 26. xxvi.

“ unto

“ unto you, while I was yet with you,  
 “ that all things must be fulfilled,  
 “ which were written in the Law of  
 “ *Moses, and in the Prophets, and in*  
 “ *the Psalms concerning me.* Then  
 “ opened he their understandings, that  
 “ they might understand the Scri-  
 “ ptures ; and said unto them, thus it  
 “ is written, and thus it behoved Christ  
 “ to suffer, and to rise from the dead  
 “ the third day ; and that repentance  
 “ and remission of sins should be  
 “ preached in his name among all na-  
 “ tions, beginning at *Jerusalem* : and  
 “ ye are witnesses of these things [ 1 ].”

These instances of the use of Pro-  
 phesy, as it was applied by *Jesus* him-  
 self, sufficiently shew, that the antient  
 Prophecies were considered by him sin-  
 gly and independently, as so many di-  
 stinct arguments, for the truth of his  
 mission ; and consequently, that those,  
 who consider them in the same light,  
 may, in contradiction to what his

[ 1 ] Luk. xxiv. 44.



wards by his Apostles ; and of whom the first Christian Church was intirely composed. But their notion of Prophecy, considered as a proof of the Gospel, was not drawn from any scheme of it, deduced from Adam, and the Antediluvian World ; nor do they refer us, for the evidences of our faith, to I know not what *Prophecies of Enoch, or Noah* ; but to *Moses and the Prophe's*, whose writings were in every body's hands, and of an authority allowed and indisputable.

After the example of their Master, they *begin with Moses*, as the first Prophet, who speaks at all of Christ, nor ever appeal to any other Prophecies, as applicable to Christ, but what were expressly found *in the law*, and the later Prophets. Thus *Philip*, as soon as he became a follower of Christ, meeting with *Nathanael*, saith unto him ; *we have found him, of whom Moses in the Law, and the Prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth the son of Joseph* [ 1 ].

[1] John i. 45.

And

And as by the evidence of these the Jews had been previously taught to expect a Messiah, out of the family of *David*, who was to publish a new law of righteousness, more perfect than that of *Moses*, so the evangelists made it their business to shew, from the same writings, that *the Messiah*, whom they had been looking for, was no other than that same *Jesus*, whom they had crucified. With this view, they collected from every part of the Old Testament all the several Prophecies, relating to *the Messiah*, and applied them separately to each act or circumstance of the life of *Jesus*, to which they thought them applicable, and by which they declare them to be fulfilled.

St. *Matthew* especially, who published his Gospel the first, and in the Hebrew tongue, for the particular information of the Jews, seems to have been more diligent than the rest, in collecting these prophetic testimonies, and applying them severally on all occasions, as to many distinct proofs of

the mission of Jesus. There is scarce a single occurrence, which ever happened to Christ, but what he declares to have been before told by some Prophet, and fullfilled by a correspondent event. “ The conception of him by  
 “ a Virgin ; his birth at *Bethlehem* ;  
 “ the conveyance of him into *Ægypt* ;  
 “ and reconveyance into *Judea* ; his  
 “ dwelling at *Nazareth* ; his removal  
 “ to *Capernaum* ; his cure of diseases ;  
 “ his custom of teaching by parables ;  
 “ his riding into *Jerusalem* upon an  
 “ ass ; his being betrayed by *Ju-*  
 “ *das* ; sold for thirty pieces of silver ;  
 “ the parting of his garments, and  
 “ casting lots for them ; his cruci-  
 “ fixation ; with the particular circum-  
 “ stances accompanying it ; the Thieves  
 “ who suffered with him ; the vine-  
 “ gar given him to drink ; the wound  
 “ made in his side ; the omission  
 “ of breaking his bones ; his resur-  
 “ rection and ascension, are all af-  
 “ firmed to have been so ordered and  
 “ so transacted, by the special counsil of  
 “ God,



“ God, *that the Scriptures of the*  
 “ *Prophets might be fulfilled by*  
 “ *them* [ 1 ].

All the other Evangelists pursue the same method, of applying the antient Prophecies singly, and independently on each other, as so many arguments for the divine authority of the Gospel: and it must surely be allowed, that any single Prophecy, delivered for that purpose, and literally fulfilled, is a strong proof of it, tho' we had reason even to neglect the rest, as uncertain and precarious. But according to the assertion of this eminent Prelate, the argument drawn from Prophecies, considered singly and independently, (as they were in fact considered by the Evangelists,) can neither satisfy any body, nor bear to be confronted with the objections of unbelievers: and on this principle his six Discourses are manifestly grounded. For when that Free-thinking Author undertook to shew, that the prophetic testimonies, which

[ 1 ] Matt. i. 23: ii. 5; 15; 23: iv. 14, &c.

are applied by the Evangelists, to evince the truth of the Gospel, are in reality no proofs at all, he plainly gives up those testimonies, as incapable of being justified ; and amuses us with Prophecies, as old as the world itself ; deduced from our first parent *Adam* ; affirming this to be the onely notion of Prophecy, which can supply any satisfactory argument for the truth of Christianity.

He adds indeed one good reason, for his preference of this comprehensive scheme, in a controversy with unbelievers, to that narrow way, which the Evangelists chose, of appealing to single prædictions, “ because it is an  
 “ easy matter, he says, for men of  
 “ leisure and tolerable parts, to find  
 “ difficulties in particular prædictions,  
 “ and in the application of them – but  
 “ not so easy, to shew, that a chain of  
 “ Prophecies, reaching through several  
 “ thousand years, delivered at different  
 “ times, yet manifestly subservient to  
 “ one and the same end, is the effect of  
 “ art

“art and contrivance.” By this way then of considering Prophecy, he has put the labouring oar upon his adversary, which in the other way of considering it, must have been thrown upon himself : but whatever ease it may give to His Lordship in this particular dispute, to consider Prophecy in so extensive a view, yet, with regard to the service of Christianity, I cannot see the least difference or advantage in his scheme, except in the greater length of his prophetic chain, than of that, which the Evangelists made use of : for the Prophecies, as they are applied singly in the Gospels, are all of them subservient to one and the same purpose of Providence, as well as in his hypothesis ; but the Evangelical chain, which begins with *Moses*, reaches only through several hundred years ; whereas his chain, which begins with *Adam*, reaches through several thousand. Yet this extension of it into the antediluvian ages can serve no other end, but to envelope a plain question of fact in clouds

and mystery ; which may afford more ground indeed for a fancyfull genius, to build it's airy castles upon, but none at all on which we can raise any solid or satisfactory argument.

But whatever view His Lordship had, in recurring to this expedient, it is certain, that there was no occasion to desert that foundation, which the Evangelists had laid, and to take refuge in a precarious System, calculated rather to create scruples, than to cure them. For should we allow, what He Himself plainly intimates, that the particular Prophecies, as they are applied by the Evangelists in their several Gospels, are clogged with very great difficulties by that Freethinking Author, there is a solution of them, obvious and natural, supplied by the case itself, which, tho' not agreeable perhaps to the principles of systematic or political Divines, cannot possibly hurt the authority of the Gospel, because it is grounded on facts, expressly delivered by the Gospel. But this perhaps I may  
take

take occasion to explaine hereafter in a particular treatise, and shall now proceede, to lay my present remarks before the reader, in the same order, in which His Lordship's arguments, to which they severally relate, are ranged by him in his Discourses.

The Text, which he has chosen for the common subject, and foundation of all these Discourses, is ;

2 *Epist. of Pet. c. i. 19.*

*We have also a more sure word of Prophecy, whereunto ye do well, that ye take heed, as unto a light, that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts.*

The first observation, which His Lordship makes upon this text, is, that  
 “ a comparifon is evidently formed in  
 “ it, between *the word of Prophecy,*  
 “ and some other thing before men-  
 “ tioned : and in order to shew, what  
 “ the thing is, with which Prophecy  
 “ is here compared, he refers us to the  
 “ three

“ three verses, which immediately pre-  
“ cede ;”

Ver. 16. *For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of his Majesty.*

Ver. 17. *For He receiv'd from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*

Ver. 18. *And this voice, which came from heaven, we heard, when we were with him in the holy Mount.*

Ver. 19. *We have also, &c.*

From this whose passage, “ we may  
“ see, says he, on what foundation the  
“ inference of those writers stands,  
“ who assert ; that the evidence, which  
“ Christians have from Prophecy, for  
“ the certainty of their hopes, is greater  
“ and surer, than the evidence, which  
“ they have from the preaching of the  
“ Apostles, who were eye-witnesses  
“ and

“ and ear-witneſſes of what they report,  
 “ concerning the majeſty of Chriſt :  
 “ or in the words of a late Author,  
 “ that Prophecy is a ſtronger argu-  
 “ ment than a miracle, which de-  
 “ pends upon external evidence and  
 “ testimony [ 1 ].”

Now the confutation of this inference, as it was deduced by that Author from this text, being the Subject of the Biſhop's two firſt Diſcourſes, it will be neceſſary, to give the reader a diſtinct notion of the point in controverſy between them, that he may form the clearer judgement of his Lordſhip's reaſoning upon it : for which purpoſe, I ſhall draw out that Author's opinion, as it is ſtated in his own words, of which, for certain reaſons, this learned Prelate has given us onely a ſmall part ; and ſhall confront it with the Biſhop's ſenſe of the text, as it is explained alſo by himſelf.

That Author then, in the paſſage of his book, to which we are referred,

[ 1 ] Page 2, 3.

having

having shewn, how *Jesus* and his Apostles grounded Christianity on proofs, drawn from the Prophecies of the Old Testament and applied by them in the New, immediately adds ;  
 “ And it is strongly and invincibly  
 “ established on those foundations : be-  
 “ cause a proof drawn from an in-  
 “ spired book is perfectly conclusive ;  
 “ and Prophecies delivered in an inspi-  
 “ red book are, when fullfilled, such,  
 “ as may be justly deemed sure and de-  
 “ monstrative proofs, and which *Peter*  
 “ prefers, as an argument, to the mi-  
 “ raculous attestation, whereof he  
 “ himself, and two other Apostles  
 “ were witnesses, given by God him-  
 “ self to the mission of *Jesus Christ*.  
 “ His argument seems as follows ; lay-  
 “ ing this foundation, that Prophecy  
 “ procedes from the Holy Ghost, it is  
 “ a stronger argument than a miracle,  
 “ which depends upon external evi-  
 “ dence and testimony [ 1. ]”

[ 1 ] See the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion, p. 27.



As far as these words go, there is certainly nothing in them, but what a sincere advocate of the Gospel might freely allow and join issue upon; but they came from an enemy, who had a crafty view in extolling the credit of Prophecy, in order to depress it afterwards the more effectually: and this was the ground of his Lordship's resolution to confute, or, at all events, to contradict them: which last part he has performed with great spirit, but how far he has succeeded in the first, will be seen in the following remarks.

In the mean while, His Lordship's exposition of the text is this; " that  
 " the word of Prophecy is compared  
 " indeed and preferred here by St.  
 " *Peter* to the evidence of that heaven-  
 " ly voice, which *he* himself had heard  
 " in the Mount, yet not, as that Free-  
 " thinking Author imagines; on the  
 " account of its being a surer proof,  
 " or better argument for the general  
 " truth of the Gospel, but onely for  
 " the particular article of *Christ's com-*  
 " *ing*

“ *ing again in glory*, to which case  
 “ alone the comparison relates ; for  
 “ with regard to the truth of the Gos-  
 “ pel, *Peter* is so far from speaking of  
 “ Prophecy in this place, as the best  
 “ evidence, that he manifestly speaks  
 “ of it as not the best [ 1 ].”

Having set forth these two opposite interpretations of the text, I shall proceed to examine the several arguments by which the Bishop attempts, in the first place, to confute his Adversary's sense ; and in the second, to establish his own.

He begins by an appeal to authority, and declares ; *that the Author's exposition is rejected, as far as he sees, by all Interpreters* [ 2 ]. This indeed is surprising ; for in the very passage to which he refers us, his Adversary has cited two Interpreters, as agreeing with him directly in the same exposition, Mr. *Whiston* and Dr. *Whitby* : the last of whom expressly says, “ the word of

[ 1 ] See Disc. p. 18, 19, 20, &amp;c.

[ 2 ] Ib. p. 3.

“ Prophecy is called by St. *Peter* more  
 “ sure, than the testimony of what he  
 “ had heard in the Mount: which was  
 “ not so certain and convincing to the  
 “ Jews, as the Record of their own  
 “ Prophets: whence the Apostles,  
 “ both in disputing with unbelieving  
 “ Jews, and writing to the believers,  
 “ among them, confirm their doctrines  
 “ from the writings of the Old Testa-  
 “ ment [ 1 ].” In the collection also of  
 the sacred Critics, he might have seen St.  
*Austin*, as he is cited by *Erasmus*, in-  
 interpreting this text in the same man-  
 ner; *that the word of Prophecy is call-  
 ed by St. Peter more sure, not more true,  
 than the miraculous attestation in the  
 Mount; because cavillers might ascribe  
 a voice delivered from heaven to Magi-  
 cal arts, which they could not do, in the  
 case of Prophecy [ 2 ].* *Castalio* also in-  
 terprets these words, *more sure*, as they  
 are applied here to Prophecy, to signi-  
 fy; *more effectual to persuade and draw*

[ 1 ] See His Comment. on the Text.

[ 2 ] Vid Crit. Sacr. in loc.

*men to Christ.* And *Grotius* paraphrases the same words, as if the Apostle had said ; *The word of Prophecy, had always great Authority with us, but now a much greater, after we have seen the events correspond so aptly with the prædictions, concerning the Messiah* [1]. An able Advocate also of our Church in the Popish controversy, touching upon this very question, observes, that our Saviour appeals more to the Scriptures of the Old Testament, for the truth of his mission, than to his miracles ; and that it is the testimony of the Scriptures, into which the testimony of his miracles must be resolved. And this he confirms by the authority of the text now before us, in which *St. Peter* prefers the testimony of the Scriptures to that miraculous attestation given to Jesus in the Mount, of which he himself was a witness—  
 “ The Old Testament, says he, is  
 “ here called *a word of Prophecy*, be-

[1] Ibid.

“ cause

“ cause the great business of those books  
 “ was, to prepare mankind for the recep-  
 “ tion of Christ by all sorts of predicti-  
 “ ons. And now that Christ was  
 “ come, if there remained any dark-  
 “ nefs or doubting in their minds, who  
 “ had seen and known other testimo-  
 “ nies given to *Jesus*, they were to  
 “ take heed to the word of Prophecy,  
 “ and diligently observe the correspon-  
 “ dence of the event with the pre-  
 “ diction of all things foretold con-  
 “ cerning Christ; in doing which,  
 “ their doubts would by degrees vanish,  
 “ and at last they would grow to a  
 “ clear and strong persuasion. *St. Pe-*  
 “ *ter* therefore calls *the word of Pro-*  
 “ *phesy, a more sure word*, because  
 “ it is the best means to make us  
 “ sure [ 1 ].”

Now all these Expositors, with many more, whom I might easily collect,

[ 1 ] See a Pamphlet in the Popish controversy printed 1687. in Quarto, called, *The School of the Eucharist, published upon the miraculous respect*, &c. supposed to be written by *Dr. Cradock*. Pref. p. xiii, xiv.

manifestly confirm this interpretation of the text, which the Bishop is laboring to confute, and take the word of Prophecy to be proposed here by St. *Peter*, as a surer argument for *the Messiahship of Christ*, than the miraculous attestation of it in the Mount. And some of the rest, while they prefer a different sense, yet mention this still as a probable one, which none of them expressly condemn, tho' His Lordship affirms it to be rejected, *as far as he sees*, by them all: where, tho' no body perhaps will call in question the sharpness of his sight, yet from this instance, as well as many others, which I might collect, one would be apt to suspect, that His Lordship never chuses to see more of any subject, than what may serve that particular hypothesis, which he comes prepared to support.

He next declares his Adversary's exposition, *to be contradictory not onely to the sense of mankind, but inconsistent also with itself and many places of Scripture* [ 1 ].

ture [1]. Where, tho' we might expect to have been informed, whence it is, that he has collected the sense of mankind on this subject, he has not favored us with the least proof or example of it in any age or country whatsoever. He forgot surely, that he was now discoursing from the Prefs, and not from the Pulpit: for tho' *Ipsæ dixits* may carry authority with them, where no body can contradict, yet they will never pass for arguments, where speech and debate are free.

He proceeds however to prove the Author's exposition to be inconsistent with itself, and says; "let any man  
 " consider, and he will find, that the  
 " greatest proof, which a Prophet can  
 " give for the authority of his mission  
 " is the power of working miracles, and  
 " how then can the evidence of Pro-  
 " phesy rise higher than the evidence  
 " of miracles, on which it ultimately de-  
 " pends for all it's own authority [2]?"

[1] Disc. p. 3, 4.

[2] Disc. p. 4.

This he illustrates by two examples from Scripture: “ first of *Gideon*, who  
 “ being commanded by an Angel, in  
 “ the name of God, to go and save  
 “ *Israel* from the hand of the *Midia-*  
 “ *nites*, with an assurance of success,  
 “ would not believe the Prophecy, tho’  
 “ delivered by an Angel, till he had  
 “ received two or three Miracles in con-  
 “ firmation of it [ 1 ].” Here he pre-  
 sently asks with an air of triumph:  
 “ What think you now? The Prophe-  
 “ cy of the Angel, was as much a  
 “ Prophecy before, as after the Mi-  
 “ racle: but was it a *more sure word*  
 “ before, than after? if so, why was a  
 “ sign desired? why granted? Does  
 “ God work miracles to humour men  
 “ in their folly, or to confirm their  
 “ faith? If to confirm our faith, then  
 “ our faith in the Prophecies depends  
 “ on the authority of Miracles, since  
 “ the stream can never rise above the  
 “ spring head [ 2 ].”

[ 1 ] *Ib.*[ 3 ] *Ib.* p. 5.



He next takes *an higher instance*, of *Moses*, “ the greatest Prophet of the  
 “ law, to whom God spake face to  
 “ face, and whom he commissioned to  
 “ deliver the children of *Israel* out of  
 “ *Ægypt*; which was sufficient to make  
 “ him a Prophet. But what says *Mo-*  
 “ *ses*? Behold they will not believe  
 “ me, nor hearken to my voice, for  
 “ they will say, the Lord hath not  
 “ appeared unto thee.” And here a-  
 gain he asks; “ Was this a foolish com-  
 “ plaint in *Moses*? if it was, how  
 “ came God to listen to it, and give  
 “ him a power to work Miracles in  
 “ confirmation of his Prophecy? Does  
 “ not this shew, that miracles are the  
 “ Prophet’s greatest authority and con-  
 “ firmation [ 1 ]?”.

But to pass over these fallies of his eloquence, and examine the force of his reasoning. *Every considering man*, he says, *will find the authority of prophecy, to depend ultimately on the au-*

[1] Ib. 5, 6,

*thority of miracles* : but let a man consider, as long as he pleases, he will never find it from these instances, to which he refers us. *Gideon and Moses* ; astonished by a wonderfull apparition and prophetic message from heaven, and under that astonishment suspecting that what they saw and heard might be nothing else but an illusion, and the effect of a surprized and disturbed imagination, demanded a more deliberate and familiar proof of it's reality : all which is utterly forein to the point in question ; and of no force at all towards determining the proper evidence of Prophecy. Nay, should we grant them even the whole, which he infers from it, that a Prophecy delivered by an authority pretending to be divine, cannot find credit, unless it be confirmed by miracles, yet this is nothing to his purpose, nor will add the least advantage to his side of the argument.

