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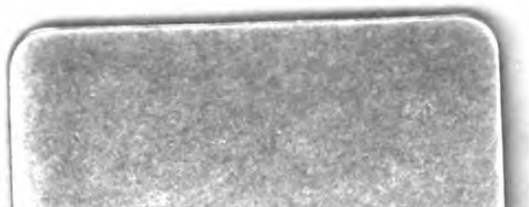
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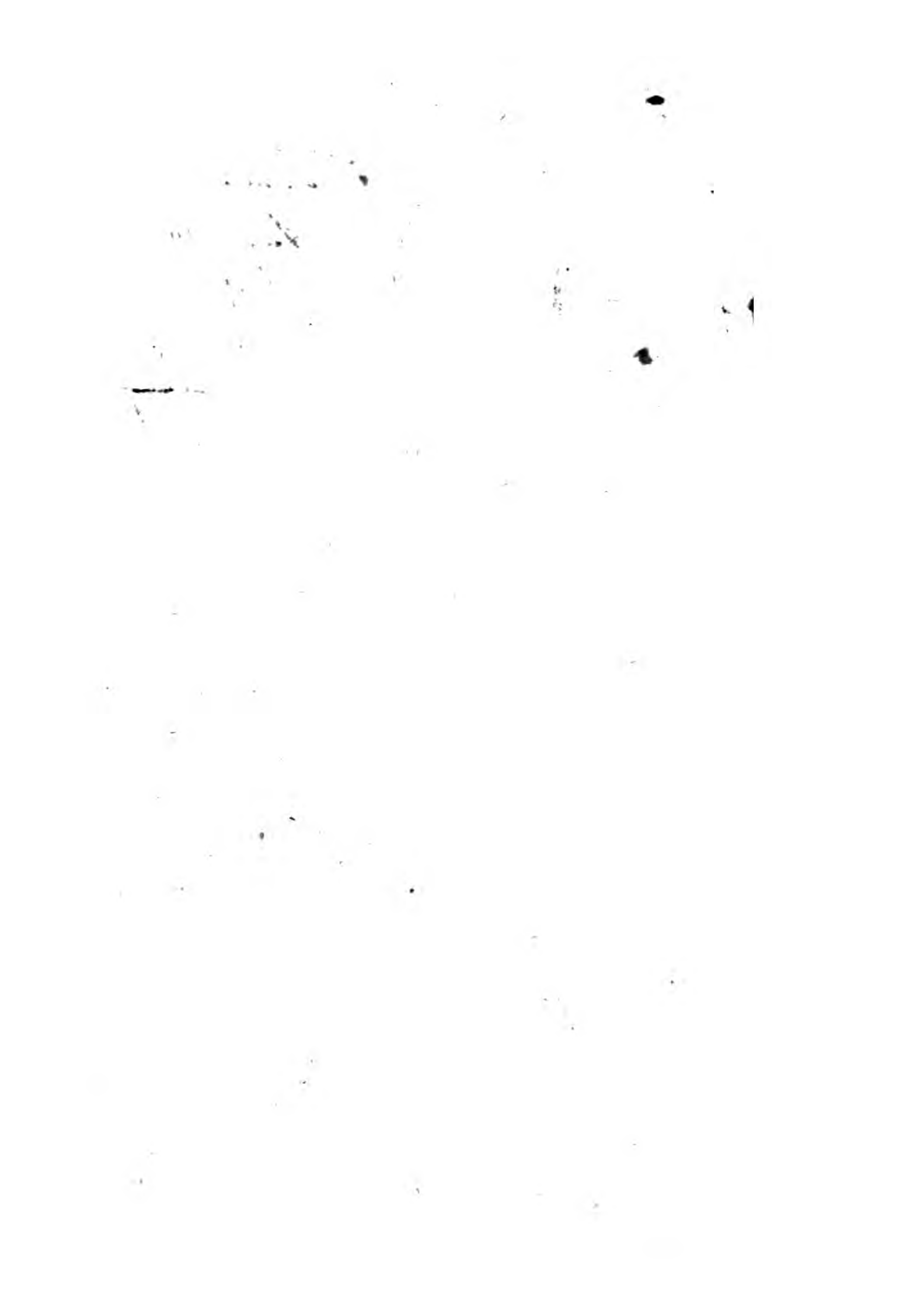
Thos. Burkitt