All, who maintain, the superior evidence of Prophecy, mean it onely of Prophecy, actually fullfilled, and carrying

rying with it the demonstration of it's truth, in the correspondency of the event with the prediction; it is in this sense alone, in which the Author whom he is confuting, expressly speaks of it: his words are; *Prophecies, delivered in an inspired book, when fullfilled, may justly be deemed sure and demonstrative proofs, and a stronger argument than a miracle.* It is this alone, which the nature of the subject required him to confute, and what he had undertaken to confute; but instead of this, he changes the quæstion upon us, and when we were expecting reasons, why Prophecy fullfilled could not be so strong a proof as a miracle, all that he attempts to shew is, that Prophecy not yet fullfilled nor even believed, wants the help of a miracle, to give it credit. Which, as it is here applied to the confutation of that Author, is wholly fallacious and sophistical, without either force or sense in it.

The same sort of fallacy seems to run through all his Discourses; in which he

treats Prophecy in a loose and indeterminate sense, and speaks of it indifferently, as carrying the same evidence with it, whether it be fulfilled or not fulfilled. Whereas a bare Prophecy delivered as the proof of a divine character in any person or doctrine, is incapable of any persuasive force, or of giving any sort of conviction, untill it be accomplished; the completion of it being the sole test, by which it's veracity can be determined. The event likewise, foretold by it, must be of a kind, which neither human prudence could foresee, nor human power produce; for otherwise it could not give any assurance of a divine interposition; since it might have been brought about by natural means, and foreseen perhaps, or luckily guessed by men of superior penetration. Thus the Oracles of the Heathen world were supported by the managers of them: who being expert in all the arts of a crafty and conjectural sagacity, gave out such answers, as they thought the most probable,

bable, and trusted the accomplishment of them to the fortuitous concurrence of natural causes ; which, in an infinite variety of predictions, could not fail of happening to some : whence it became a proverbial saying among the Greeks, *that He was the best prophet, who could make the best guesses* [ 1 ].

It is certain however, that a Prophecy literally fulfilled, is of itself, without external aid, as clear a proof of it's own divinity, as any miracle can be : tho' while the event is still in futurity, the authority of the Prophet may reasonably be called in quæstion ; unless he can shew some present sign, or divine credential of his mission ; which seems to have been always expected from the Jewish Prophets, and always performed by them. Yet miracles were not the usual sign of the prophetic character, but generally reserved to seal the mission of those, who were sent to in-

[ 1 ] Est quidam Græcis vulgaris in hanc sententiam versus,  
Bene qui conjiciet, Vatem hunc perhibeto optimum.  
Cic. de Divin. 2. v.

Μάστις γ' ἀριστῶς, ὅστις ἰκάζει καλῶς.

troduce

roduce a new way of worship, and were not granted therefore, as the learned observe, or in no large measure at least, to any other, than to *Moses*, the deliverer of the Law; to *Elijah and Elisha* the restorers; and above all to *Jesus*, the Fullfiller of it; and to his Disciples afterwards, the preachers of his Gospel [ 1 ].

Among all the other Prophets, the common and ordinary sign of their divine authority was, *the apparent accomplishment of every word, which they spake in the name of the Lord*; as it was appointed by God himself; and is thus related by *Moses*.

“ The Prophet, which shall presume  
 “ to speak a word in my name, which  
 “ I have not commanded him to speak,  
 “ or that shall speak in the name of  
 “ other Gods, even that Prophet shall  
 “ die.—And if thou say in thine heart,  
 “ how shall we know the word, which  
 “ the Lord hath not spoken?—when a

[1] See Spencer on Vulgar Prophecies, c. iv. p. 60.

“ Prophet speaketh in the name of the  
 “ Lord, if the thing follow not, nor  
 “ come to pass, that is the thing, which  
 “ the Lord hath not spoken, but the  
 “ Prophet hath spoken it presumptu-  
 “ ously [1].” We find however, se-  
 veral great events and revolutions fore-  
 told by all the Prophets, the truth of  
 which could not possibly be known to  
 the generation then living, because they  
 were not to take place till after a succe-  
 sion of many ages: but the same Pro-  
 phets, as we read of some, and may  
 suppose therefore of all, had given in  
 the mean while the usual proofs of their  
 mission, by many other predictions  
 which were fulfilled perhaps immedi-  
 ately, or within a few days, or months;  
 or else by declaring the secret thoughts  
 of men; or things transacted in distant  
 places, and with such circumstances,  
 as no human wisdom could possibly  
 penetrate.

[1] Deut. xviii. 20, &c.

Thus

Thus it is said of *Samuel*, that all Israel knew him to be an established Prophet of the Lord, because none of his words fell to the ground [1]. And Saul, as we read, went to consult him, how he might find his Father's Asses, because he was an honourable man, and all that he said came surely to pass [2]. It is written also of *Elisha*, that he had often given warning to the King of Israel, of the secret counsels, which his enemy, the King of Syria, had projected against him: and that he could tell, whatsoever that Syrian King had spoken in his bed-chamber [3]. Agreeably to all which, *Jeremiab*, reproving the false Prophet, *Hananiab*, who was deluding the people by predictions of peace and restoration from *Babylon*, said to him; "Hear now this word, which I speak in thine ears, and the ears of all the people. The Prophets, that have been before me, and before thee of old, prophesied both

[1] 1 Sam. iii. 19, 20. [2] Ib. xix. 6.

[3] 2 Kings vi. 8, 12.

" against



“ against many countries, and great  
 “ Kingdoms, of war, and of evil, and  
 “ of pestilence. The Prophet, which  
 “ prophesieth peace, when the word of  
 “ the Prophet shall come to pass, then  
 “ shall the Prophet be known, that the  
 “ Lord hath truly sent him” — And when  
*Hananiab* persisted still, to alledge the  
 name of God for the truth of what he  
 spake, *Jeremiab* again said to him,  
 “ Hear now, *Hananiab*, the Lord hath  
 “ not sent thee, but thou makest the  
 “ people to trust in a lie. Therefore  
 “ thus saith the Lord, behold, I will  
 “ cast thee off from the face of the  
 “ earth ; this year thou shalt die : be-  
 “ cause thou hast taught rebellion a-  
 “ gainst the Lord. So *Hananiab* the  
 “ Prophet died the same year, in the  
 “ seventh month [ 1 ].” And as this was  
 the established credential of the pro-  
 phetic character under the Old Testa-  
 ment, so our Savior applied it to the  
 same purpose in the New, as the sure

[1] Jerem. xxviii, 7, 16, 17.

testimony of his divine mission. For after he had foretold to his disciples, that *Judas* would betray him, he presently adds, *now I tell you this, before it come, that when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am He* [1]. And on other occasions also, when he was informing his disciples of his approaching departure from them, and ascent to the Father, and of the persecutions, which they would suffer after he was gone, he adds the same words, and admonishes them again, in the same manner, *that when the time should come, they might remember, that he had told them so, and believe in him* [2]. Hence we see, that the established and ordinary sign, by which the Prophets of the Lord were distinguished, was nothing else, but the testimony of Prophecy itself, when fulfilled, and accomplished by the event : because this carried with it a proof of Divinity, as

[1] Joh. xiii. 19.

[2] xvi. 4.

convincing

convincing as any, which heaven could give.

Let us now return to the Bishop's Discourses, in which he goes on to demonstrate the inconsistency of the Author's exposition, by telling us, " that it  
 " makes *Peter* to say, in his own per-  
 " son, that the dark Prophecies of the  
 " Old Testament were a surer and more  
 " certain evidence to himself, than the  
 " immediate voice of God, which he  
 " had heard with his own ears. And  
 " is it possible, adds he, *that St. Peter,*  
 " *or any man in his wits could make*  
 " *such a comparison* [1]? To which  
 quæstion, so smartly and confidently  
 put, I readily answer ; that it is not  
 onely possible, that *St. Peter* might  
 make such a comparison, but even weak  
 to imagine, that he could make any o-  
 ther : which I shall presently explaine,  
 by stating a fact or two, universally ac-  
 knowledged by all, both Jews and  
 Christians. The spirit of Prophecy,

[1] Disc. p. 6.

which

which continued in the Jewish Church, till after it's restoration from the Babylonish captivity, had intirely ceased under the second Temple, for three centuries at least before the birth of Christ. But there succeeded to it, as all the Jewish writers unanimously testify, an *oracular voice from heaven*, which was given occasionally to the leading Rabbies or Teachers of the Law, to direct them, how to act or speak on particular emergencies. It is said, to have been accompanied generally with a kind of thunder, out of which it issued, in a clear and articulate manner, and thence derived it's name of *Bath-Kol*; that is, the *daughter-voice or daughter of a voice*. The *Bath-Kol*, says the learned *Lightfoot*, was this; *when a voice or thunder came out of heaven, another voice came out of it* [ 1 ].  
The

[ 1 ] See *Lightfoot's Works*, Vol. 2. p. 128. in Mat. iii. v. 17.

*N. B.* Thus when *Jesus*, a little before his death, was addressing himself to the Father, in the midst of his disciples and people of *Jerusalem*, and saying; *Father, save me from*

This way of divine instruction is affirmed to have been subsisting during the time of our Savior, and to the final dissolution of the Jewish state ; and is considered by all their Doctors, as *an inferior kind of Prophecy, or a sort of twilight indulged to them, after the Sun, of Prophecy was set* [ 1 ] ; and from this pretended source, they derived the greatest part of those traditions, with which they corrupted the Law of *Moses*. This then being the general persuasion of the Jews, at the time, when *St. Peter* wrote his Epistle, he would necessarily prefer the evidence of Prophecy, which was always esteemed the highest and most perfect degree of Inspiration, under the first Temple, to the *Bath-Kol, or a voice from heaven, the*

*from this hour ; Father, glorify thy name : There came a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again. Upon which the people, that stood by, and heard it, said that it thundered ; others said, that an Angel spake to him, [Joh. xii. 28.] That is ; part of the company believed it to be nothing more, than an accidental clap of thunder ; while others took it to be the Bath-Kol, or the voice of God, or of an Angel, which was accompanied always with thunder.*

[ 1 ] See Spencer on the Vulgar Prophecies, c. vii. p. 126.

E

more

more imperfect Oracle of the second Temple; and which all the Jewish converts, and *Peter* himself without doubt, had been taught to consider, as of an authority much inferior to the original *word of Prophecy*, delivered to them by *Moses*, and the other antient Prophets. For the learned reckon *four degrees of a Prophetic or divine Instruction*, which were indulged to the Jewish Church: the first and most excellent was, *the Spirit of Prophecy*, properly so called, as it was given to *Moses*, and the succeeding Prophets: the second was, *The Holy Spirit*: the third, *Urim and Thummim*; the fourth and lowest, *the Bath-Kol* [1]. Which last, as *Grotius* says, was *the sole Oracle, which remained to them, during the time of the second Temple* [2].

The reality of this Oracular voice is attested, as I have said, by all the

[1] Quatuor gradus in Prophetia: primus, Prophetia: Secundus, Spiritus Sanctus: Tertius, Urim & Thummim: Quartus & infimus, *Filia vocis*. Druf. in Matt. iii. 17.

[2] Quod solum ferme Oraculi genus temporibus Templi secundi restabat, *Bath-Kol*, vocant. Grot. in Joh. xii. 28.

Jewish writers, after the cessation of Prophecy, in the same positive manner, as the miraculous gifts of the Christian Church, by the primitive Fathers, after the days of the Apostles; and innumerable instances of it are particularly recorded by the same writers: yet the ablest of our Divines, and the most conversant with the Rabbinical learning, have not scrupled to declare the whole story of it, to be a mere fiction, contrived to illustrate the characters and authority of some leading Rabbies, and recommend the particular Doctrines, which they were establishing. Such was the opinion of two learned Deans, and ornaments of our Church, Dr. *Spencer* and Dr. *Prideaux*; the first of whom, after declaring the *Bath-Kol* to be a Jewish Fable, says;

“ there were no two nations which have  
 “ so corrupted histories, and obtruded  
 “ so many legends upon the credulity of  
 “ the world, to inhance the credit of  
 “ their own people, as the *Jews*, and

“ *the Grecians* [1].” And the second affirms, that the *Bath-Kol* was no such voice from heaven, as they pretended, but a phantastical way of divination of their own invention [2]. Dr. Light-foot also, the Soundness of whose faith and erudition is allowed by all, speaks still more precisely to my present purpose, and says ; “ that if we observe “ two things, first, that the Jewish na- “ tion, under the second Temple, was “ given to Magical arts beyond mea- “ sure: secondly, that it was given to “ believe all manner of delusions be- “ yond measure ; we may safely sus- “ pect, that those voices, which they “ thought to be from heaven, and no- “ ted with the name of *Bath-Kol*, were “ either formed by the Devil in the air, “ to deceive the people ; or, by Magi- “ cians with Devilish art, to promote “ their own affairs :” from which he draws this inference, which I would recommend to the special consideration

[1] Spencer *ibid.*[2] *Frid. Connect*, Vol. 2. p. 256. Edit. Fol.



of this eminent Prelate; *Hence*, adds he, *the Apostle Peter saith with good reason, that the word of Prophecy was surer, than a voice from heaven* [1].

Yet *St. Peter's* words after all, as they are expounded by the freethinking author above mentioned, do not necessarily imply him to mean, that Prophecy was a surer argument to himself, than the voice from heaven, which he had heard, but to the Jewish converts in general, who did not hear that voice, but received it onely from the report of others. It was not his view in this Epistle, to declare what sort of arguments was the most convincing to himself, but to propose such, as were most worthy of the attention of those, to whom he was writing, and most effectual to keep them stedfast in the faith, against the impressions of false teachers, who were laboring to seduce them: and that Prophecy is a properer argument, to repell the insults of unbeliev-

[1] Vol. 2. p. 129,

ing scoffers, than the report of a Miracle, is manifest, from the reason mentioned above from St. *Austin*; because a Miracle, and especially, *a voice from heaven*, might be imputed to Magical arts; whereas a Prophecy, actually fulfilled, was not liable to any such imputation. When St. *Peter* therefore says, *We have a more sure word of Prophecy*; the occasion of his words oblige us to interpret them, as spoken, not with any particular reference to himself, but to the general body of the Jewish Converts, to whose attention he recommends them: and the constant use and analogy of all language will justify such an interpretation.

But should we admit, what His Lordship affirms, that the text, as it is expounded by that Author, makes *Peter prefer Prophecy, as a surer argument even to himself, than the voice, which he heard in the mount*; how will this prove that exposition to be inconsistent, or that *Peter must be out of his wits in saying so*? It is no offence surely,

ly, either to reason or religion, to imagine ; that this wonderfull apparition and heavenly voice, might be accompanied with such circumstances, as would naturally leave some doubt and perplexity on the mind, concerning the precise manner, and nature of the whole transaction. For *Peter*, as we read, was in such a fright and amazement, at what he saw and heard, *that he knew not what he said*: and both he and the two other Apostles, then with him, *James and John*, were so greatly terrified, that *they fell upon their faces to the ground, and durst not so much as look up*, till *Jesus*, when the vision was over, came to raise and encourage them [1].

But be that as it will; and let *Peter* be as perfectly assured, as we can suppose him to be, of every circumstance, which passed in the Mount, he might still take Prophecy, considered as a standing evidence, always lying open to the cool and deliberate examination of reason, to be a

[1] Matt. xvii. 6. Mar. ix. 6.

firmer argument on the whole, and to carry a more permanent conviction with it to the sober senses of men, than the vision, with which he here compares it. For after all the conviction, which he himself had received from it, we know, that his faith was still so infirm, as to betray him into a shameful denial of his Master, whom he had seen so wonderfully glorified. We know on the other hand, that after our Lord's Ascension, when his faith was more fully confirmed, and his understanding inlightened by the mission of the Holy Ghost, the chief argument, which he applied in all his Sermons, to evince the truth of the Gospel, was this *more sure word of Prophecy*, as he calls it; from which he demonstrated to the Jews, how the character, doctrine and mission of Jesus were foretold and described *by the mouths of all their Prophets* [1].

I might now leave it to the reader to judge, whether in contradiction to

[1] Act. ii. 19: iii. 18, 21: &c.

what

what the Bishop maintains, a man in his wits, and especially a Jew, might not think Prophecy a stronger argument in general, than a voice from heaven, which he himself had heard; or at least, whether every man in his sober senses, would not sooner trust to the evidence of Prophecy, when allowed to be fulfilled, than to a voice from heaven, not heard by himself, but reported to him by another: for this in truth is the whole, which can reasonably be inferred from St. *Peter's* words. But before I dismiss this argument, I cannot help observing, that all, which His Lordship has been affirming so freely concerning the superior evidence of Miracles to that of Prophecy, seems to have been originally confuted, and the whole question determined against him, by Christ himself; who in one of his Parables declares, *that those, who would not hearken to Moses and the Prophets, would not be persuaded, tho' one rose from the dead* [1]; clearly intimating,

[1] Luk. xvi. 31.

that

that *the word of Prophecy*, as delivered in the Old Testament, carried with it a firmer proof of the truth of his Gospel to the Jews, than even the greatest of all his Miracles.

His Lordship observes farther, that the disparaging character, which *Peter* here gives of the word of Prophecy, shews, that he could not mean to recommend it, as the best evidence of the Christian faith, for he distinguishes it from *day-light*, and *the brightness of the day-star*, and compares it to a light *shining in a dark place*; or to *the glimmering light of a candle, seen at a distance in a dark night*: which tho' it gives some direction, yet is nothing, when compared to clear *day-light*. And here he entertains us again, through a page or two, with a flourish of his oratory: "Is not this now, says he, a  
 " choice account of the evidence of the  
 " Gospel; nay, of the very best evi-  
 " dence, which we have of the Gos-  
 " pel? Are we still surrounded on all  
 " sides with darkness, assisted by one  
 " onely

“ onely glimmering light ? Was it  
 “ thus, that Christ came *to be a light*  
 “ *to lighten the Gentiles, and to be the*  
 “ *glory of Israel ? St. Peter in his first*  
 “ *Epistle, tells all Christians, that they*  
 “ *are called out of darkness into God’s*  
 “ *marvellous light, how comes he then*  
 “ to tell them in the second, that they  
 “ are still in darkness, and have nothing  
 “ but a glimmering light to direct them ?  
 “ Can the same writer possibly be sup-  
 “ posed to give such different accounts  
 “ of the Gospel state ? Ask St. Paul  
 “ what state Christians are in, he will  
 “ tell you, *that the light of the glo-*  
 “ *rious Gospel of Christ, who is the*  
 “ *image of God, has shone upon them.*  
 “ Ask the Evangelists, they will tell  
 “ you, *The day star from on high hath*  
 “ *visited us, to give light to them,*  
 “ *who sit in darkness.* Ask any, or  
 “ all the Apostles, they will tell you,  
 “ their commission is *to open the eyes of*  
 “ *the people, and to turn them from*  
 “ *darkness to light* [1].”

[1] Disc. p. vii. 8.

Yet

Yet all this pomp of words ; this solemn appeal to the whole College of the Apostles and Evangelists, is nothing else but an empty strain of rhetoric, without any argument or significance in it whatsoever. The state of the Gospel, he says, is described by the sacred writers, as a state of glorious light. But what is this to the purpose ? Has the Author whom he is confuting, compared the light of *Prophecy*, to *the glorious light of the Gospel* ? No : he considers it onely, as one of the proofs and evidences of the Gospel : and tho' it yields but a fainter light, it may still be the best, which we have, to guide us into the day-light of the Gospel : this is all, which the Author's exposition implies, and thus far it is certainly consistent. But the Bishop urges, that it makes the Apostle give different accounts of the Gospel state in his two Epistles, telling the Christians in the first, that *they are called out of darkness into God's marvellous light*, yet telling them in the second, that *they*  
*are*



*are still in darkness.* But these different accounts are plainly given of different things, which His Lordship by mistake confounds and treats as one and the same: I mean the Gospel state, of which the Apostle is here speaking, and the state of those Jewish Converts, to whom he was then writing. For the Gospel state, when compared with *day-light, and the day-star*, necessarily signifies the perfection of that state, inlightened with all the knowledge, and enriched with all the graces, which are the genuine fruits of a perfect faith in Christ: but the state of the New Christians, to whom these Epistles are addressed, was far removed from that character: they were *called indeed into God's marvellous light*; and had made some progress towards it, but were not yet arrived at it: for as *Peter* expressly says, *the day had not yet dawned to them, nor the day star arisen in their hearts.* For which reason he recommends to them *the word of Prophecy*, as the surest guide, to lead them through the obscurity of their doubts  
 into

into clear day-light. And thus the Apostle's sense, as it is expounded by the Author, is clear and consistent, nor liable to any exception, but what flows from that perplexity, in which His Lordship has involved it, by his use of equivocal terms, and perpetual change of the point in question.

He takes it for granted, through all his Discourses, and builds his Argument upon it, that *Peter's* character of Prophecy, *as of a light shining in a dark place*, carries in it a very low and disparaging idea of it; and makes nothing more of it, than a twinkling candle seen at a distance in a dark night. But is not *a light, which shines in a dark place*, the greatest comfort, and best guidance, which a man can possibly have in a state of darkness, and the sole means, by which a wandering traveller can hope to extricate himself, and make his way at last into day-light? for this was the real use of Prophecy, as it was applied by the Apostles, to draw both the Jews and Gentiles  
out

out of their darkness, into the light of the Gospel.

*But all the Apostles and Evangelists*, he says, if examined concerning the subject of their Commission, will tell us, *that it was to open the eyes of the people, and to turn them from darkness to light.* This indeed is true, but not the whole truth, nor is it that truth, which we are now inquiring after; and His Lordship, who is so celebrated *a Trier of witnesses*, must allow the adverse party, to examine them as well as himself. Let me ask them therefore in my turn, what were the means, which they used, in virtue of their commission, to propagate that light, which they were ordered to dispense to the world? *Matthew* will tell us, on the part of the Evangelists, that it was the *more sure word of Prophecy*; by the evidence of which, he had shewn in his Gospel, how the mission of *Jesus*, and all the remarkable acts and sufferings of his life, were precisely and circumstantially foretold by the Prophets. *Peter* also  
2 will

will tell us, that, *on the Feast of Pentecost*, when the Apostles had received their full powers from heaven, he converted *three thousand souls* that very day, by the *same word of Prophecy*; and that in all his sermons, the chief argument, which he applied to draw people out of their darkness, was to shew, that the *character and mission of Jesus* were foretold and described, many ages before, *by the mouths of all the Prophets*. If we follow St. Paul likewise through all his travels and labors, in propagating the Gospel, we shall find him, in every City, betaking himself to the Synagogue; reasoning there with the Jews, *and opening and alledging to them from the Scriptures, that Christ must needs have suffered and risen again from the dead*; and that *Jesus*, whom he preached unto them, was the Christ; and in short, saying *no other things*, as he himself affirms, *than those, which the Prophets and Moses did say, should come* [ 1 ].

[ 1 ] Act. xiii. 27, &c. xvii. 3. xviii. 28.

His Lordship advances still *one step farther*, in depressing the evidence of Prophecy, and declares, “ that St. *Peter* is so far from speaking of it as “ the best light to be had, for the “ point in question, that he manifestly “ speaks of it, as not the best, but as a “ light to be attended to onely, until a “ better comes : and he would not “ have limited any time for their at- “ tending to it, had he been consider- “ ing it as the best support of the “ Christian faith, for in that sense it “ ought ever to be attended to [1].” And here again the turn of his argument would lead us to imagine, that his adversary had compared the light of Prophecy with the light of the Gospel; for in any other view of it, it is nothing else but a mere quibble, which tends rather to confute, than support, what he attempts to establish. For to what time has *Peter limited their attention to Prophecy ?* why ; *until the day*

[1] D. sc. p. 9.

*should dawn, and the day-star arise in their hearts* : that is, till they had acquired a full conviction, and stedfast faith in the truth of the Gospel. As if he had said, ye do well in attending to the word of Prophecy, till it has completed it's work, and wrought in you that effect, for which it was at first given, and for which I now recommend it, of confirming and perfecting your faith in Christ. Which instead of limiting their attention, is an exhortation for their perseverance in it, till the end of it was obtained, and no farther room left for any particular sollicitude or anxious inquiries on that subject.

Having now run through all the arguments, by which His Lordship endeavours to overthrow that Author's exposition, I shall procede to examine those, by which he attempts to establish his own.

He affirms, that the preference given by *St. Peter* in this text to the evidence of Prophecy was not intended by him to recommend it, as a stronger argument

ment for the general truth of the Gospel, but onely for the particular article of Christ's coming down again in glory ; in the confirmation of which, the Apostle first alledges to them *the glorification of Christ*, on the Mount, as one proof ; and then adds *the word of Prophecy*, as another, still better, with regard to an event, which, being *yet in futurity*, admitted no surer evidence than of Prophecy [ 1 ].

After He has worked up this sense, with much hypothetical refinement, from a number of passages, arbitrarily tacked together from both the Epistles, and strained to his own purpose ; by *supposing, what an Objector might say, and supposing again what the Apostle might answer*, he pronounces it, to be *easy, natural, rendering to every expression it's proper signification necessary to the Apostle's argument ; plainly enforced by the context, and clear of all difficulties* [ 2 ].

[ 1 ] Disc. p. 13, 19, 22.      [ 2 ] Disc. p. 22.

But for my own part, when I recurred to the Epistles, after the perusal of this Discourse, I could neither see the necessity, nor propriety of His Lordship's exposition, nor the least reason from either of the Epistles, why *the word of Prophecy* should be disparaged, and degraded by him, from being a proof of the general truth of the Gospel, and restrained to the particular article of *Christ's coming in glory*.

The two Epistles of St. *Peter* have always been stiled *Catholic*, or general, as not written to any particular Church, or to inculcate any particular doctrine; but addressed to the Jewish Converts at large, or dispersed through the several provinces of the East, for the sake of confirming them in that faith, in which they had been instructed, and to arm them against the Scoffers and false Teachers, who were busily employed, in beguiling and seducing them from that faith.

In the first Epistle, he puts them in mind, “ how they were begotten again  
 “ to



“ to a lively hope, by the resurrection  
 “ of *Jesus*; to an inheritance incor-  
 “ ruptible, reserved for them in heaven.  
 “ That the end of their faith was the  
 “ salvation of Souls; that the Prophets  
 “ had inquired diligently after this sal-  
 “ vation, and prophesied of the grace,  
 “ that should come to them searching  
 “ into the time, signified by the Spirit  
 “ of God, when it testified before-hand  
 “ of the sufferings of Christ, and the  
 “ glory which should follow: that  
 “ they did not prophesy of things re-  
 “ lating to themselves, but of the  
 “ things, which were reported by those  
 “ who preached the Gospel, and which  
 “ the Angels desired to look into.  
 “ Having thus opened the foundation  
 “ of their faith, from the antient Pro-  
 “ phecies, and signified how this spiri-  
 “ tual house, or Christian Church,  
 “ *was built on that chief corner stone*  
 “ *laid in Sion, as mentioned by* *Isaiah*;  
 “ He exhorts them, to steadfastness in  
 “ that faith, which was so well ground-  
 “ ed; and to the practice of all those

“graces, which are the fruits of it,  
 “holiness, sobriety, mutual love, cha-  
 “rity, vigilance : after which, he  
 “draws out a short sketch of all the se-  
 “veral duties required by the Gospel,  
 “from every particular rank and con-  
 “dition of it’s Disciples : from ser-  
 “vants, from subjects, from wives, from  
 “husbands, from the old and from  
 “the young. And because their pre-  
 “sent state was exposed to manifold  
 “temptations and trials, from the ma-  
 “lice of their enemies, he drops several  
 “hints occasionally, by way of com-  
 “fort to them, concerning the speedy  
 “coming of Christ in power and glory  
 “to deliver and reward them, and to  
 “take a severe vengeance on their per-  
 “secutors ; and concludes, by declar-  
 “ing, that his view in writing to  
 “them, was to exhort and testify, that  
 “what he had briefly explained to  
 “them, was the true grace of God,  
 “in which they stood.”

In the second Epistle, He admonishes them, “to make a proper use of  
 the

“ the exceeding grace, and precious  
 “ promises, which were given them  
 “ through faith in Christ, by using all  
 “ diligence, to improve that faith, and  
 “ carry it on to it's perfection, by adding  
 “ to it virtue, knowledge, temperance,  
 “ patience, godliness, brotherly kind-  
 “ ness, charity, that they might not  
 “ be unfruitfull in the knowledge of  
 “ Christ, but make their election sure :  
 “ of which he would never fail to re-  
 “ mind and stir them up, as long as he  
 “ lived. Then to confirm them a-  
 “ gainst the Scoffers and false teachers,  
 “ who were beguiling the unstable, and  
 “ drawing them away from the Gos-  
 “ pel, he reminds them again, in short,  
 “ of the foundation of that faith,  
 “ which had been preached to them by  
 “ the Apostles, as being grounded not  
 “ on fabulous tales, but on Miracles  
 “ and Prophecy ; alledging, as an in-  
 “ stance of the former, the miraculous  
 “ attestation given to it by God on  
 “ the Mount, yet exhorting them to  
 “ attend more especially to the latter, as  
 F 4 “ to

“ to an evidence *more sure*, or convinc-  
 “ ing to them : because *none of the Old*  
 “ *Prophecies were dictated by the will*  
 “ *of man, but by the Spirit of God.* He  
 “ then proceeds to a particular def-  
 “ cription of the wicked principles,  
 “ manners, and characters of those  
 “ false teachers, who were bringing  
 “ upon themselves swift destruction ;  
 “ and in the third and last chapter  
 “ declares, that this second Epistle was  
 “ written with the same view, as the  
 “ first, *to stir up their minds and me-*  
 “ *mories, concerning the words spoken of*  
 “ *old by the Prophets, and commanded*  
 “ *by the Apostles of our Lord.* He  
 “ assures them of the certainty of  
 “ Christ’s coming, notwithstanding the  
 “ scoffs of those deceivers, who seeing  
 “ all things continue in the same state,  
 “ as in the days of the Fathers, and  
 “ not knowing what wonderfull things  
 “ God had formerly wrought in the  
 “ old world, derided the belief of it’s  
 “ approaching end : but that the day of  
 “ the Lord would come upon them un-  
 “ expectedly,

“ expectedly, as a thief in the night, and  
 “ this seeming delay of judgement was  
 “ not to be ascribed to any slackness of  
 “ the Lord, concerning the perfor-  
 “ mance of his promise, but to his  
 “ mercy and long-suffering, that all  
 “ might have time to repent and be  
 “ saved : which he urges as a motive,  
 “ to persevere in an holy life, and to  
 “ beware, that they be not drawn a-  
 “ way, by the error of the wicked,  
 “ and fall from the steadfastness of their  
 “ faith.”

In this abstract of the two Epistles,  
 we see, as it were, the whole plan of  
 Christian duty, with respect both to  
 faith and practice, sketched out in a  
 summary manner, agreeable to the pur-  
 pose of the writer, which, as it is de-  
 clared by himself, was to stir up the  
 Jewish converts to a steadfast adherence  
 to that faith, in which they had been  
 instructed : And as the coming of  
 Christ was one article of it, which was  
 particularly derided by the scoffers of  
 those days ; so the certain and speedy  
 2 approach

approach of it is more especially inculcated, as an effectual source of comfort, and a strong motive of constancy, in those circumstances of persecution, to which they were then exposed. It is evident likewise, that all the use, which is made by the Apostle, *of the word of Prophecy* in both the Epistles, is applied by him to the same general purpose, of confirming the whole Christian doctrine, and not to the particular proof of the single article of Christ's coming. For the Prophecies mentioned in the first Epistle, are declared to relate, *to the Salvation of Souls, which is obtained by the faith of Christ; to the sufferings of Christ, and the glory, which should afterwards follow; and in short, to the things, which were reported by those, who preached the Gospel, and which the Angels desired to look into*: which must be understood, to reach to the whole of Christianity; or *the whole mystery of man's redemption*, and cannot be restrained to one particular article of it.

The

The second Epistle, from which the text is taken, was written, as it expressly tells us, with the same view as the first; *to stir up the Christians, and remind them of the words, which were spoken before by the Prophets, and preached to them afterwards by the Apostles*; which must include likewise the whole faith: according to which sense and in no other, St. Peter's reasoning will be found clear and just, in his application both of *the miracle in the Mount, and of the word of Prophecy*, and in the preference given to the latter, with regard to the general force of it's evidence.

The *Glorification of Christ*, which Peter saw, and *the voice of God*, which he heard, declaring *Jesus to be his beloved Son*, was undoubtedly a strong proof of Christ's divine mission: Yet to those, who did not hear that voice, *the word of Prophecy*, considered as a standing evidence, is surely a much firmer and more rational proof of it. But that same *glorification*, tho' a strong argu-  
ment

ment for the truth of Christ's mission, is no argument at all for his coming again in glory. This the Bishop himself allows, and even ridicules the notion of it's carrying any real evidence of that sort. *Can any certainty, says he, as to future events, be collected from past events? or can any thing we see this year, assure us, what will happen to us the next [1]?* It is absurd then to imagine, that St. Peter should alledge *the glorification of Christ in the Mount*, as a proof of his coming again in glory, of which in reality it was no proof at all, or should compare the evidence of Prophecy, to the evidence of a particular Miracle, with regard to a particular event, to which that Miracle bore no sort of relation. Whereas if we suppose him to have compared them together, as arguments for *the mission of Jesus*, of which they are both good proofs, the comparison is rightly instituted, and the preference justly given to Prophecy.

[1] Disc. p. 21.

Thus



Thus far however all people will agree with His Lordship, that Prophecy is as sure an argument for the coming of Christ, as the vision in the Mount, because that vision, as he owns, is no argument at all : but he assigns another reason, which is not quite so clear ; *because Christ's coming is an event yet in futurity, for which therefore we can have no surer evidence than Prophecy.* But Prophecy not fulfilled, carries with it, as I have said above, no evidence at all, nor is an event in futurity capable of being ascertained by any ; and cannot therefore be a just ground for giving the title of *sure, or more sure,* to any sort of evidence whatsoever. The article of Christ's coming, is an express doctrine of the Gospel, taught both by Christ and all his Apostles, so that the Jewish Converts to whom St. *Peter* was writing, could not possibly doubt of it, without doubting at the same time of the whole, which the Apostles had been preaching to them concerning all the other doctrines and facts of the Gospel ;

Gospel ; and, in such a case, it would have been vain and trifling, to attempt to confirm their faith, by a particular Prophecy not yet fullfilled, when they had conceived a distrust of all the other Prophecies, which had been alledged to them by the Apostles, as actually fullfilled.

The prediction of things to come, can, at the most, raise onely an expectation or presumption, more or less strong, in proportion to the authority of the person, who delivers it. To men persuaded that all the remarkable things, foretold in the Old Testament, concerning the *Messiah*, were actually fullfilled in *Jesus*, the presumption would be strong, that any other event, still future, foretold by the same Prophets, and relating to the same *Jesus*, would be accomplished in due time. But to those, who doubted of the Prophecies already fullfilled, the prediction of an event still future, urged by way of confirmation to them, might help indeed to increase their doubts, but could

not in any manner be applicable to the cure of them. So that the Bishop's exposition of the *word of Prophecy* in the text, as applied to the particular case of Christ's coming, could not possibly answer the Apostle's end of confirming the faith of those, to whom he was writing, or have any influence at all with them, unless he had really meant to propose it, as the firmest evidence on the whole, for the general truth of the Gospel.

His Lordship adds one argument more, for the final overthrow of that Author's exposition, by saying, " that  
 " *the more sure word of Prophecy* here  
 " mentioned, is not to be understood  
 " merely of the Prophecies of the Old  
 " Testament, for it may refer to the  
 " Prophecies of the New ; and proba-  
 " bly does, as appears from St. *Peter's*  
 " appealing, not onely to the antient  
 " Prophets, but also to the preachers  
 " of the Gospel. How unhappily then,  
 " adds he, was this text made choice  
 " of, to set up antient Prophecy in op-  
 " position

“ position to Gospel-evidence, since  
 “ the Prophecy here intended is pro-  
 “ bably itself a Gospel-evidence ?  
 “ &c. [ 1 ]”

Yet while he insults his adversary, for his *unhappy application of this text*, to set up the credit of antient Prophecy, he is certainly more unhappy, in hazarding so crude a reflection ; which is confuted even by St. *Peter* himself, on whose authority he grounds it ; who, in the very next words to the text, plainly limits the sense of it, *to the Prophecies of the Old Testament ;* and gives this reason for setting up Prophecy, *because no Prophecy of the Scripture is of private interpretation : for Prophecy came not of old by the will of man, but holy men of God spake, as they were moved by the Holy Ghost [ 2 ].* For it is a point allowed and indisputable, that wherever the writers of the New Testament speak of the *Scripture* in general, or of *the Prophecies of the*

[ 1 ] Disc. p. 23.

[ 2 ] 2 Pet. i. 20, 21.

*Scripture*, they must be understood to speak onely of the Old Testament, and the Prophecies therein recorded.

We are now come to the Bishop's second Discourse, the chief purpose of which is, to illustrate the nature of Prophecy, from the testimonies of the sacred writers ; and to shew what *St. Peter's meaning* was, *in comparing it to a light shining in a dark place, and in making it's evidence so much inferior to the other evidence of the Gospel.* But His Lordship's zeal seems to be bent rather, on refuting what his adversary has affirmed, than on searching what *St. Peter* really meant ; and on contradicting the Free-thinker at any rate, tho' at the hazard of contradicting the Apostle.

*St. Peter*, as it is manifest from every part of his conduct, had a very high opinion of the evidence of Prophecy, and applied it on all occasions, as the most effectual proof, which he could offer to the Jews for *the mission of Jesus, or the general truth of the*  
G
Gospel.

*Gospel.* Yet when the Free-thinker, upon his authority, had undertaken to consider it in the same character, the Bishop begins presently to depreciate and reduce it so low, as to render it of no use at all. For this is the description, which he gives us of the Prophecies of the Old Testament; “ that they are, generally penned in  
 “ such a manner, that one cannot fix  
 “ the precise and determinate sense of  
 “ them with any certainty [1]: That  
 “ they are dark speeches, delivered in  
 “ visions and dreams; and were never  
 “ intended to be a very distinct evi-  
 “ dence [2]: that they are figurative  
 “ and dark descriptions of future e-  
 “ vents, which could not be made  
 “ clearer, by being even fulfilled, but  
 “ would have all the obscurity of figu-  
 “ rative and dark descriptions, as well  
 “ after, as before the event [3]; and  
 “ that no event can make a figurative  
 “ expression plain, or literal; or re-

[1] Disc. p. 29.

[2] P. 30.

[3] P. 32.

“ strain

“ strain the language of Prophecy to  
 “ one determinate sense, which was  
 “ originally capable of many [ 1 ].”