Aug. 18<sup>th</sup>

1775

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T H R E E  
S E R M O N S  
O N T H E  
E V I D E N C E S  
O F T H E  
G O S P E L ;

Preached at

*N O R T H A M P T O N .*

---

By P. D O D D R I D G E, D. D.

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The T H I R D E D I T I O N .

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Μη φοναίς μόνον, και ρημάτων φόφοις Χριστον γεραιρομεν,  
αλλα και παση διαθεσει ψυχης ως και αυτης προσημαν  
της εαυτων ζωης την εις αυτον μαρτυριαν.

Euseb. Histor. Eccles. Lib. i. cap. 3.

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## S E R M O N I.

The Evidences of CHRISTIANITY  
briefly stated, and the New Testament  
proved to be genuine.

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2 P E T. i. 16.

*We have not followed cunningly devised  
Fables.*



It is undoubtedly a Glory to our Age and Country, that the Nature of Moral Virtue has been so clearly stated, and the Practice of it so strongly enforced, by the Views of its native Beauty, and beneficial Consequences, both to private Persons, and Societies. Perhaps in this Respect, hardly any Nation or Time has equally, certainly few, if any, have exceeded our own. Yet I fear I might add, there have been few Ages or Countries, where Vice has more generally triumphed, in its most audacious, and, in other Respects, most odious Forms.

This may well appear a surprising Case; and it will surely be worth our while to enquire into the Causes of so strange a Circumstance. I cannot now enter into a particular Detail of them. But I am persuaded, none is more considerable than that unhappy *Disregard*, either



to the *Gospel* in general, or to its most peculiar and essential *Truths*, which is so visible amongst us, and which appears to be continually growing. It is plain, that like some of old, who thought and *professed themselves* the *wisest* of Mankind, or in other Words, the *freest Thinkers* of their Age, Multitudes among us *have not liked to retain GOD* and his *Truths in their Knowledge*: And it is therefore the less to be wondered at, if *GOD has given them up to a reprobate Mind* (a); to the most infamous Lusts, and Enormities; and to a Depth of a Degeneracy, which, while it is in Part the natural Consequence, is in Part also the just, but dreadful Punishment of their Apostacy from the Faith. And I am persuaded, that those who do indeed wish well to the Cause of publick Virtue, as every true *Christian* most certainly does, cannot serve it more effectually, than by endeavouring to establish Men in the Belief of the *Gospel* in general, and to affect their Hearts with its most distinguishing *Truths*.

The *latter* of these is our frequent Employment, and is what I have particularly been attempting in the preceding Discourses *on the Power and Grace of the Redeemer*: The *former* I shall now, by the Divine Assistance, apply myself to, in those that follow. And I have chosen the Words now before us, as a proper Introduction to such a Design.

THEY do indeed peculiarly refer to *the Coming of our Lord*, which the Apostle represents as attested by that *Glory*, of which he was an *Eye witness* on the *Mount of Transfiguration*, and by that *Voice from Heaven* which he *heard* there: But the *Truth* of these *Facts* is evidently connected with that of the *Gospel* in general. I am persuaded therefore, you will think they are properly prefixed to a Discourse *on the general Evidences of Christianity*. And I hope, by the Divine Assistance, to propose them at this Time in such a Manner, as shall convince you, that the *Apostles* had Reason to say, and that *we* also have Reason to repeat it, *We have not followed cunningly devised Fables* (b).

I HAVE

(a) Rom. i. 28.

(b) 2 Pet. i. 16, 17, 18.