How different a character is this, from  
 what Dr. *Spencer* has given of the same  
 Prophecies? which stand, he says,  
 “ perpetuated in Scripture, and fall  
 “ therefore under the dayly notices of  
 “ men ; so that when the events fore-  
 “ told come to pass, they may readily  
 “ be compared with the predictions ;  
 “ which, the more antient date they  
 “ bear, the more wonderfull will they  
 “ appear, when accomplished, and the  
 “ more full reports will they make, of  
 “ their divine original, and of the  
 “ Scripture, wherein they are found.  
 “ For there is nothing doth so seal the  
 “ faith of the divine inspiration of  
 “ Scripture, as the various predictions  
 “ therein delivered, at such distant  
 “ times and places, exactly accomplish-  
 “ ed in their seasons [ 2 ].”

[ 1 ] P. 36.  
 p. 50.

[ 2 ] See *Spencer* on *Vulg. Proph.* c. iii.

But even the litteral Prophecies find no better treatment from His Lordship than the dark and the figurative: “ for these, he says, how plainly soever foretold, were not always the plainest at the time of their delivery, nor received by the Jews in their true meaning, for the seeming incredibility of the things: for an instance of which, he gives this Prophecy; *a Virgin shall conceive a son*: which being contradictory to all the experience of the world, was not probably believed by the Jews of those days to import a miraculous conception; because common sense would lead them to understand it in a manner agreeable to nature and experience [1].”

This is surely a very rash and unguarded declaration. Did not the Jews look upon their Prophets, to have been really inspired? and were not miraculous events of all kinds familiar

[1] Disc. p. 34.



to them in every period of their history? did they not know, how God, for the defence of his people, had frequently over-ruled the established order of nature, and baffled all the experience of mankind? how he had made *the sun to stand still, or go backwards* at his pleasure, for a sign to his servants [1], and had ordered the waters of the sea to separate themselves, and open a safe passage to the armies of *Israel* [2]? Is it possible then, that their faith and reason could be shocked by the *conception of a virgin*, when affirmed to them, in the name of the same God, by persons divinely inspired? yet this, it seems, was the case, and a Prophecy so wonderfull, could not be understood by *the Jews*, on the account of it's contradiction to common sense, *till the event had shewn the litteral meaning, to be the true one* [3].

[1] Josh. x. 12. Isa. xxxvii. 8. [2] Exod. xiv. 21.  
 [3] Disc. p. 34.

But His Lordship is as unlucky in the choice of this particular instance, as he is injudicious in his reflection upon it: for of all the Prophecies relating to *Jesus*, this alone is of a kind, which is incapable of being made clearer by the event. His resurrection from the dead, how incredible soever in the prediction, was cleared up, beyond all doubt, by the event, to all those, who saw and conversed with him after it: and so in all the other miraculous cases which were foretold of him, the event, if exposed to the open view and trial of men's senses, would clearly confirm the divinity of the prediction. But, *the conception of a virgin*, is a Miracle of that peculiar nature, which could not be seen by any, nor known to any, but to the Virgin Herself, except by a divine revelation: so that the credibility of it, whether in the prediction, or in the accomplishment, intirely depended, and still depends, on the authority of the persons, who attested it. With the Jews, therefore, the event was much  
more

more likely, to derive its credit from the prediction, than the prediction from the event; because the Prophets, who foretold it, had a more established credit with them, than the Apostles, who reported the completion of it. Wherefore if, as His Lordship says, they rejected the *litteral prediction*, on the account of its incredibility, they had the same reason, or a stronger still, for rejecting *the litteral accomplishment* of it; unless he can shew, that the Inspiration of the Prophets might be distrusted by them in this case, but the inspiration of the Apostles could not.

He begins, however, to be aware at last, “ that it may seem strange, to  
 “ hear a Christian Divine, pleading,  
 “ as it were, for the obscurity of the  
 “ Scripture-prophecy, when it would  
 “ be thought more suitable to his cha-  
 “ racter, to maintain the clearness of  
 “ it: wherefore he pauses here a while,  
 “ to make a short apology for himself;  
 “ and wishes to God, that all the Pro-  
 G 4 “ *phesies*

“ *phesies of the Lord were manifest to*  
 “ *all his people :* but tho’, it is not of  
 “ the nature of Prophecy, he says, to  
 “ be obscure ; since things future may  
 “ be spoken of as clearly, as things ei-  
 “ ther past or present, and Prophecy  
 “ be made as plain as common history :  
 “ yet obscurity being the peculiar cha-  
 “ racter of Scripture-prophecy, it mat-  
 “ ters but little what we may wish or  
 “ think the best in the case, we must  
 “ be content with such light and di-  
 “ rection, as God has thought fit to  
 “ bestow upon us [ 1 ].” Where I shall  
 leave it to all candid Christians to  
 consider ; whether, if the Free-thinker’s  
 attack on the prophetic evidence of the  
 Gospel had been wholly flighted, or  
 his argument allowed even to be true,  
 it could have done any more harm to  
 the credit of the Gospel, than the Bi-  
 shop’s own account of Prophecy is  
 likely to do. The purpose of that Au-  
 thor was, to shew, that the Prophecies

[ 1 ] P. 32-36, 37.

of the Old Testament, as they are applied by the Apostles in the New, are in reality no proof at all, nor capable of persuading any, but the weak and the credulous. His Lordship's character of Prophecy tends to the same end, and as far as the Apostles have applied the evidence of it to the confirmation of the Gospel, must of consequence weaken the credit of the Gospel. The Prophecies of the *Pythian Apollo* were indeed obscure, equivocal, and ambiguous, admitting not onely different, but contrary senses; so that the character here given of the *Scripture-prophecies*, was undoubtedly true of them, that no event could restrain them to one determinate sense, when they were originally capable of many. For if the obvious sense failed, as it often did, to the ruin of those, who acted upon it, there was another always in reserve, to secure the veracity of the Oracle: till this very character of it's ambiguous and ænigmatical senses, confirmed by constant observation, gradually sunk  
its

its credit, and finally detected the imposture [1]. Is it possible then, that the same character can be due to the Jewish Prophecies, which the wise and virtuous of the Heathen World considered as an argument of fraud and falsehood in the ~~Christian~~ Prophecies?

*Pythian*

I have observed above, that His Lordship reduces the credit of Prophecy so low, as to render it of no use at all. But after all his pains, to depress it, he declares it to have been given for two great purposes: first, *to support the faith and religion of the old world*; secondly, *to give testimony to the mission of Jesus*, who appeals to the Prophets for the truth of it. The first of these he affirms to be the chief

[1] Jam ad te venio,

Sancte Apollo, qui umbilicum certum terrarum obsides,  
Unde superstitiosa primum sæva evasit vox fera.

Tuis enim Oraculis Chrysippus totum volumen implevit,  
partim falsis, ut ego opinor, partim casu veris, ut fit in  
omni oratione sæpissime; partim flexiloquis, & obscuris,  
ut interpretes egeat interprete, & fors ipsa ad sortes referenda  
sit; partim ambiguis, & quæ ad dialecticum referenda  
sunt. &c.

Cic. de Divin. ii. 56.

and

and most important end: “ for there  
 “ was no occasion, he says, to lay in  
 “ so long beforehand the evidence of  
 “ Prophecy, to convince men of things,  
 “ that were to happen in their own  
 “ times: and that it gives a low idea  
 “ of the administration of Providence,  
 “ in sending Prophets, one after ano-  
 “ ther, in every age, from *Adam* to  
 “ *Christ*, to imagine, that all this *Ap-*  
 “ *paratus* was for their sakes, who  
 “ lived in, or after the times of  
 “ *Christ* [1].”

But if the principal end of the anti-  
 tient Prophecies was really such, as he  
 assigns to them, God would surely have  
 given them a character, proper and  
 adequate to that end. Whereas, ac-  
 cording to his representation of them,  
 they seem calculated rather to subvert,  
 than to support the faith and religion  
 of mankind. For it is impossible, *that*  
*dark speeches, ambiguous phrases, car-*  
*rying no precise meaning, or distinct*

[1] Disc. p. 37.

*evidence,*

*evidence*, should produce any thing in the minds of men, but doubts, scruples, and uncertainties, which are all opposite to faith and religion. He tells us still farther, “ that these antient Prophecies, these supports of faith and religion, were not understood by those, who delivered them, tho’ they searched diligently into the meaning of them, and if the inspired and righteous of the old world, to whom the word of God came, did not understand them, it is certain, that others less qualified could have but a confused and indistinct notion of them [ 1 ].” Where he might as well have told us, that mists and clouds were given for the propagation of light, as *confused and indistinct notions, for the support of faith*. Whatever creates faith, must first convince the understanding: but Prophecies not understood by those, who delivered them, and less still by

[ 1 ] P. 28.

those,



those, who heard them, and which convey'd nothing to the mind, but confus'd and indeterminate ideas, might serve indeed to disturb the faith, and pervert the religion of the world, but could never be of use, to support or confirm them.

It is certain then, that the antient Prophecies, as they are described at least by His Lordship, could not be chiefly intended, to support the faith and religion of the Old World. But whatever character they may deserve, or whatever light they may carry in them, it is allowed, that they all bear a relation to the person and coming of the Messiah, or that Great Prophet and Deliverer, who was to arise in the land of *Judæa*: and as this was the common subject of them all, so it was undoubtedly the principal end of them all, (tho' he ridicules it as a low and inferior end) to mark out, from time to time, more and more distinctly, the character and qualities of that expected Prophet, and to prepare the world for  
the

the reception of a new religion, wholly strange and inconceivable, not only to the wisest of men, but to the apprehension even of Angels. And in Prophecies of this kind, whose chief end was, to open gradually such a wonderful scheme of salvation and redemption, to be wrought, after a succession of many ages, some obscurity must necessarily be found, from the sublime and mysterious nature of the subject itself.

Let us here consider a while, how our argument now stands; and what light we have gained from the premises towards settling a just notion of *the use and intent of Prophecy*, which the Bishop professes to teach us in these Discourses.

In the first place then, it is evident, from the practice both of Christ and of his Apostles, that in preaching the Gospel to the Jews, they took all occasions of applying the Prophecies of the Old Testament, singly and separately, to each remarkable circumstance of the  
I
life

life and ministry of Jesus, as so many direct and decisive proofs of his divine mission. The learned Mr. *Whiston*, who seems to have inquired into this subject with great diligence and accuracy, says ; “ It appears to me, upon a  
 “ particular examination, that not onely  
 “ the Apostles, *who might possibly be*  
 “ *supposed to be mistaken sometimes in*  
 “ *such applications*, but our blessed Sa-  
 “ vior himself, who could not be sup-  
 “ posed ever to be so mistaken, always  
 “ quoted these texts, as really, pro-  
 “ perly, and singly belonging to him-  
 “ self, as the true Messias ; and as just  
 “ proofs that he was so [ 1 ].” Thus  
*Jesus*, as I have observ’d above, ap-  
 plying to himself a particular Prophe-  
 cy, in which the principal characters of  
 the *Messiah* are briefly sketched out,  
 says ; *This day, is this Scripture full-*  
*filled in your ears* [ 2 ]. Which is a testi-  
 mony surely as precise and distinct, as

[ 1 ] See his *Literal Accomplishment of Scripture Proph.*  
 p. 20. § x.                      Luk. iv. 21.

any

any can possibly be. The Evangelists also and Apostles applied the ancient Prophecies in the same manner, as so many direct proofs of the truth of the Gospel; and plainly signify this, to have been the genuin use and intent of them, in the designation of God himself; who moved his Prophets, to deliver them in that particular manner, that by tallying so circumstantially with the events, they might yield a demonstrable proof, that they could not relate to any one, but to *Jesus*. Thus in the course of their several Gospels, wherever they mention any notable act or occurrence relating to him, as prefigured in the Old Testament, their constant way of expressing it is; such a thing was done or suffered by him, *that the Scriptures of the Prophets might be fulfilled*: or as *Jesus* himself says, *thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day* [1]. Since

[1] Matt: xxi. 4. Luk. xxiv. 46. Joh. xiii. 18. xvii. 12. &c.

this then was the use of Prophecy, which we find to have been taught and practised, both by Christ and his Apostles, it confutes at once the general argument of His Lordship's *two first Discourses* : The purpose of which is, to shew, that the *Scripture-prophecies were never intended, to be a very distinct evidence* ; and if considered singly, are incapable, from the nature of them, of affording any satisfactory proof, when *they come to be confronted with the objections of unbelievers.*

Secondly, it appears also from what has been said, that the Evangelists, in collecting all the Prophecies of the Old Testament, which they imagined to relate to *Jesus*, never looked for them any higher, than to *the Law, and the Prophets* ; nor ever appealed to any other, than what they found there ; following herein the example of their Master, who in expounding all the prophetic Scriptures, which were applicable to himself, *began with the*

H

*Prophecy*

*Prophecy of Moses* [1]. Thus, as St. *John* tells us, *Philip*, finding *Nathanael*, said to him, We have found him, of whom *Moses*, in the law, and the *Prophets* did write, *Jesus of Nazareth the Son of Joseph* [2]. Which fact confutes likewise at once the grand scheme of his four remaining Discourses, and shews his pretended chain of *antediluvian* Prophecies, to be a vain and impertinent fancy, which has no sort of relation to the evidence of the Gospel.

This being the case, I might here put an end to my remarks, and spare myself the trouble of animadverting on the rest of His Lordship's Discourses; but since the subject of the third is of a very curious kind, in which he opens his grand scheme, *traces out the rise and progress of divine Prophecy, and shews the real end, which God intended to serve by it* [3]; it will not perhaps

[1] And beginning at *Moses* and all the Prophets, &c. Luk. xxiv. 27.

[2] Joh. i. 45.

[1] Disc. p. 47.

be disagreeable to the reader, to wait upon him a little farther, that by examining the foundation, or first link of his prophetic chain, we may the better judge, of its ability to sustain that immense weight and length, which he ascribes to it.

His scheme in short is this: “ that  
 “ Man, like all the other works of  
 “ God, came perfect out of the hands  
 “ of the Creator ; furnished with light  
 “ enough to see his duty, and to attain  
 “ all the happiness, for which he was  
 “ designed ; but being made a free and  
 “ moral agent he fell from his duty and  
 “ incurred the displeasure of God. In  
 “ this state, having forfeited all title to  
 “ happiness and to life itself, he had  
 “ no comfort left to him : the natural  
 “ law could offer none ; it had already  
 “ condemned him, and could suggest  
 “ nothing but a fearfull expectation of  
 “ punishment : all the hope, which  
 “ remained, was ; that God might  
 “ freely pardon him upon his repen-  
 “ tance ; but whether he would or not,

“ natural religion could not teach :  
 “ and should God think fit to be re-  
 “ conciled to him, the natural law  
 “ must again become the rule of his  
 “ future obedience ; so that all his  
 “ hopes and confidence must arise from  
 “ the promise of God ; that is, from  
 “ *the word of Prophecy* ; for which  
 “ reason, Prophecy must ever be an es-  
 “ sential part of such a sinner’s reli-  
 “ gion.

“ Our first Parents being reduced to  
 “ this desperate condition ; deprived of  
 “ all hopes by a sense of their guilt,  
 “ and under the terrible apprehension  
 “ of the divine vengeance, God came  
 “ down, to judge them, yet with in-  
 “ tentions of shewing mercy, and res-  
 “ cuing them finally from that ruin,  
 “ which they had brought upon them-  
 “ selves. For this end, *the word of*  
 “ *Prophecy now came in* ; not in op-  
 “ position to natural religion, but in  
 “ the support of it, and to convey  
 “ new hopes to man ; without  
 “ which religion could no longer have  
 “ subsisted



“subsisted in the world ; because a  
 “sense of religion without hope, is  
 “a state of Phrenzy and distracti-  
 “on [1].”

The Prophecy, which *is now said to come in*, is a part of the sentence, pronounced by God upon the Serpent, in these words ; *And I will put enmity between thee and the woman ; and between thy seed and her seed ; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel* : which he calls the *ground-work and foundation of all the Prophecies, which have been ever since ; and the sole support of religion, in the antediluvian world [1]*. The authority of it is grounded on the Mosaic account of the fall, considered as *an Historical narration* of facts, supposed to have been transacted, in the manner, as they are there described : and *the more, and oftner it is considered, he says, in all it's circumstances, the more will this interpretation of it prevail.*

[1] P. 53, 54. 61. &amp;c.

[2] P. 54.

He owns however, that it might have been expected from him, *to have cleared it in the first place from the difficulties, which arise from it*, yet he thinks it sufficient to say, *that nothing material could be added to what has already been said on that subject* [1]. But for my part, as oft as I have had occasion to consider this case; I have ever found myself persuaded still more and more, that the historical sense was so far from being the sense of the writer, or in any degree probable, that it was utterly absurd and contradictory to reason.

His Lordship supposes man to have come perfect out of the hands of his Creator, and furnished with sufficient light, to see and to perform his duty, without *an admonisher at every turn at his elbow* [2]. He supposes the law, which was given to him, as the guide of his nature, to have been complete, if he had obeyed it, but after he had

[1] P. 55.

[2] P. 50.

once transgressed, it had no healing clause which could save him from punishment, till God thought fit to supply it by *the word of Prophecy*. This is smooth and plausible, and easily swallowed by those, who take every thing for sacred which is delivered from the Pulpit : but men, who inquire into things, will meet with many absurdities, which reason must wink at, and many incredibilities, which faith must digest, before they can admit the authority of this Prophecy, upon the evidence of this Historical narration.

A natural law, we see, is supposed, to have been implanted in the very frame of man at his creation, pointing out to him his chief good and happiness, and enabling him to acquire it. And in truth, it is not possible to conceive him to have been placed upon this earth by God, without being furnished with natural powers, proper to support and preserve him, in that perfection of his nature, in which he was originally created. Yet in this *Histo-*

*rical narration*, we cannot discover the least trace of any natural law, nor of any religion, which reason could teach. Reason and nature appear to have had no rule in the Paradisiacal state; all things in it were ordered miraculously and supernaturally by the immediate interposition of God; and the Admonisher no sooner retired from the elbow of our first Parents, than the Serpent stepped in, and beguiled them.

Had they been left to the direction of the natural law, it would have taught them, that the primary end of their creation was, to propagate their species; but from this *Historical narration* we find, that during their state of innocence, they were utterly ignorant of this end; and did not know *their own nakedness*, till they were expelled out of Paradise. The natural law could not teach them, that the fruit of a tree would inspire knowledge; or that *the knowledge of good and ill* could be criminal or hurtfull: nor was it the light of reason which directed them,

them, to hide themselves from the sight of God among the trees. When the beasts of the field were brought before *Adam*, that he might give names to them ; the same law, which instructed him, to give them names, proper to their several natures, would have taught him at the same time, that they were all dumb, and that the use of speech was the peculiar privilege of man, to whom the dominion over them was given ; yet in this Historical narration, we find one of the lowest of those beasts holding discourse, and debating with *Eve*, without giving the least shock or surprize to her natural reason. Lastly, when the wonderfull works of the Creator had convinced our first Parents of his infinite power, and wisdom and goodness, the natural law could not inform them, that there was another invisible Being in the world, of an opposite nature absolutely wicked, malicious ; and indued likewise with great power ; which he was perpetually employing, to defeat  
all

all the good and happiness, which God had provided for his creatures: and since this was neither discoverable to their reason, nor revealed to them by their Maker, how can we imagine, that God would expose their simplicity, unarmed and uninstructed, to the assaults of an insidious temptor, so greatly superior to them both in craft and power?

But his Lordship being apprehensive, that the reasoners of this world might break in upon him, and rudely unravel his fine-spun scheme, takes care to enter his protest against a certain set of them, whom, for the grossness of their infidelity, he excludes from *all right to debate in this question*, and describes under the following Character;

“ To some unbelievers, says he,—  
 “ the history of the fall would have  
 “ been altogether as incredible, tho’  
 “ perhaps not quite so diverting, had  
 “ it been told in the simplest and plain-  
 “ est language. ’Tis to little purpose  
 “ therefore,

“ therefore, to trouble ’em with an  
 “ account of the genius of the Eas-  
 “ tern people, and their language ;  
 “ for you may as soon persuade them,  
 “ that a Serpent tempted *Eve*, as that  
 “ an evil spirit did. If you ask, why  
 “ the Devil might not as well speak to  
 “ *Eve*, under the form of a Serpent,  
 “ as give out Oracles to the old Hea-  
 “ then world, under that and many  
 “ other forms ? You gain nothing by  
 “ the question ; for Oracles, whether  
 “ *Heathen or Jewish*, are to them  
 “ alike, they dispute not their autho-  
 “ rity, but their reality. This is a  
 “ degree of unbelief, which has no  
 “ right to be admitted to debate the  
 “ question now under considerati-  
 “ on [ 1 ].

Every man of sense must necessarily  
 be surprized, to find this eminent Pre-  
 late proclaiming here from the Pulpit,  
 the great impiety of *disbelieving the*

[ 1 ] P. 55.

*Heathen Oracles*, or denying them, to have been *given out by the Devil*. Yet whatever he may please to write, or preach concerning this heinous crime ; I freely own myself to be guilty of it, and think myself sufficiently warranted to pronounce from the authority of the best and wisest of the Heathens themselves, and the evidence of plain facts, which are recorded of those Oracles, as well as from the nature of the thing itself, that they were all mere impostures, wholly invented and supported by human craft, without any supernatural aid or interposition whatsoever.

If His Lordship had read the short *History of Oracles*, by M. De Fontenelle, he would have learnt, that *Cicero*, speaking of the *Delphic Oracle*, the most revered of any, in the Heathen world, declares, *that nothing was become more contemptible, not onely in his days, but for a long time before him* : that *Demosthenes*, who lived about three hundred years earlier, af-  
 2 firmed



firmed of the same Oracle, in a public speech to the people of *Athens*, that it *was gained to the interests of King Philip*, an enemy to that City: that the Greek Historians tell us, how, on several other occasions, it had been corrupted by money, to serve the views of particular Princes and parties, and the Prophetess sometimes deposed, for bribery, and for lewdness: that there were some great sects of Philosophers, who, by principle, disavowed the authority of all Oracles: agreeably to all which, *Strabo* tells us, that Divination in general and Oracles had been in high credit among the antients, but in his days, were treated with much contempt. Lastly, that *Eusebius* also, the great Historian of the primitive Church, declares, that there were *six hundred writers among the Heathens themselves*, who had publicly written against the reality of them.

Is it not amazing then, that a Christian Bishop should so zealously preach up the reality of those Oracles, which  
the

the most learned and virtuous of the Heathens themselves condemned as a despicable imposture? But the Primitive Fathers constantly affirmed them to have been the real effects of a supernatural power, and *given out by the Devil*: and this without doubt is the ground of that zeal which His Lordship expresses in favor of their reality. Yet here again, the same M. *De Fontenelle* would have informed him, that, while those Fathers preferred that way of combating the authority of the Oracles, as the most commodious, to themselves and to the state of the controversy, between them and the Heathens, yet they believed them at the same time, to be nothing else, but the effects of human fraud and contrivance: which he has illustrated, by the examples of *Clemens of Alexandria, Origen, and Eusebius* [1].

I chuse to refer His Lordship on this occasion, to the learned and ingenious

[1] Hist. des Oracles par M. *De Fontenelle*, vid. *Strabo*. l. 17. p. 1168. A.

M. *De Fontenelle*, who is a Papist, still living in a Popish country ; where he enjoys, in a good old age, the full credit and respect, which is due to his great merit, notwithstanding his avowed *unbelief of the Heathen Oracles*, and the fatal blow which he has given to their authority : while the same unbelief in this free or Protestant country, is declared here by a Protestant Bishop to be of so criminal a nature, that it ought at least to be silenced, and banished from all philosophical or religious debate. His Lordship addresses himself in the next place to another set of Unbelievers, *not infidels*, he says, *with regard to religion in general*, like the first sort, who deny the *reality of the Heathen Oracles*, but whose minds are shocked onely with some particular circumstances of this History : with these therefore he condescends to debate in the following manner, and says ; “ I desire them to consider, that  
 “ the speculations arising from the his-  
 “ tory of the fall, and the intro-  
 “ duction

“ duction of natural and moral evil  
 “ into the world, are of all others the  
 “ most abstruse, and furthest removed  
 “ out of our reach : that this difficul-  
 “ ty led men in the earliest time, to  
 “ imagine two independent principles  
 “ of good and evil ; a notion def-  
 “ tructive of the sovereignty of God,  
 “ the maintenance of which is the  
 “ principal end and design of the  
 “ Mosaic history. Had the history of  
 “ man’s fall plainly introduced an in-  
 “ visible evil being, to confound the  
 “ works of God, and to be the author  
 “ of iniquity, it might have given  
 “ great countenance to this error, of  
 “ two Principles : or to prevent it,  
 “ *Moses* must have writ an history of  
 “ *the Angel’s fall* likewise ; a point I  
 “ suppose, to which his commission did  
 “ not extend, and of which perhaps  
 “ we are not capable Judges ; and  
 “ since this difficulty might in a great  
 “ measure be avoided, by having re-  
 “ course to the common usage of the  
 “ Eastern countries, which was to clothe  
 “ history

“ history in parables and similitudes,  
 “ it seems not improbable, that for  
 “ this reason the history of the fall  
 “ was put into the dress, in which we  
 “ now find it [1].”

I am at a loss to conceive, what His Lordship can aim at in this paragraph, or how it can possibly remove the scruples of those, to whom it is addressed. To the former set of unbelievers, who are enemies to religion, this history, he tells us, is *diverting*; but to these, it seems, who are friends to it, it is *shocking*: yet the history itself all the while is quite harmless and inoffensive, if taken in it's right sense; and the whole ground either of the diversion, which it gives to the enemies, or of scandal, to the friends of religion, lies in the absurd interpretations, and senseless whims, which the Jewish and Christian Divines have in all ages been ingrafting upon it.

[1] P. 56, 57.

For instance, if it is to be received as a literal, or *historical narration* of things, transacted in the manner, in which they are described, then the discourse of a Serpent, tempting and beguiling our first parents, must needs appear shocking to every man: or if, as His Lordship would persuade us, the Devil, under that borrowed form, was the real temptor; this is still more shocking, as being not onely void of all support from the text, but contradictory to the expresse sense of it, which ascribes the success of the Serpent, to the natural subtilty of the beast; *Now the Serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field, which the Lord God had made, and he said unto the woman, &c. [1].* The curse also denounced against the deceiver, restrains it to a mere serpent. *Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattell, and above every beast of the field: upon thy belly*

[1] Gen. iii. 1.

*shalt*

*shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life. And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed : it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel* [1]. For this being the whole sentence, which was pronounced on the Deceiver, and the literal execution of it upon the serpent, being verified to us at this day, by the nature of that animal, it shews, that it must have been pronounced upon a real Serpent, exclusively of any other agent, or it could not possibly be just. But the introduction of the Devil embarrasses the case still more, as it is more glaringly inconsistent with the Attributes of the Deity ; which the Bishop in effect confesses, yet, with his usual dexterity, clears the narration from any objection of that sort, by this curious observation ; *that if an invisible evil Being had indeed been plainly introduced into the scene, it might have given great*

[1] Ib. v. 14, 15.

*countenance to the error, of two independent principles; but Moses being aware of this, and having no commission to write an History of the fall of the Angels, which would have accounted for the origin of evil, nor being at liberty therefore to introduce the Devil openly, contrived, for the sake of avoiding that inconvenience, to keep him always out of sight, and behind the curtain, as it were, by clothing the story, after the eastern fashion, in parables and similitudes.*

No paragraph surely, in which a point of such high importance is treated, was ever more conspicuously trifling than this. The difficulty, which His Lordship attempts to account for, is the introduction of natural and moral evil into the world; and the sum of what he suggests for the comfort of those, who are shocked by it, is;  
 “ that it is a point of all others the  
 “ most abstruse, and what gave birth  
 “ to the pernicious notion of two in-  
 “ dependent



“ *dependent Principles of good and ill :*  
 “ that if God had instructed *Moses* to  
 “ give us an history *of the fall of the*  
 “ *Angels*, it would have prevented this  
 “ error; but since *Moses’s* commission  
 “ did not reach so far, he could not  
 “ openly introduce into the history of  
 “ man’s fall, an invisible evil Being,  
 “ who was able to confound the works  
 “ of God, without strenghtening the  
 “ said error : wherefore he contrived  
 “ to introduce him in masquerade, or  
 “ in the dress of a Serpent ; so that  
 “ tho’ the weak and simple could not  
 “ discover him, yet the sharp-sighted  
 “ and judicious might still find him  
 “ out, and be inabled by that means,  
 “ to satisfy both their own and other  
 “ people’s scruples, and unfold this ab-  
 “ struse quæstion, of the origin of  
 “ evil.

“ For the Serpent, adds his Lord-  
 “ ship, was remarkable for insidious  
 “ cunning, and therefore stood a proper  
 “ emblem of a Deceiver, and yet being

“ one of the lowest of the creatures,  
 “ the emblem gave no suspicion of any  
 “ power concerned, that might pre-  
 “ tend to rival the Creator. This me-  
 “ thod has not so obscured this Histo-  
 “ ry, but that we may with great cer-  
 “ tainty come to the knowledge of all,  
 “ that is necessary for us to know.  
 “ Let us consider the history of *Moses*,  
 “ as we should do any other antient  
 “ history of like antiquity : suppose,  
 “ for instance, that this account of the  
 “ fall had been preserved to us out of  
 “ *Sanconiatbo's Phœnician History*.—  
 “ 'Tis no unreasonable thing surely, to  
 “ demand the same equity in interpre-  
 “ ting the sense of *Moses*, as you would  
 “ certainly use towards any other anti-  
 “ ent writer—[ 1 ].”

This demand indeed is reasonable ;  
 and what all the lovers of truth will  
 allow ; that the books of *Moses* have a  
 right to be interpreted with the same  
 candor, which is commonly indulged

[1] P. 57.

to all other antient writers. Upon this foot then we will join issue, and consider the history of the fall, and the particular condemnation of the Serpent, as a story delivered to us by some Old *Phœnician Historian*. But before I declare my own opinion upon it in this light, it may be more satisfactory perhaps to the reader, to be informed of what an abler writer has already declared upon it; I mean the late Dr. *Burnet of the Charter-House*, who speaking to this very point, of the *Scriptural account of the fall*, says;

“ Great is the force of prejudice and  
 “ preconceived opinions on the minds  
 “ of men. We receive these short  
 “ commentaries and little stories, of  
 “ the origin of men and things, from  
 “ the mouth of *Moses*, without exami-  
 “ nation or hesitation: but if we had  
 “ met with the same doctrine in ano-  
 “ ther writer; in a *Greek Philosopher*  
 “ for instance, or in a *Jewish or Ma-*  
 “ *hometan Doctor*; the mind would  
 “ have been perplexed and set fast, as  
 I 4 “ it

“ it were, in every period, by doubts  
 “ and objections. This difference ari-  
 “ ses not from the nature of the thing,  
 “ or the matter of those writings, but  
 “ from our opinion of the credit and  
 “ authority of the writer, as of one di-  
 “ vinely inspired. And this indeed we  
 “ freely allow to him, nor are we dif-  
 “ puting on this occasion, about the  
 “ authority of the writer, but about  
 “ the view and intention, with which  
 “ he wrote, and the character of the  
 “ stile, which he made use of ; whe-  
 “ ther it was of the popular, or philo-  
 “ sophic kind : the popular I say, not  
 “ the fabulous, tho’ we might call it  
 “ also by this name, if we were treat-  
 “ ing of any other writer, but those of  
 “ the Scriptures. As to the case of  
 “ Fables, some of them are merely and  
 “ absolutely fictitious : others are built  
 “ on a foundation of fact, but dressed  
 “ out with additional and fancifull or-  
 “ naments. There are likewise cer-  
 “ tain narrations, by which truth is  
 “ conveyed to us, yet not in the parti-  
 “ cular

“ cular points or sentences, but from  
 “ the sum of the whole narration,  
 “ and the general purpose of the Au-  
 “ thor : and if the narration now in  
 “ question should be ranked by any  
 “ one in this class, with due respect  
 “ had to the name and honor of the  
 “ writer, I shall not be against it [1].”

We see here, what sort of character this very able and ingenious writer ascribes to *the History of the fall*, when considered abstractedly from the authority of *Moses*. The Bishop on the other hand is extremely shy, of declaring his opinion concerning the proper class or species of writing in which it may be ranked, and avoids to give any explicit definition of it, or to tell us, of what kind he takes it to be, whether of the *litteral*, *the parabolical*, *the allegorical*; or the *fabulous*; nay, he speaks of it on all occasions, so obscurely and equivocally, as if he meant,

[1] Vid. Thom. Burnetij Theor. Sacr. & Archæolog. ibid. adjunct. p. 503. Edit. Amst.

to leave himself at liberty to take it in any of them, which may best suit his own system; or in all of them rather in their turns, by applying one kind of it to one part, and a different one to another. He pronounces it, in the first place, to be an *Historical narration*: which leads us to expect nothing from it but the literal sense: yet he informs us, in the next page, how *Moses*, for certain reasons, chose to cloath it *in parables and similitudes*, after the manner of the Eastern writers [1]. Then he returns presently to the letter, and says, *that there were four persons evidently concerned in the story, the man, the woman, the person represented by the Serpent, and God*: that the three first were *standing before God, to receive sentence for their disobedience*; that the *judgment was awfull and severe*; *the woman doomed to sorrow in conception*; *the man to sorrow and travel all the days of his life*; and the

[1] Disc. p. 57.

ground itself *curfed for their fake*— that upon the Serpent alfo, this curfe was pronounced ; *upon thy belly fhalt thou go, and duft fhall thou eat all the days of thy life : and I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy feed and her feed, it fhall bruife thy head, and thou fhalt bruife his heel* [1]. Yet after he has fupposed all this to have been literally tranfacted, in the very manner, in which it is described ; he proceeds again, to laugh at the literal fenfe, as contradictory to common fenfe ; and declares the *language of this Prophecy, or curfe upon the Serpent, to be in part metaphorical* [2].

This is the whole, which he has thought fit to declare, concerning the ftile and nature of the Mosaic account ; *that it is Historical, but cloathed in parables and fimilitudes, and in fome part metaphorical*. Now what idea any other reader may form, from fuch a description, I know not ; for

[1] P. 58, 60, &amp;c.

[2] P. 65.

my part, I can form none : and tho' he has jumbled *history, parable, similitude, and metaphor*, into the composition of this narrative, it is certain, that if those terms be taken strictly, it will be difficult to discover any one of them in it ; but on the contrary, every thing as plain and literal, as language can make it. *The man, the woman and the Serpent* are declared to be personally standing before God in Paradise ; without the least shadow of any *similitude, metaphor, comparison or allusion* to any other being whatsoever : yet we cannot properly call it a parable ; for tho' a parable be a mere fiction, it is defined to be of such a sort, as must always be probable, or what might possibly be true : nor can it be an history, for tho' it be a plain description of facts, yet they are all apparently fictitious, and impossible to be performed in the manner, in which they are described. What then, are we to think of it ? why, we may give it either the general name of an *allegory*, by which a different sense

is



is conveyed, than what is signified by words: or we may call it rather an *Apologue or moral fable*; the peculiar character of which is, to relate things and events, impossible in their nature: which is evidently the case of the narrative in quæstion.

But to return to the point, from which I have digressed. His Lordship having submitted the story to our examination, abstractedly from the authority of *Moses*, or as grounded onely on the testimony of any other antient writer, proceeds, like an able Advocate, to lay it before us, in the most advantageous light. He observes, “ that if  
 “ the man and the woman, who were  
 “ standing before God under the con-  
 “ viction of their guilt, had been left  
 “ to undergo the severity of their sen-  
 “ tence, without any source of hope  
 “ or comfort remaining to them, that  
 “ would have made them desperate, and  
 “ extinguished all sence of religion in  
 “ them, as taking themselves to be ut-  
 “ terly rejected by their Maker: but  
 “ that

“ that God came down in mercy, as  
 “ well as judgement, and with a pur-  
 “ pose, not onely to punish, but to  
 “ restore man : which purpose was fig-  
 “ nified, by the curse pronounced up-  
 “ on the Serpent, or the Deceiver, and  
 “ especially by that part, in which it is  
 “ declared, *that the seed of the woman*  
 “ *should bruise the Serpent’s head.* That  
 “ it was absolutely necessary, to com-  
 “ municate so much hope to them, as  
 “ might be a rational foundation, for  
 “ their future endeavours to reconcile  
 “ themselves to God by a better obedi-  
 “ ence. And it was necessary also to  
 “ the state of the world and the condi-  
 “ tion of religion, which could not  
 “ possibly have been supported with-  
 “ out the communication of such  
 “ hopes, that they could not but con-  
 “ ceive these hopes, when they heard  
 “ from the mouth of God, that the  
 “ Serpent’s victory was not complete  
 “ even over themselves ; but that they  
 “ and their posterity should be inabled  
 “ to contest his Empire ; and tho’  
 “ they

“ they were to suffer much in the struggle, should finally prevail and *bruise his head*, and deliver themselves from his power and dominion [1].”

In this state of the case, the Bishop supposes all the while, that the Devil was the real deceiver, under the borrowed form of the Serpent; which, tho' *Adam and Eve* did not then understand, they might however, have some reason to suspect; *for they had found the Serpent by experience, to be an enemy to God, and to man; and the great Author of iniquity in the world, who was able to debase the noblest work of the creation; yet, by the curse and punishment inflicted upon him, they saw, that God was still his superior, and consequently, that there was no evil Being, which could rival the power of the Creator: thus the condemnation of the Serpent, as his Lordship says, was the maintenance of God's supremacy, and the divine Prophecy, which was declared by it, became a fresh*

[1] P. 60-64.

source of hope and comfort, and religion to our first Parents under the misery of their fall.

Let us now then take a review of the story, agreeably to his own demand, as if it had been told to us by *Sanconiatbo*. And in this way of considering it, the first reflection, which would occur, is, that it was not possible for any mortal, to give an Historical narration of the events therein represented; or to describe the particular manner, order, and time in which, or the materials, out of which this world, and it's principal inhabitant, man, were formed. We should apply presently to such a writer, what was said by God to Job, *where wast thou, when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding, &c.* [1]. And should think the same of him, which Job confesses of himself, *that he had uttered, what he understood not; things too wonderfull for him, which he knew*

[1] Job xxxviii. 4.

*not* [1]. We should conclude at once, that the whole, which the wisest of men could write on such a subject, must be the mere effect of fancy and invention ; or an attempt to inculcate some moral truth, where physical truth was not to be had.