I HAVE often touched on this Subject occasionally ; but I think it my Duty at present to insist something more largely upon it. You easily apprehend, that it is a Matter of the highest Importance, being indeed no other than *the great Foundation* of all our Eternal Hopes. While so many are daily attempting to *destroy this Foundation*, it is possible, that those of you especially, who are but entering on the World, may be called out to *give a Reason of the Hope that is in you* (c). I would therefore, with the *Apostle*, be concerned, that you may be *ready to do it*. It may fortify you against the Artifices, by which the Unwary are often deceived and ensnared, and may possibly enable you to *put to Silence their Foolishness* (d). At least it will be for the Satisfaction of your own Minds, to have considered the Matter seriously, and to be conscious to yourselves, that you are not *Christians* merely by Education, or Example, (as had you been born elsewhere) you might have been *Pagans* or *Mahometans* ; but that you are so upon *Rational Evidence*, and because (as the sacred Historian expresses it,) you *know the Certainty of those Things in which you have been instructed* (e).

To open and vindicate *the Proof of Christianity* in all its Extent, would be the Employment of many Discourses ; nor would it, on the whole be proper to attempt it here. All that I now intend here is, to give you a summary View of the most considerable Arguments, in that which seems to me their most proper and natural Connection ; that so you may be able to judge of them better, than you could possibly do by a few scattered Remarks, or by the most copious Enlargement on any single Branch of them alone. I shall endeavour to dispose these Hints so, as that they may be some Guide to those, whose Leisure and Abilities may lead them to a more ample and curious Enquiry ; that they may not be intangled in so complex an Argument, but may proceed in an orderly Manner. And if any of you, my Friends, desire a more particular Information on any of those Heads, which I now but briefly suggest, you may depend upon it, that faithful *Ministers* of every Denomination will think it an important Part of their

B 3

Duty,

(c) 1 Pet. iii. 15.

(d) 1 Pet. ii. 15.

(e) Luke i. 4.

Duty, to give you all the private Assistance they can. It is my hearty Prayer, that GOD would enable me to plead his Cause with Success; that he would open your Understandings to receive these Things, and strengthen your Memories to retain them; that you may not be like Children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every Wind of Doctrine, by the Sleight of Men, and the cunning Craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive (f); but may be strong in Faith, giving Glory to GOD (g); that, your Faith being more and more established, it may appear, that the Tree is watered at the Roots; and all your other Graces may grow and flourish, in an equal Proportion.

BUT before I proceed, I must desire you to observe, that there is no Proof in the World so satisfactory to the true Christian, as to have felt the transforming Power of the Gospel on his own Soul. As that illiterate Man whose Eyes were miraculously opened by Christ, when he was questioned by the Jewish Sanhedrim, who endeavoured with all their Sophistry to prove Christ an Impostor, answered with great Steadiness and Constancy, and with a great deal of Reason too, *This one Thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see* (h): So the most unlearned of the Disciples of Jesus, having found his Soul enlightened and sanctified, and felt his Heart so effectually wrought upon, as to bring him home to his Duty, his God, and his Happiness, by the constraining Power of the Gospel, will despise a thousand subtle Objections which may be urged against it: And though the Cross of Christ be to the Jews a Stumbling-block, and to the Greeks Foolishness, yet with this Experience of its saving Energy, he will honour it in the Midst of all their Contempt and Ridicule, as the Power of GOD, and the Wisdom of GOD (i). In this Sense, though the miraculous Communication of the Spirit be ceased, he that believes, hath still the Witness in himself (k); and while the Spirit beareth Witness with his Spirit, that he is a Child of GOD (l), he cannot doubt, but that the Word, by which he was, as it were, begotten  
unto

(f) Eph. iv. 14.  
(i) 1 Cor. i. 23, 24.

(g) Rom. iv. 20.  
(k) 1 John v. 10.

(h) John ix. 25.  
(l) Rom. viii. 16.