It may be said perhaps, that an account of man's fall might have been delivered by *Adam* to his posterity, and transmitted from hand to hand through the succeeding ages, by the pious and faithfull of the antient world. But this will be of no weight with inquisitive men : who know from all experience, that the testimony of tradition is of all others the most fallacious, and ever found the most fabulous, in proportion, as it is antient. They know, that, in the present state of mankind, how much soever polished by arts and sciences, there is not a single nation, which can trace any probable tradition of it's own origin, or give any satisf-

[1] Job xlii. 3.

factory account of its history, beyond a few of these later centuries : they would think it therefore ridiculous to imagine, that after an interval of near three thousand years, a precise account could be given of a personal conference between *God, the man, the woman and the Serpent*, in *paradise* ; the situation of which place has never been known to the world, after the most diligent inquiry, to this very day. Thus from the nature of the story itself, if it had been told to us by any one, but *Moses*, we should readily conclude, that no writer whatsoever could be so sufficiently informed of it, as to be able to give an *historical narration* of it ; or could have authority enough, to make it pass for such, with any judicious reader : and we should pronounce it therefore *at once*, to be one of those Antient *Apologues* or *Moral Fables*, by which the Sages of the Eastern countries, used to instruct their people in the general principles of religion and morality, and attempt to illustrate the  
origin

origin and nature of these worldly things.

For if we suppose any wise and virtuous man of those early ages, to have projected a scheme, to reform the general corruption and degeneracy of manners, which he observed to prevail in the world, by infusing into his fellow creatures a sense of duty and religion, proper to their nature, and conducive to their happiness, he could not take any method so effectual, as to persuade them in the first place, that this world, and all things in it derived their existence from a Creator, who alone was without beginning or end of days: that the Creator had given a being to man, for the sake of communicating happiness to him, and made him capable of acquiring and preserving it, by his own strength; but that man, deviating from the law of his nature, and the guidance of his reason, and giving himself up to the rule of his lusts, and appetites, had debased the dignity of his nature; levelled himself, as it were, to the con-

dition of the brutes ; incurred the displeasure of His Maker ; and rendered himself obnoxious to punishment ; without any means of recovering the divine favor, [or restoring himself to his original happiness, but by deserting that bestial rule of sensual pleasure, which had beguiled him into a state of guilt and misery.

These are the fundamental points of all religion, and of necessary belief, for the reformation of a depraved world : and these are clearly inculcated, to the level even of all capacities, by the story now before us, if considered in that character, in which it would certainly have been proposed, by every antient writer of the eastern world ; that is, as one of those instructive and moral fictions, to which we may give the name of Apologue, or *fable, or allegory*, or of any thing rather, than of an *Historical narration*, with which it is utterly incompatible. This, I say, is what we should judge of it, if it had come from *Sanconiatbo*.

We



We could not avoid seeing the intention of the writer, in imagining man to have been formed out of *the dust of the earth*; and the woman, out of *the rib of man*; in placing them, while they continued innocent, in a *Paradise*, stored with every thing proper to support and perpetuate their happiness: we should perceive this paradise, to be nothing else but a fancifull Scene, abounding with fruits, which had no existence in nature, and planted in a part of the East, which no geography could ever mark out upon the face of this Globe: we should see also, that the subtil discourse of the Serpent, which beguiled *Eve*, could mean nothing else but the tempting suggestions of lust and sensual appetite, of which the Serpent was the emblem; and that their expulsion out of paradise pointed out the natural effects of sin and guilt, in depriving man of his happiness, and plunging him into misery, sorrow, and death. Which account of the matter is no other, than what St. *James* himself gives of the natural method, by which men are usually beguiled to debase the

purity of their nature ; where he says ; *that every man is tempted, when he is drawn away and enticed by his own lust : and that lust, when it has conceived, bringeth forth Sin ; and Sin, when it is accomplished, bringeth forth death* [1].

This way of inculcating a notion of the fall, or lapsed state of man, is perfectly agreeable to the genius of the Eastern writers ; and as the moral of it is plain and obvious, so it is the onely way of inculcating it, which mere reason could suggest to any writer. And by the same fable, the Author meant without doubt, to account also after the Eastern fashion, for the abject state of *the Serpentine race*, now *creeping upon its belly, licking the dust, and in perpetual hostility with man, whose heel it sometimes bites*, while man more frequently finds means to *bruise his head*. For the curse upon the Serpent, instead of containing *any divine prophecy*, seems to carry nothing more in it, according to all ra-

[1] Jam. i. 14.

tional interpretation, than a fancifull solution of the cause and origin of the present odious nature of that beast, agreeable to the manner of those antient Sages.

But after all ; I freely remit to His Lordship all the advantage, which I might draw from his concession of considering this story abstractedly from the authority of *Moses*. I will grant it to come from *Moses*, and that *Moses* was commissioned by God to write it : yet this makes no difference in the case, because the matter of the story, whether it be inspired or not, is absolutely inconsistent with the character of *an historical narration*, and must ever convince all, who consider it without prejudice, that it is wholly fabulous or allegorical : and that *Moses's* commission was accommodated on this occasion, as it is allowed to have been on many others, to the prevailing taste and customs of the nations around him ; among whom the usual method of instructing or incul-

cating truths, especially those of a sublime and theological kind, was by fables and allegories, which conveyed a summary notion of the doctrine proposed to be taught, by a way the most striking and entertaining to the generality of mankind.

Thus the plantation of a *paradise* for the habitation of man; *the tree of life, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil in the midst of it; the expulsion of him out of it after his fall; the cherubim and flaming sword, placed as a guard to it; God coming down to walk in it, in the cool of the day; Adam hiding himself among the trees from the sight of God; the discourse of the Serpent; and the curse pronounced upon him by God, and upon the ground also itself;* must all be consider'd as a mere Eastern fable, from which no other lesson or doctrine can be inferred, than what I have already intimated; that this world was created by God; and that man was happy in it, as long as he continued  
innocent,

innocent, but forfeited his happiness, and became wretched and miserable, as soon as he became a willful and habitual sinner. This, I say, is the whole, which we can rationally collect from *the Mosaic account of the fall*; but to draw divine and literal prophecies out of a mere fable, and to treat it as the *support of all religion in the Antediluvian world, and the foundation of all the prophetic evidence*, which the Christian religion has to depend upon, is more likely to weaken than confirm the authority of Christianity; and deserves rather to be ranked among the dreams of Visionaries and Enthusiasts, than considered, as the suggestion of sober sense and reason.

In conversing formerly on this subject with a certain great Prelate, he said, *that he looked upon the literal and the allegorical interpretation of the account of the fall, to be of equal force and merit, with respect to their use, or application to Christianity.*—I understood him then to mean, what I still take

take to be the sole meaning of his words, which carries any sense in it; that though the simpler sort of Christians generally interpret this story in it's gross and literal sense, while the more knowing and liberal look upon it as a fable or allegory; yet both of them acknowledge the same end in it; draw the same doctrine from it; and consider that doctrine, whether delivered allegorically or historically, as the foundation of their common religion.

If I should name this Prelate, His Lordship, I am sure, would own his authority to be justly great with all men, and greater still with himself, than with any; yet when he comes to handle the same story, neither *the letter*, nor *the allegory* can satisfy him, nor any other uniform, and consistent rule of explaining it. He cannot allow it to be literal; because the letter is shocking to our reason; nor will he grant it to be *fabulous*; because a fable cannot be the foundation of a prophecy, which his system requires; he  
contrives

contrives therefore, to jumble all the various interpretations of it together, till by the help of that confusion he may shuffle his own sense upon us. And thus a prophecy is cooked up, of which there is not the least intimation in the narrative itself; and which the Author of it, *Moses*, has on no occasion recommended or pointed out to us as such, in any other part of his writings: yet this is affirm'd to be *the ground-work and foundation of all the later prophecies*, which have any relation to the Christian religion.

To this Discourse on *prophecy*, His Lordship here adds a summary account also of the use and intent of *sacrifice*; and though the reader perhaps may not readily perceive, what relation the one has to the other, yet in the few paragraphs, that remain, he will presently be taught that there is a close connexion between them; which the Bishop opens to us, by saying; “ that the bringing in of prophecy was not the only change in  
“ the

“ the state of religion, occasioned by  
 “ the fall. Sacrifice came in at the  
 “ same time, as appears by the course  
 “ of the history [1].” This he sup-  
 poses at once to have been of *divine*  
*institution*; tho’ the text gives not the  
 least hint of any such origin; and the  
 learned *Spencer*, who had considered  
 this quæstion as accurately perhaps as  
 any man, expressly rejects it, and main-  
 tains, “ That the rite of sacrificing  
 “ did not derive it’s birth from any  
 “ command of God, but from the  
 “ free will and appointment of man,  
 “ expressing his gratitude to the Cre-  
 “ ator, for all the good things, which  
 “ he had received from him [2].

The Bishop however having thus  
 settled in a few words *the divine insti-*  
*tution of sacrifice*, proceeds to explain  
 the reason, why *Abel’s sacrifice was*

[1] Disc. P. 73.

[2] Primo, probare conabor, Abelem, Noachum,  
 aliosque Mose vetustiores, sponte sua sacrificasse, adeoque  
 sacrificandi ritum non e præcepto aliquo divino, sed in-  
 stituto & arbitrio humano originem derivasse. De Legib.  
 Hebræor. Vol. 2. l. III. c. IV. §. I. p. 767.



*accepted, and Cain's rejected.* The text informs us, that *Abel brought his offering of the firstlings of his flock and the fat thereof; Cain of the fruit of the ground:* upon which he immediately forms these following suppositions: first, that the original *intent of sacrifice, was to expiate sin:* secondly, that *without blood* there could be no *remission of sin:* thirdly, that *Abel's sacrifice was of a bloody kind:* fourthly, that *Abel came a petitioner for pardon,* and brought with him accordingly *the proper atonement for sin,* as God had appointed it; whereas *Cain,* trusting to his primogeniture, came proudly, *as wanting no pardon,* and with an offering, expressive onely of his thanks and gratitude to God, for favors already received; for which reason it was rejected [1]. Now by the same method of reasoning, and the liberty, which His Lordship every where assumes, of supposing what-

[1] P. 75.

ever premises he wants, and taking every thing for granted, which tends to confirm his hypothesis, we may prove any doctrine to be true or divine, or whatever we please to make of it. *Dr. Lightfoot* has shewn us the way, in his comment on this very text; where he lays open the mystery of the sentence upon the serpent, as well as of the institution of sacrifice, and says; “Christ is here promised, before  
 “the man and the woman are cen-  
 “fured,—Adam layeth hold on that  
 “promise by Faith—and for an out-  
 “ward sign and seal of this faith,  
 “and for a farther and more lively  
 “expression of the same, God teach-  
 “eth him the right of sacrifice, to  
 “lay Christ dying before his eyes in  
 “a visible figure [1].” Yet the text itself yields not the least intimation concerning Christ, or a redeemer of mankind, nor a single word about the use, intent or duty of sacrificing; and

[1] Vol. 1. p. 692.

the whole, which the narrative itself suggests to us, or the learned have collected with any probability from the sacrifices of the two brothers, is; that the different treatment, which they received from God, flowed from the different nature, not of the offerings, but of the men: that *Abel* came with a sincere heart, and a warm sense of his duty and gratitude to his Maker; *Cain*, with an envious and hypocritical heart; harbouring vicious lusts, and projecting malicious designs [1]. But the Bishop insists, that his account of the matter is favored by the text, where God thus expostulates with *Cain*; *if thou dost well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou dost not well, sin lieth at thy door*: from which, he extorts a sense conformable to his suppositions above mentioned, while the obvious and natural sense of the words seems plainly to overthrow them all,

[1] *Cain was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. Wherefore slew he him? because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.* 1. John iii. 12.

and

and to carry the same meaning, as if God had said: “ How canst thou be  
 “ so foolish, as to imagine, that I  
 “ should be pleased with such offer-  
 “ ings, and vain offices of thy duty  
 “ to me, as these? Does not thy reason  
 “ teach thee, that as long as thou dost  
 “ well, thou wilt surely be accepted  
 “ by me, whether thou sacrificest or  
 “ not: but if thou continuest to do  
 “ ill, that the guilt of sin will ever  
 “ lie upon thee, and the punishment  
 “ of it be sure to overtake thee; which  
 “ no sacrifice can atone for; no offer-  
 “ ing expiate.”

The divine acceptance of any particular sacrifice under the law was usually signified *by a flame of fire*, issuing miraculously from heaven, and consuming the said sacrifice: and this testimony is supposed by the Jewish Doctors to have been given to the sacrifice of *Abel*: which *Grotius* takes to be probable, and *St. Jerom* also confirms; for *how could Cain know, says he, that his brother's sacrifice was*  
*accepted*

accepted and his own rejected, but by this sign, which was given afterwards also to Elias, on mount Carmel, and to Solomon, in the dedication of the Temple [1]. But this way of signifying the divine acceptance, was accompanied, as the learned *Fagius* informs us from the Jewish traditions, by this particular circumstance; that in the *cœlestial flame*, which consumed the sacrifice, there always appeared the face of a lion: and if this be true, says he, who can doubt of it's being a type of Christ, who is that *Lion of the tribe of Judah*, which is shadowed out to us by all those sacrifices, both before the laws and under it [2]? Agreeably to which, *Dr. Lightfoot* again takes notice, “ that  
 “ the faith of *Abel* appeared in the  
 “ very materials of his sacrifice, it be-  
 “ ing of slain beasts, and so a repre-

[1] Unde scire poterat Cain, quod fratris munera suscepisset Deus, & sua repudiasset; nisi illa interpretatio vera est, quam *Theodotion* posuit; *Et inflammavit Dominus super Abel, & super sacrificium ejus: super Cain vero & sacrificium ejus non inflammavit?* &c. *Hieron. Quæst. Grot. in Genes. Op. T. 2. p. 511.*

[2] Vid. *Fagium* in *Genes. 4. 4. Apud. Critic. Sacr.*

L

“ sentation

“ sentation of the death of Christ,  
 “ for which reason it was fired from  
 “ heaven, and *Cain's* was not, tho'  
 “ his dry ears of corn were materials  
 “ far more combustibile [1].

Here then we discover His Lordship's reason, for tacking this account of sacrifice, to his account of prophecy. The intent of both, it seems, was the same; and the first sacrifice in the world, as well as the first prophecy, was a typical præfiguration of Christ: for whether the tradition of *the Lion's face* be true or not, it gave His Lordship at least an useful hint, *of a prophetic sense in the sacrifice of Abel.* And thus after a series of suppositions, deduced through two pages, every one of which has been controverted and rejected by the ablest writers on the subject, he proceeds to tell us, “ that his  
 “ interpretation, if admitted, plainly  
 “ shews; that the true religion, in-  
 “ stituted by God, has been one,

[1] Vol. 1. p. 693.

“ and

“ and the same from the fall of *Adam*,  
 “ subsisting ever upon the same prin-  
 “ ciples of faith ; that is, as he him-  
 “ self explains it, *on a reliance on*  
 “ *God’s promises and appointments*,  
 “ or the hopes of a redemption by  
 “ Christ, signified to our first pa-  
 “ rents, by the curse pronounced  
 “ upon the Serpent, and the accept-  
 “ ance of *Abel’s* sacrifice. These  
 “ hopes were at first onely general and  
 “ obscure, but were gradually opened  
 “ and unfolded in every age, till bet-  
 “ ter days came, when God thought  
 “ good to call us into the marvellous  
 “ light of his Gospel [1].”

To this summary account of his  
 scheme, he adds the following short  
 paragraph, with which he concludes  
 this notable discourse ;

“ This piece of history is all the ac-  
 “ count we have of the religion of  
 “ the Antediluvian world : it was pro-  
 “ per to be considered, for the relation

[1] P. 75.

“ there is between prophecy and the  
 “ state of religion in the world ; and  
 “ for this reason also, because *sacri-*  
 “ *fice may perhaps be found to be one*  
 “ *kind of prophecy*, or representation  
 “ of the one great sacrifice, once of-  
 “ fered for the sins of the world.”

Such are the curious refinements, which we must receive upon the authority of this Prelate, as the fundamental principles of that faith, on which our religion subsists. Principles, which utterly exclude and throw aside the natural law, or reason of man, as of no use or service to him, from the beginning of the world to this day, in discerning what is right and wrong, or marking out the chief good and happiness of his nature : and no wonder, that they wage a perpetual war with reason, since they must either suppress reason, or reason will finally destroy them. For instead of recommending a calm and natural way of thinking on subjects, the most important, they tend to fill our heads with

with



with fanatical conceits, and enthusiastic fancies; drawing our attention away from the nature of things, and the testimony of plain facts, and applying it to the investigation of mysteries, prophecies, types, shadows, or every thing, which God has thought proper to hide, instead of revealing to us. In short, when men's searches into the scriptures are directed by these principles, the most favorable treatment, which can be given to them, is to rank them in the same class with the vain amusements of those simple people, who please themselves with looking up to the heavens, not to contemplate the real beauty, order, and motions of the heavenly bodies, but to spy monsters in the clouds, or the typical figures of mountains, castles, beasts, and men; the creatures not of God, but of their own imagination.

I have now said enough, to give the reader a just notion of the Bishop's celebrated Discourses, concerning *the use and intent of the scripture prophecies,*

*phesies*, considered either singly, and independently on each other, or in that comprehensive scheme and chain of them, which he deduces from *Adam*. But before I dismiss the subject, I must beg the reader to recollect what I have before observed, concerning the use of prophecy, as it was actually taught and practised by the Apostles and Evangelists :

1st, That, in preaching the Gospel, to the *Jews*, they constantly applied the prophecies of the Old Testament, *singly and independently on each other*, to all the remarkable circumstances of the life of *Jesus*, as so many decisive proofs of his divine mission.

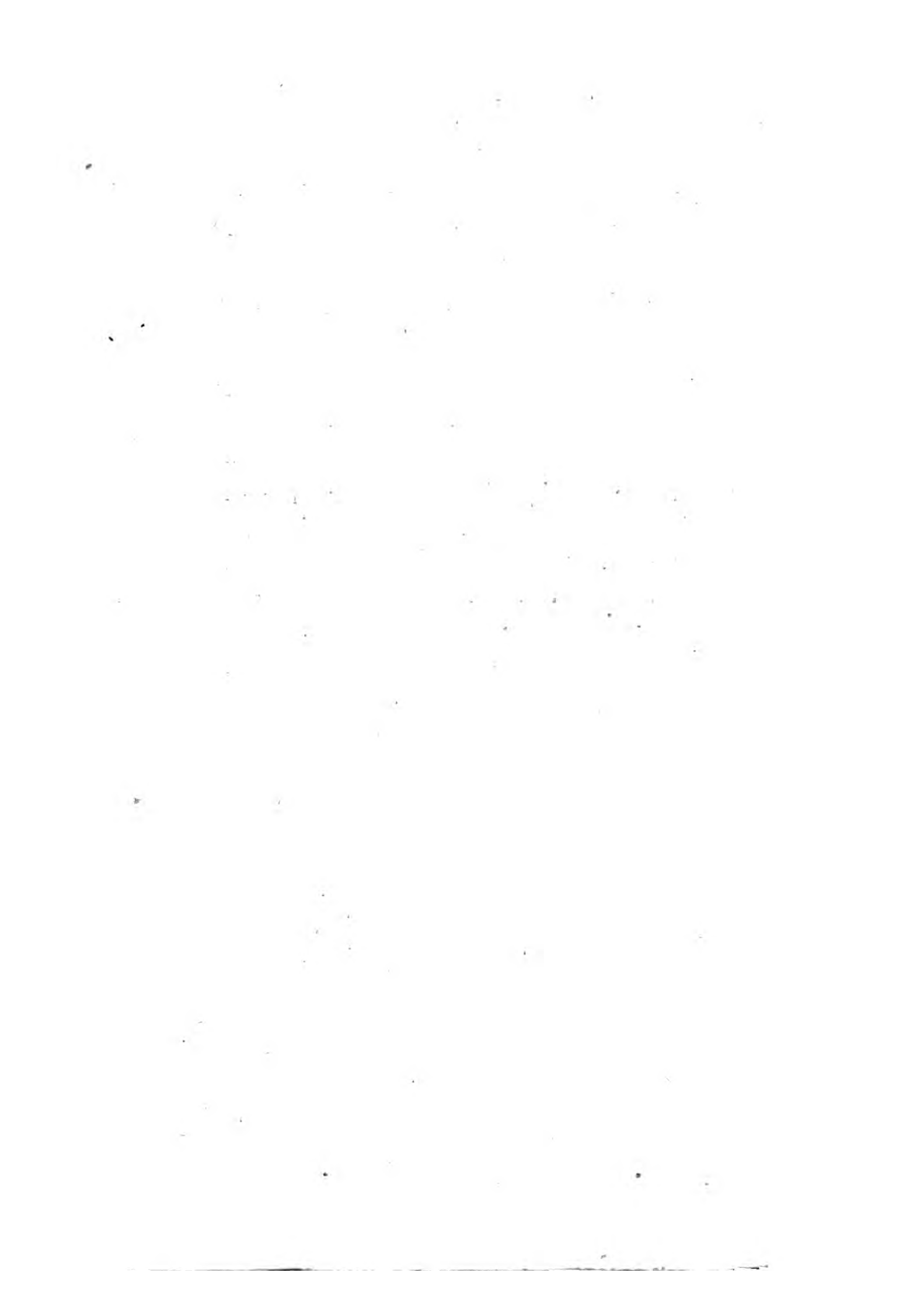
2dly, That, in their search and allegation of those prophecies, *they began always with Moses*, as the first Prophet, who had spoken of Christ, in the delivery of his law to the people.

From these two Observations, it follows, that, whatever difficulties may be charg'd to the particular applications of prophecies, which are found in the New Testament, yet on the whole, that way of applying them must be esteem'd by Christians, as the best, which the case affords; and that the authority of the Gospel, as far as it is grounded on prophecy, rests on those single and independent predictions, which are delivered occasionally here and there, *in the Law and the Prophets*. It must be confessed however, that the Author, against whom the Bishop's Discourses are levelled, has alledged several strong and even unanswerable objections to some of them, which are cited by the Evangelists in proof of the mission of Jesus, as being of too loose and precarious a nature, to build any solid argument upon. This His Lordship seems to allow in his Preface, and intimates, that it was this difficulty, which induced him, to quit that

field to the Adversary, and to take shelter in his *Antediluvian* scheme.

But if this foundation, laid by the Apostles and Evangelists, must be deserted, and their applications of prophecy given up as defenceless, it is certain, that there is no other scheme of it, which can add any real support to the authority of the Gospel. It is our business therefore to take things, as we find them, and treat them agreeably to their nature, neither ascribing a divine character to what is common and natural; nor denying a due reverence to what is sacred and divine. This is what I endeavoured to do many years ago, with regard to this very question; at a time, when it was warmly controverted, and many subtil objections raised upon this article of prophecy, to the disadvantage of the Christian cause; on which occasion, instead of contriving any evasive expedients, or fancifull systems, to elude the force of such objections, I thought it my duty,

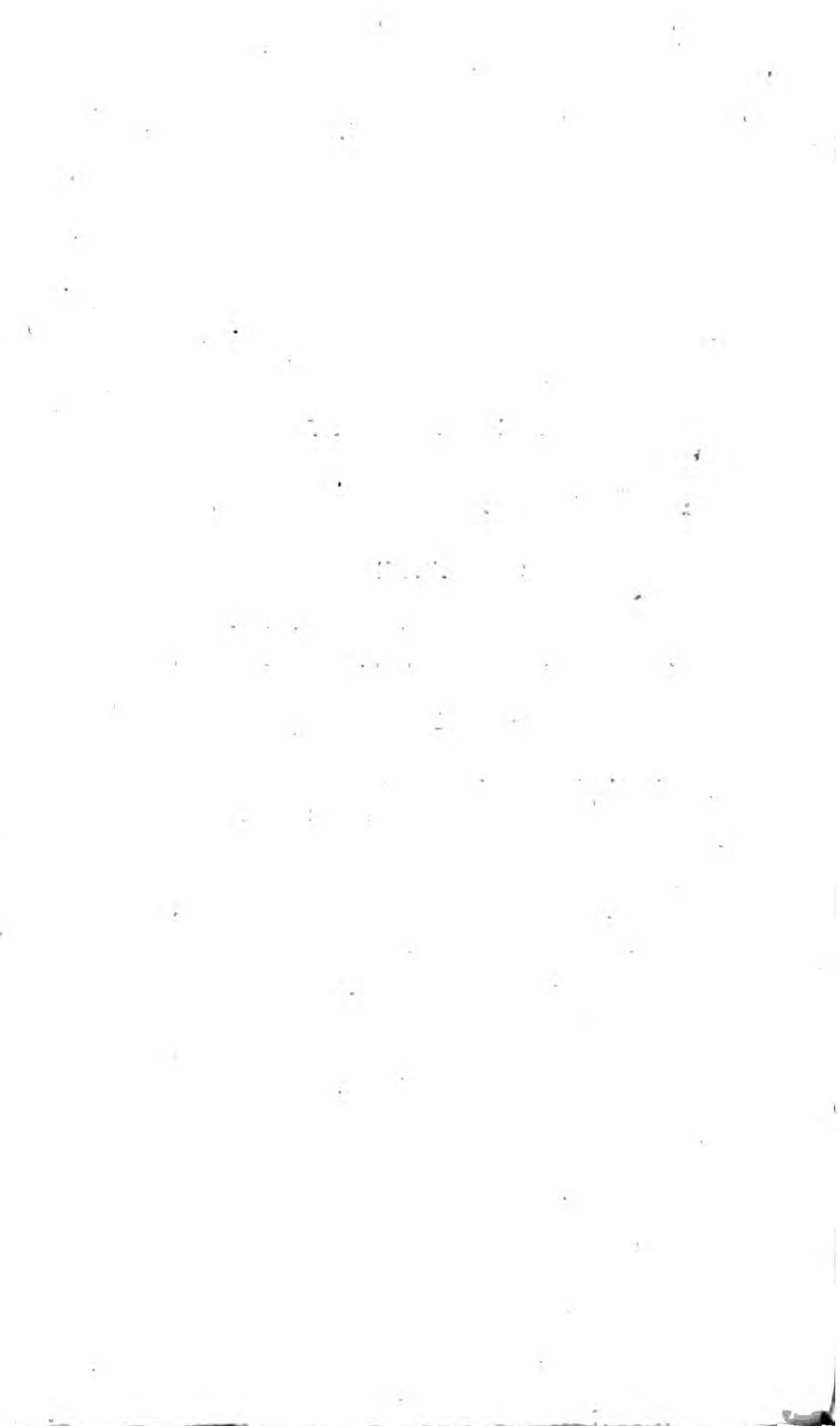
ty, to examine seriously and impartially, what solution of them the subject itself, when fairly stated, would supply; and to embrace that opinion, which the evidence of allowed facts would naturally suggest to me. The sum of this inquiry, as it was originally drawn up by me, will probably be the subject of some future treatise, which I shall reserve however, together with the examination of the rest of his Lordship's Discourses and learned Dissertations, to some occasion hereafter of more leisure.



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SOME CURSORY  
ANIMADVERSIONS  
ON THE  
APPENDIX,  
OR,  
Additional Dissertation.

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SOME CURSORY

## Animadversions, &amp;c.

AFTER I had drawn up the foregoing Examination, and was preparing it for the Press, the Bishop thought proper to publish an *Appendix, or Additional Dissertation*, as he calls it, containing a farther inquiry into the *Mosaic account of the Fall*. This is the fifth piece of the same kind, with which he has successively enlarged and enriched these favorite Discourses; *bringing forth to us, out of his treasure, like the good householder in the Gospel, things new and old*. To this Appendix he has prefixed a short Advertisement, in which he acquaints us, “ that it was drawn up some years ago, and intended, as an Exami-  
 3 “ nation

“ nation of the objections of a par-  
 “ ticular Author, who is since dead ;  
 “ for which reason, he has now con-  
 “ sidered the objections, not as His,  
 “ but as common to all, who call in  
 “ quæstion, or are offended with the  
 “ History of the Fall, as it stands re-  
 “ corded by *Moses*.”

Thus he artfully engages *Moses* in  
 a quarrel, which is purely his own ;  
 and prepossesses people with a notion,  
 that he is defending his character and  
 authority against adversaries, who are  
 laboring to depress them ; whereas the  
 objections generally proposed on this  
 subject, and these especially, now  
 offered by myself, are not levelled  
 against the writings or testimony of  
*Moses*, but against the absurd conceits  
 and interpretations, which superstition,  
 false zeal, or the arts of political  
 Churchmen have in all ages been in-  
 grafting upon them, and imposing  
 upon all Christians as the fundamen-  
 tal principles of their religion.

I have

I have already declared my opinion very freely on the *Mosaic account of the Fall*, and observed; that by considering it as a moral Fable, we get rid of every difficulty, render it clear and consistent, as well as adequate to every use, which Christianity can require from it: and, on the contrary, that the historical sense cannot be defended, but by a series of suppositions, wholly arbitrary and precarious, void of all support from the text, and evidently condemned by our reason.

This, I say, I have clearly shewn in the course of the preceding examination, and there cannot be a stronger confirmation of it, than what His Lordship has given us in this very Appendix, by letting us see, that a person of his great parts and learning, after twenty-five years spent, in considering, revising, and explaining his historical scheme, has nothing after all to produce, as his last thoughts  
upon

upon it, but a perplexed, hypothetical, inconsistent piece of sophistry; which will be intelligible onely to a few, incapable of convincing any, and sure to disgust every rational inquirer. The truth of which I shall exemplify, by a specimen or two of his manner of treating some of the capital points, which he professes to explaine and confirm in this additional performance.

His Lordship begins by observing, that the main difficulty of the quæstion consists in determining, *what we are to understand by the Serpent, who is represented by Moses, as the Temptor of Eve.* Yet before he has advanced one page farther, he concludes, *that a real and natural Serpent had part in this transaction,* for these two reasons; first, because he is said to *be more subtil than any beast of the field, which implies him to have been of the same class with those beasts;* 2dly, because *the curse denounced against him, is adapted to the condition*

*tion of a natural Serpent, and of no other being* [1].

Thus far he adheres to the letter of the text ; which, as all will allow, suggests to us no other notion, than that of a real Serpent. But though the same text ascribes the use of reason and speech to the Serpent, as faculties belonging to his nature, and though *Moses*, as the Bishop affirms, *relates this fact as an Historian* [2], yet in the very next step, he utterly deserts the text, and in flat contradiction to his Historian, declares it *impossible, that a natural Serpent could reason and talk in that manner which Moses has related* [3].

But since the curse pronounced against the Serpent is grounded on the reality of the dialogue, which he is said to have held with *Eve*, and is adapted, as he says, to the condition of *a natural Serpent*,

[1] Append. p. 1, 2. [2] p. 3. [3] p. 3, xi.

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and

*and of no other being* : This reflection alone might have been sufficient, one would think, to have staggered His Lordship, and checked his zeal for an hypothesis, which assigns the whole punishment to one being, yet charges the whole crime to another. But notwithstanding this manifest absurdity, he proceeds to confirm it, by many grave and weighty arguments, which he introduces thus ;

“ This Serpent, says he, talks and  
 “ reasons, not upon such trivial things,  
 “ of which we may suppose the beasts  
 “ of the field, (if they have any rea-  
 “ son) to have some notion : but he  
 “ reasons upon the nature of God  
 “ and of man ; upon the knowledge  
 “ of good and evil ; upon the na-  
 “ ture and tendency of the law given  
 “ to man. He looks back and re-  
 “ flects upon the policy, in which  
 “ that law was founded, and the  
 “ art of the Governor, in keeping  
 “ his subjects in ignorance and blind  
 “ obedience.

“ obedience. He looks forward and  
 “ foretells the happy consequences  
 “ of throwing of this yoke, and per-  
 “ suades the woman, that she and  
 “ her husband should be as Gods,  
 “ if they could have the courage,  
 “ to break through the restraint of  
 “ this iniquitous law.”—After which  
 pompous display of the great and im-  
 portant subjects, which are treated of  
 in this dialogue, he comes upon us  
 again with his old insulting quæstions.

“ What think you now? are these  
 “ the properties of a mere brute  
 “ creature? Or is there any instance  
 “ of an author, who ever serious-  
 “ ly introduced the beasts of the  
 “ field, thus reasoning and thus dis-  
 “ coursing [1]?”

To the first of these quæstions, eve-  
 ry one will readily answer, that  
 speech and reason are not the pro-  
 perties of a brute creature. Yet this

[1] P. 3.

very answer, which his Lordship expects from us, and in which He seems to triumph, instead of confirming his hypothesis, will ever be fatal to it with all men of sense, and convince them at once, that the story of *a talking Serpent*, can be nothing else but a fable. Nor will the answer to the second question be of any more service to him; since it is certain, that there never was a writer of fables, either ancient or modern, who introduced the beasts of the field, as the speakers, but he introduced them in the same manner, and made them speak indifferently on all subjects, serious or jocular, high or low, trivial or important, which he himself was acquainted with, or had occasion to inculcate.

But it is curious to observe, that while *Moses relating this fact as an Historian*, assigns *the natural subtilty of the Serpent*, as the sole ground and reason of his success in tempting *Eve*; the



Bishop, on the contrary, alledges that very subtilty, with which she was tempted, as a proof, that the Serpent could not be the temptor. And thus he goes on, sometimes sticking close to the text, and sometimes contradicting it, till he brings us, to what he calls *it's true import and meaning*, which he fumms up in two or three short conclusions; first, *that the Temptor must be a rational Being, because he reasons with Eve*; secondly, *a wicked Being, because he acts in opposition to the Creator*. And from these two he draws the capital conclusion of his elaborate work; *that a natural Serpent, managed by the art of the Devil, was the visible agent or instrument in beguiling Eve* [1].

In the deduction of this argument, he has given us the pattern of a proper fable, from another part of Scripture, in which *the Trees are feigned to have*

[1] P. 9.

*held a general assembly, for the choice of a King* [2]: for what purpose he introduced it, is difficult to say; unless it was to shew the difference between the fabulous stile, in which this story of the trees, and the historical, in which the story of the Fall is related. Yet upon comparing the two stories, we shall find that the same characters, by which His Lordship attempts to mark out the difference between them, are common to them both; and that there is nothing in the stile or matter of the one, but what will prove it to be equally fabulous, or equally historical with the other. For instance, the Serpent and the Trees were both of them equally destitute of speech, yet are both of them affirmed to have discoursed and debated. But the Serpent, it seems, talked and reasoned on sublime points of theology, morality, and civil policy; looked back into the causes, and forward into the

[1] P. 5.

consequences

consequences of things : and so did the Trees ; they reasoned on matters of the highest importance to human society ; on the chief good of life ; the sweetness of a private condition, preferable to the splendor of administering public affairs ; and on the miseries of living under the tyranny of an unworthy and ill-chosen Prince [ 1 ].

But *Serpents*, he tells us, *under the same management of the Devil, had often been known to talk on other occasions, as well as at the Fall, and to give out oracles to the Heathens, in several different nations.* And so the Trees again were known as certainly, to speak and give out oracles to the antients, as the Serpents : witness *the Oak of Dodona*, so celebrated for its oracle, by all the writers of antiquity ; with several other *speaking Oaks*, to which religious honours, vows, and offerings have been paid on the same

[ 1 ] *Judges ix. 8.*

account, both in Pagan and Christian countries [1]. Wherefore, as in the story of speaking Trees, the incredibility of the thing obliges us to take it for a Fable, so the same incredibility must surely have the same effect, in the stories of speaking Serpents.

The Bishop however goes on to confirm his opinion, by shewing,  
 “ that wicked spirits and wicked men  
 “ are sometimes called in Scripture,  
 “ *Serpents, Scorpions, Adders, and the*  
 “ *Temptor himself, the Great Dragon*  
 “ *and old Serpent*; and he affirms it  
 “ to be well known, as an undoubted  
 “ Fact, that since this first deceit up-  
 “ on Eve, the Devil has played the  
 “ same trick over again a thousand  
 “ times, under the form of a Serpent,  
 “ in *the Eastern country, and in*  
 “ *Ægypt, Greece and Rome*: and  
 “ that, in *America* also, the image of  
 “ a Great Dragon, as *Garcilasco del*

[1] See my Letter from *Rome*, p. 183.

“ *Vigo*

“ *Vigo* relates, was found in one of  
 “ their Temples, as the Deity of the  
 “ country, and the object of their re-  
 “ ligious worship [1].” And this sort  
 of proof, grounded on a variety of fanci-  
 full conjectures, forced constructions,  
 and incredible facts, is the summ, of  
 what he has been able to collect, for  
 the support of his fundamental point,  
*that the Devil was the Temptor of*  
*Eve.*

I shall now add a short sketch of  
 his manner of repelling the objections,  
 which reason is apt to suggest, in con-  
 tradiction to his hypothesis. Some  
 writers have imagined the story of the  
 Fall to be of the fabulous kind, be-  
 cause the curse denounced against the  
 Serpent, *of creeping upon his belly,*  
*licking the dust, and being hostile and*  
*odious to man,* would otherwise seem  
 impertinent, since it inflicted nothing,  
 but what flowed from the original

[1] P. 25, 26, &amp;c.

nature and formation of the animal. This His Lordship treats with much contempt, and says: “ How do you  
 “ know this? who could inform you  
 “ of it? If you argue from a fact, of  
 “ which you have neither knowledge,  
 “ nor information, what support have  
 “ you? Will you say, that God can-  
 “ not alter the state or condition of  
 “ any Being, in any respect from what  
 “ it was originally?—And if we con-  
 “ sider rightly, nature is nothing but  
 “ the law and appointment of God,  
 “ who is master of his own laws,  
 “ and can change them whenever he  
 “ pleases, and nature will follow and  
 “ obey his commands [1].

He supposes the nature both of the serpent and of the woman to have been changed by the Fall, from what it was before: but how that change was effected, *I neither know*, says he, *nor shall inquire* [2]: in which indeed he is in the right, for to *inquire* into

[1] P. 19, 20.

[2] P. 20.

it,

it, would be troublesome and fruitless; whereas *to suppose* it, is easy and applicable to his purpose on all occasions. And to say the truth, in the present supposition, he does but follow the example of several other Bishops and Commentators, who, to evade the same difficulty, have recurred to the same expedient, of supposing *the Serpent to have been originally of an erect and beautiful shape, which appeared so glorious to Eve, that she took him to be an Angel, or Minister of heaven* [1]: from which upright and amiable form he was doomed for his offence to creep upon his belly.

I shall not trouble myself, to expose the vanity of this hypothetical way of reasoning, which, if allowed

[1] The woman, says *Dr. Lightfoot*, thinking it had been a good Angel, entred into communication with the Devil. Observation on Genes. c. iii. Vol. 1. p. 692.

Nor doth it seem at all credible to me, that she could have been otherwise deceived, but by some creature, which appeared so gloriously, that she took it for an heavenly minister. See Bishop Patrick. Comment on Gen. iii. 1.

to have any force, would confound all reasoning whatsoever: my view, in the recital of it, is to shew onely, how inconsistent His Lordship is with himself, in the application of it: the common fate of all, who undertake the defence of systems, in opposition to nature and reason. For instance; when it was his business to prove, *that the Devil was the real Tempter of Eve*; he declares it impossible and contrary to nature, that a mere Serpent should talk and reason: yet when the nature of the same Serpent is alledged in contradiction to his scheme, then nature is nothing with him but an empty name, from which no certain inference can be drawn; as being not onely variable, but often actually varied at the pleasure of it's author: which very reasoning, as it is applied by him to refute an objection, invalidates every thing, which he had been urging for the confirmation of his main argument.