SERM. I. *is confirm'd by its Power.* 7

unto him, is indeed a Divine and *incorruptible Seed* (m). And perhaps, there are certain Seasons of pressing Temptation, in which the most learned, as well as the most illiterate *Christian*, will find *this* the surest *Anchor of his Hope*.

NEVERTHELESS, it must be acknowledged, that this glorious kind of *Evidence*, is like the *white Stone*, mentioned in the *Revelation*, in which there was a *new Name written, which no Man knew, but he who received it* (n). GOD has therefore made other Provision for the Honour and Support of his *Gospel*, by furnishing it with a *Variety of Proof*, which may with undiminished, and indeed with growing Conviction, be communicated from one to another. And we should be greatly wanting in Gratitude to him, in Zeal for a Redeemer's Kingdom, and in charitable Concern for the Conversion of those who reject the Gospel, as well as for the Edification of those who embrace it, should we wholly overlook *these Arguments*, or neglect to acquaint ourselves with them. *This is the Evidence*, which I am now to propose; and I desire you would hear it with a becoming Attention. I speak to you, as to Rational Creatures; Judge ye of the Reasonableness of what I shall say.

IN Prosecution of this great Design, I shall endeavour more particularly to shew you, — that if we take the Matter on a general Survey, it will appear *highly probable*, that such a Scheme of Doctrines and Precepts, as we find *Christianity* to be, should indeed have been a *Divine Revelation*; — and then, that if we examine into the External Evidence of it, we shall find it *certain in Fact*, that it was so, and that it had its Original from above.

FIRST, Let me shew, “ that taking the Matter merely *in Theory*, it will appear *highly probable*, that such a System as the *Gospel* should be indeed a *Divine Revelation*.”

To evince this, I would more particularly prove, — that the State of Mankind was such, as greatly to *need*

B 4

a Re-

(m) Jam. i. 18. 1 Pet. i. 23.

(n) Rev. ii. 17.

8 *Christianity probable in Theory.* SERM. I.

*a Revelation*;—that there seems from the Light of Nature, *Encouragement to hope* that GOD should grant one;—that it is reasonable to believe, if any were made, it should be so *introduced and transmitted*, as we are told *Christianity* was; and that its *general Nature and Substance* should be *such*, as we find that of the *Gospel* is. If these Particulars are made out, here will be a strong *presumptive Evidence*, that *the Gospel is from GOD*; and we shall have opened a fair Way toward that *more direct Proof*, which I principally intend.

1. "THE Case of Mankind is naturally such, as greatly to need a *Divine Revelation*."

I SPEAK not here of *Man* in his *Original State*; though even then, as many have largely shewn, some Instruction from above seemed necessary to inform him of many Particulars, which it was highly expedient that he should immediately know: But I speak of him in the *degenerate Condition* in which he now so evidently lies, by whatever Means he was brought into it. It is an easy Thing to make florid Encomiums on the Perfection of *Natural Light*, and to deceive unwary Readers with an ambiguous Term †, (which shall sometimes signify all that appears even to the Divine Understanding, and sometimes no more than the meanest of the Human Race may, or than they actually do attain;) but let *Fact* speak, and the Controversy will soon be determined. I appeal to all, that are acquainted with the Records of *Antiquity*, or that have any Knowledge of the most credible Accounts of the *present State* of those Countries where *Christianity* is unknown, whether it is not too obvious a Truth, that *the whole Heathen World* has lain, and still *lies in Wickedness* (o). Have not incomparably the greater Part of them been perpetually bewildered in their Religious Notions and Practices, vastly differing

† This *Dr. Tyndal* has done in so gross and palpable a Manner, that it is surprising *that Fallacy alone* should not have exposed his *Christianity as old as the Creation*, to the immediate Contempt of every intelligent Reader.