For



For let us ask him in his own words; how can you know that the Serpent could not speak? who could inform you of it? If you argue from nature, nature is nothing but the appointment of God, who may change it at pleasure, and has often done so in many cases. It is as easy to suppose, that the Serpent might talk before the Fall, as that he might walk erect before the Fall; since the same reasoning has certainly the same force in the one case, as in the other. And in truth, if any alteration was really made at that time in it's nature, it is more reasonable to believe, that it was made by depriving it of speech, than by any change of it's external form: because the text expressly ascribes to it the use of speech, yet gives not the least hint, of it's having any different form or bodily shape, than what it now enjoys.

But tho' his Lordship, when it served his turn, declar'd it impossible, for  
 serpents

serpents to speak, yet it seems to be his private opinion, that they were indued originally with that faculty, but lost it again at the Fall. This we may collect from the example produced by him to shew, how such a change might be made in the nature of men or other animals, yet no body be able to tell in what manner it was wrought.

“ When Zacharias, says he, *Father of*  
 “ *John the Baptist*, was stricken dumb  
 “ instantaneously, can you tell what  
 “ change was made in his Organs of  
 “ speech, or how this alteration was  
 “ effected? But suppose, that the same  
 “ change had been made universally,  
 “ would not the world have been  
 “ speechless? And can you doubt,  
 “ whether the same power, could do  
 “ this in every man’s case, which was  
 “ done in the case of *Zacharia’s*?  
 “ and would not this have been a curse  
 “ upon man, as fatal and extensive  
 “ as the *curse of the Fall was to the*  
 “ *woman, or to the serpent*, and as  
 “ contrary to what we call the course  
 of

“ of Nature, and as hard to be ac-  
 “ counted for [1]?”

Now if nothing more be meant by this series of quæstions, than what the obvious sense of them seems to import; that *God, who struck one man dumb, might have struck all men dumb, if he had pleased, at the same time; and if he had done so, that all the world would then have been speechless*: it is wholly trifling and of no service to his avowed argument: wherefore his view probably in these quæstions was, to suggest a tacit inference, which can hardly escape an attentive reader, that as *Zacharias* was struck dumb, so likewise was the *Serpent*; but with this difference; that the punishment of *Zacharias* was restrained to one individual, whereas that of the *Serpent* was made universal; and the curse, though pronounced singly up-

[1] P. 20.

on one animal, was extended, as in the case also of *Eve*, to the whole species; which from that moment became speechless.

He makes an attempt on his way, to confirm his exposition of this story, by the authority of our Lord: and if he could do this, to the satisfaction of men of sense, it would silence at once the scruples of all Christian inquirers. But his way of proving it is no other, than what we have already seen on many occasions; not by any direct or explicit testimonies of scripture, but by subtil refinements, or forced interpretations of the texts referred to.—For instance; “it appears plainly, says he, that our Saviour understood the Devil to be the Temptor, from the parable of the tares and his exposition of it [1].” Now a declaration so peremptory would lead us

[1] P. 21.

to conclude, that some reference or allusion was certainly made by this Parable to the temptation of *Eve* and the manner in which it was effected: yet any other person, who had not the same hypothesis in his head, might read it over a thousand times, without ever thinking once of the story of the Fall, or discovering the least connection or relation whatsoever between them.

The parable of the tares, as well as every other parable recited in the same chapter, is interpreted by our Lord himself, to denote the fate and success of the promulgation of his Gospel, which is commonly called by him, *the kingdom of heaven, or the word of the kingdom*: those, who hear and receive this word, are *the good seed, or the children of the kingdom*; those, who contemn and reject it, are the tares, or *the children of the wicked one*; by whom they are incited and encouraged to op-

N pose

pose the progress of the Gospel [1]. Now what relation has this to the story of the Fall, or how does it teach us that the Devil, in the form of a Serpent, was the Temptor of *Eve*? Why not at all. Yet by an art peculiar to himself we shall see him presently drawing out of the text, what no body else had ever dreamt of, or thought possible to be found there: in order to which, he amuses us by the following harangue upon it.

“ Our Saviour, says he, explains  
 “ this parable, and applies it to God’s  
 “ government of the world—the  
 “ field is the world, the good seed  
 “ are the children of the kingdom,  
 “ the Tares are the children of the  
 “ wicked one—Here then our Sa-  
 “ viour had the great point before  
 “ him; How came evil into the  
 “ world? All the answer he gives

[1] Matt. xiii. 24, 25.

“ to

“ to it is, the enemy, that sowed the  
 “ tares, is the Devil. Could our Lord  
 “ be ignorant of the history of the  
 “ Fall, and of the first introduction  
 “ of evil into the world? Or could  
 “ he forget it, when he was account-  
 “ ing for the work of Providence,  
 “ with respect to the beginning of  
 “ evil, that every where abounded?  
 “ He does not indeed enter into the  
 “ curious questions, relating to the  
 “ origin of evil, but he tells us, who  
 “ first brought it in, the Devil. The  
 “ Devil therefore was that very Ser-  
 “ pent, who tempted *Eve*; that ene-  
 “ my who sowed these tares, which  
 “ have overspread the world [1].

Here we see how many great and  
 important doctrines have lain dormant  
 in this Parable, for seventeen hundred  
 years past, and would have lain so  
 probably for ever, if his Lordship's  
 penetration had not discovered them;

[1] P. 22.

who has now at last shewn; *that the origin of evil*, of all quæstions, as he says, *the most abstruse, and the farthest removed from our reach*, is expressly taught and explained by it: that the first prophecy also in the world, delivered to our first Parents, in the curse upon the Serpent, is clearly made out and exemplified by it; and Christianity, in short, proved to be *as old as the Creation*.

But how much soever he may plume himself upon this discovery, it is certain; that nothing was ever more strained, confused and forein to the real sense of the Parable, than the exposition, which he has given to it. He first supposes our Lord to be here discussing the great point *of the introduction of evil* into the world;— and having laid down this supposition, without any authority from the text, he treats it immediately as an allowed fact, and converts it into an argument: for  
our



our Lord, says he, *could not be ignorant of the story of the fall, when he was accounting for the beginning of evil: from which premises he draws this extraordinary conclusion; the Devil therefore was that very Serpent, who tempted Eve.*

Our Lord tells us, as the Bishop affirms, *that the Devil was the first bringer in of Evil: if so, he not only enters into the quæstion, but goes to the bottom of it at once: Yet we are at a loss all the while, to know, where it is, that our Lord tells us so: for it is certain, that in this Parable, he says not a syllable about it. The whole, which he here intimates, is, that there is a wicked invisible spirit subsisting in the world, who, by the agency of his children, or corrupt seed, makes it his business, to obstruct the progress of the Gospel, and the happiness proposed by it to mankind: but how that wicked one was himself introduced,*

and how he became indued with a nature and power utterly opposite and hostile to the divine nature, is a mystery, not yet revealed to us, either by the Old, or the New Testament.

From the same premises, His Lordship draws another conclusion of the same kind, and says; “ our Lord in  
 “ this Parable, had undoubtedly also  
 “ in his view, that part of the Pro-  
 “ phecy, delivered by God at the  
 “ Fall, in these words, *I will put*  
 “ *enmity between thee and the woman,*  
 “ *and between thy seed and her seed;*  
 “ *it shall bruise thy head, and thou*  
 “ *shalt bruise his heel.* For as our  
 “ Lord has expressly told us, that the  
 “ enemy, who brought evil into the  
 “ world, was the Devil, he has as  
 “ clearly, if attended to, told us, that  
 “ the restorer of righteousness was  
 “ that very seed, promised to the  
 “ woman, who was to bruise the Ser-  
 “ pent’s head [1].

[1] F, 23.

As

As to the case of the prophecy here referred to, supposed to be mystical-ly couched in the curse upon the Serpent, enough has already been said in the Bishop's Discourses, and the Examination of them: and what His Lordship has here added, in this Appendix, is but a remnant, as it were, of the same flimsy stuff; a fine-spun webb of fantastical whims, and precarious suppositions, worked up together into some resemblance of arguments, whence many surprising and recondite inferences are occasionally deduced by him; all which I shall leave for the present to the contemplation of the reader; who will hardly want a monitor, to point out the ridicule of them; nor will I make any reflection on a second Prophecy, which he has since discovered and explained here at large with his usual acuteness; the bare recital of it, with a short sketch of

his reasoning upon it, will be sufficient for my purpose.

The prophecy is this; *Dan shall be a Serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the Horse's heels, so that the rider shall fall backwards. I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord!* This second prophecy is so like, he says, to the first, in language and idea, that comparing the two together, may reflect light upon each. And in order to strike out this light, he tells us, " that the " house of *Dan* were the Temptors " and ringleaders in idolatry to all " the other tribes of *Israel*: where- " fore supposing this to be the view " before the prophet's eyes, he then " shews, that as the first Temptor " deserved the name of a Serpent for " drawing *Adam and Eve* from their " obedience to the original law, so " this second Temptor and seducer, " *Dan*, deserved no less to be called " a Serpent and biter of heels, for drawing

“ drawing the people of *Israel* from  
 “ their obedience to the divine law :  
 “ for if the mischiefs brought up-  
 “ on the race of *Adam*, were just-  
 “ ly represented by the Serpent’s  
 “ *bruising the heel of the woman’s*  
 “ *seed*, did not the mischiefs brought  
 “ upon the house of *Israel* by the  
 “ idolatry of *Dan*, deserve to be  
 “ painted in colours of the same  
 “ kind [1] ? ” Then as to the hope  
 of salvation intimated in this pro-  
 phesy, “ it manifestly relates, he  
 “ says, to the mischief wrought by  
 “ a Serpent biting the heels,” so that  
 by being considered in this light, it  
 affords a very ancient evidence of  
 the expectation of a deliverance from  
 the curse of the Fall. And so the  
 similitude and relation between the  
 two prophecies being thus demon-  
 strated, “ and all these circumstances  
 “ laid together, he declares it impos-  
 “ sible, to imagine any salvation, that

[1] 42—&amp;c.

“ can answer to these ideas, but  
 “ that onely, which arose from the  
 “ promise, that the *seed of the*  
 “ *woman should bruise the Serpent’s*  
 “ *head* [2].”

There are many other notable discoveries, and observations, scattered through this Appendix, which I have omitted to take notice of, for fear of being tedious; but lest the reader should think himself too great a sufferer by my indolence, I will entertain him here with one or two, as a specimen of the rest.

His Lordship observes; “ that it is  
 “ the prerogative of the man, *to be the*  
 “ *head of the woman*; but this superiority is not conveyed to him by  
 “ express grant or concession, but the  
 “ subjection is laid on the woman as a  
 “ penalty, in the sentence pronounced  
 “ upon her by God. And it is from

[1] P. 47.

“ this

“ this penalty that man’s superiority, “ is left to be collected by us [ 1 ].” So that unless we admit his hypothesis, and take the account of the Fall for a real history, this prerogative of man must be deemed a mere tyranny and usurpation, as having no other plea or title, but from that punishment inflicted on *Eve*, by which she was made subject *to the rule of her husband*. Yet His Lordship might have seen, that the same history, whether taken literally or allegorically, had given a clear superiority to man, even previous to the Fall, by the priority of his creation, and the formation of the woman *out of his rib*; on which *St. Paul* particularly grounds it, where he says, *that the head of the woman is man; for the man was not of the woman, but the woman of the man: neither was the man created for the woman, but the woman for the man* [ 2 ].

[ 1 ] 41, 42.

[ 2 ] 1 Cor. xi 3, 8, 9.

But man has still a surer title to this prerogative, than either *Moses*, or the Apostles could give him, derived from his very nature, and confirm'd by the experience of all mankind: I mean that superiority of force, and bodily strength, which distinguishes the male, from the female sex, and necessarily conveys a superiority of power to the stronger over the weaker. And thus this groundless conceit, instead of confirming the Bishop's exposition, tends rather to confute it, and shews, from this very circumstance, that the account of the Fall could not be an historical description of a real fact, but the mere effect of fancy, attempting, by way of fable or allegory, to represent the unhappy state to which the man and the woman had reduced themselves by a wilful defection from the original purity, and innocence of their nature.

There



There is another observation still remaining, on the subject of that first prophecy, said to be contained in the sentence upon the serpent, with which His Lordship concludes his Appendix, and I also shall put an end to my present Animadversions. He observes, “ that the language of that prophecy, “ representing the victory of the wo- “ man’s seed, *by bruising the Serpent’s* “ *head*, and the known use and ap- “ plication of it in Scripture to the “ promised seed, will help us to ac- “ count for one of the arts, made use “ of by the Temptor when he made “ his trial upon our Saviour:” which he illustrates in the following manner.

“ The Temptor, says he, plainly “ wanted to know, whether *Jesus was* “ *the Son of God*, that person expected “ to come, and with whom he well “ knew, what concern he had. In “ order to know this, he tries whether “ our Lord would own his character,

3

“ by

“ by assuming the power belonging  
 “ to it—*if thou be the Son of God, cast*  
 “ *thyself down, for it is written; He*  
 “ *shall give his Angels charge concern-*  
 “ *ing thee, and in their hands they shall*  
 “ *bear thee up, lest at any time thou*  
 “ *dash thy foot against a stone.*” These  
 “ words are taken from the 91st  
 “ Psalm, v. 11, 12: and considered  
 “ in themselves contain, in figurative  
 “ language, a promise of God’s pro-  
 “ vidence and care over that person  
 “ to whom they are addressed;  
 “ and might be applied with great  
 “ propriety to *David* himself, or to  
 “ any other good person, specially re-  
 “ garded by God. How came the  
 “ Temptor then, to consider these  
 “ words, as belonging only to him,  
 “ who was to *be the Son of God?* From  
 “ the words themselves he could not  
 “ collect this; but there was another  
 “ character in the very next verse,  
 “ and belonging to the same person,  
 “ which he could not mistake; for this  
 “ person, over whom the Angels were  
 “ to

“ to have charge, *was to tread upon*  
 “ *the Lion and Adder, and the young*  
 “ *Lion and the Dragon to trample un-*  
 “ *der his feet.* He knew by this mark,  
 “ to whom this whole prophecy be-  
 “ longed ; He could not forget, who  
 “ was to bruise his head, and tho’ he  
 “ avoided to ask our Lord directly,  
 “ whether he was that person, who  
 “ was to bruise his head, yet he did  
 “ the same thing covertly, by trying  
 “ whether another part of the same  
 “ prophecy would be owned by him,  
 “ as belonging to himself [ 1 ].”

Here again we are amused with a fine story, in which His Lordship, by a wonderful penetration, lays open to our view the craft and hidden wiles of Satan, by which he hoped to intrap our Lord, and draw the secret of his Messiahship out of him : where, tho’ he treats the temptation of Christ, in the same manner with the temptation

[ 1 ] P. 51.

of *Eve*, as a fact historically related ; yet the Learned have ever been puzzled how to interpret it, and there were some, as *Grotius* intimates, *both of the antients and moderns, who took the whole to have been represented onely to the fancy of Christ, as in a dream, or vision* [1]. Be that however as it will, I have no design to dispute it's reality, but shall only ask His Lordship, how he can think it probable, that the Devil, who appears, from this very story, to have been perfectly acquainted with the writings of the Old Testament, could be ignorant of the character of *Jesus*, whose person was marked out so evidently, through a long succession of ages, *by Moses and all the Prophets*, that many of the Jews were able to discover and acknowledge him, as soon almost as he appeared? *Dr. Lightfoot*, in his com-

[1] Quæ omnia eo libentius noto, ne quis cum veteribus quibusdam, novisque existimet, quæ hic narrantur, Christo non vere, sed κατὰ φαντασίαν accidisse. Grot. in Matt. 4. 1.

ment on this same story, says; *since the Devil was always a most impudent Spirit, he now takes upon him a more hardened boldness than ever; even of waging war with him, whom he knows to be the Son of God* [2].

But how probable soever His Lordship may take his conceit of *Satan's ignorance* to be, it happens very unluckily for him, that it is utterly confuted by the repeated testimonies of the Evangelists; who, in several different places, expressly affirm, that the Devils, whom *Jesus* every where cast out, used to profess, and proclame aloud their knowledge of him, *as the Messiah or Son of God*, sent on purpose to destroy them and their works. Their constant cry was; *What have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? we know thee, who thou art: the Son of God*

[2] Vol. 2. p. 129. in Matt. iv. 1.

*most high, or the Holy one of God* [3]. So that *Jesus*, as we are likewise told, would *not suffer them to speak* on some occasions, because *they knew him to be the Christ* [4]. How is it credible then, that, when every inferior Devil; and even the whole *Legion* of them, whom *Jesus* cast out at once, should all know his true character, yet Satan himself, the Prince and Leader of them all, should alone be ignorant of it and unable to discover him; especially, when *Jesus* had been openly declared to be *the Son of God* by a *miraculous voice* from heaven, immediately before the time of this very temptation [5] ?

In the last paragraph of this Appendix, to which we are now arrived, His Lordship puts us in mind, how the first and noxious part of this prophecy at the Fall, is so evidently fulfilled by the dominion of sin and death, through all ages of the world, *as to want no other proof of it's completion.* The heel of

[3] Mark i. 24. [4] Luke iv. 41. [5] Mark i. 11.

*the seed of the woman, says he, has been, and will continue to be sufficiently bruised, till death, the last enemy, shall be destroyed. But the second and healing part of the same prophecy, which implies a promise of victory by bruising the Serpent's head, is not to be accomplish'd till the day of judgement. Then, says he, shall the Dragon, that old Serpent, which is the Devil and Satan, be fast bound, and cast into the lake of fire and brimstone. Then shall the loss of the fall be repaired, Paradise be restored, and the Tree of life shall yield it's fruit again, and the leaves thereof be for an healing to the nations.*

And thus the benefit of this supposed prophecy seems to evaporate at last into air. It was given, as we have constantly been told by him, to administer comfort to man, under all the evils and distresses, in which his enemy, the Devil had involved him.

Strange comfort, to an inhabitant of this world, which could not be felt or understood, till the world itself should be no more! And a strange sort of victory, which left the Devil still insulting, as the Bishop expresses it, *in all the forms of violence, fraud, iniquity, distempers without number, and miseries too many, too affecting to be described* [1]. A victory which was not to take place, till the enemy had scattered every plague, and wrought every evil upon this earth, which his malice could contrive or his power effect.

It is remarkable also, that after all His Lordship's pains to assert the historical character of the Mosaic account of the Fall, he is carried at last inadvertently and by the very nature of his subject to turn it, as it were, into an allegory: telling us here in the conclusion, that the Paradise, which man had forfeited on earth, would  
be



be repaired and restored *to him in heaven*; and *the Tree of life*, which he was not suffered to taste in this world, would *yield it's fruit again in the next, and spread it's leaves for a shelter and healing to all nations.*

But since he has referred us after all, for the completion of this prophecy, to the day of judgement; I shall willingly adjourn all farther disputes about it to the same day. It is that day alone, which can determine the real character, not onely of this, but of all other pretended prophecies, inspirations, and revelations of the will of God; which now chiefly occupy the attention, and constitute the religion of all the nations upon earth. And happy would it be for them all, if dropping those vain contests and wranglings about quæstions, wholly speculative, fruitless and inexplicable: and remitting the decision of them to that last and  
awful

awful day, men would apply their pains and zeal, to promote and inculcate those practical, social and real duties, which our reason and senses prescribe in common to all, as the chief good of our nature; the foundation of all religion; the source of all our happiness in this life, and of all our hopes in that which is to come.

*F I N I S.*

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