(o) 1 JOHN V. 19.

differing from each other, and almost equally differing on all Sides from the probable Appearances of Truth and Reason? Is any Thing so wild as not to have been *believed*, any Thing so infamous as not to have been *practised* by them, while they have not only pretended to justify it by Reason, but have consecrated it as a Part of their Religion? To this very Day, what are the Discoveries of new Nations in the *American* or *African* World, but generally speaking, the opening of new Scenes of Enormity? Rapine, Lutt, Cruelty, Human Sacrifices, and the most stupid Idolatries, are, and for ought I can find, always have been, *the Morality and Religion* of almost all the *Pagan* Nations under Heaven: And to say, that there have still been some smothered Sparks of Reason within, which, if cherished, might have led them to Truth and Happiness, is only saying, that they have been so much the more criminal, and therefore so much the more miserable.

BUT you live at Home, and hear these Things only by uncertain Report. Look then around you within the Sphere of your own Observation, and see the Temper and Character of the Generality of those, who have been educated in a *Christian*, and even in a *Protestant* Country. Observe their Ignorance and Forgetfulness of the Divine Being, their Impieties, their Debaucheries, their Fraud, their Oppression, their Pride, their Avarice, their Ambition, their unnatural Insensibility of the Wants and Sorrows and Interests of each other; and when you see how bad they generally are in the Midst of so many Advantages, judge by that of the *probable State* of those that want them. Judge upon these Views, whether *a Revelation* be an *unnecessary* Thing.

2. " THERE is, from the Light of Nature, considerable *Encouragement to hope*, that GOD would favour his Creatures with *so needful a Blessing* as *a Revelation* appears."

THAT *a Revelation* is in itself a *possible* Thing, is evident beyond all Shadow of a Doubt. Shall not *he that made Man's Mouth* (p), who has given us this wonderful

derful Faculty of discovering our Sentiments, and communicating our Ideas to each other, shall not *be able* to converse with his Rational Creatures, and by sensible Manifestations, or by inward Impressions, to convey the Knowledge of Things, which lie beyond the Ken of their natural Faculties, and yet may be highly conducive to their Advantage? To own a GOD, and to deny him such a *Power*, would be a notorious Contradiction.— But it may appear much more dubious, whether he will please to confer such a Favour on sinful Creatures.

Now I acknowledge, that we could not *certainly* conclude he would ever do it; considering on the one Hand, how justly they stood exposed to his final Displeasure; and on the other, what Provision he had made by the Frame of the Human Mind, and of Nature around us, for giving us such Notices of himself, as would leave us *inexcusable*, if we either failed *to know him*, or *to glorify him as GOD*; as the Apostle argues at large (q). Nevertheless methinks, we should have had something of this Kind *to hope*, from considering GOD as the indulgent Father of his Creatures; from observing the tender Care which he takes of us, and the liberal Supply which he grants for the Support of the animal Life; especially, from the Provision which he has made for Man, considered as a guilty and calamitous Creature, by the medicinal and healing Virtues which he has given to many of the Productions of Nature, which in a State of perfect Rectitude and Happiness Man would never have needed. This is a Circumstance, which seemed strongly to intimate, that he would some Time or another graciously provide some Remedy to heal Mens Minds; and that he would interpose to instruct them, in his own Nature, in the Manner in which he is to be served, and in the final Treatment which they may expect from him. And I think, such an Apprehension seems very congruous to the Sentiments of the Generality of Mankind; as appears from the many *Pretences to Divine Revelation* which have often been made, and the Readiness of Multitudes to receive them on very slender Proofs: This shews how naturally Men *expect* some such kind Interposition of the Deity: A Thought, which might  
farther

(q) Rom. i. 20, & seq.

farther be confirmed by some remarkable Passages of *Heathen Writers*, which I have not now Time particularly to mention.

3. We may easily conclude, “ that if a *Revelation* were given, it would be *introduced* and *transmitted* in such a Manner, as *Christianity* is said to have been.”

IT is exceeding *probable*, for Instance, that it should be taught, either by some illustrious Person sent down from a superior World, or at least by a Man of eminent Wisdom and Piety, who should himself have been, not only a *Teacher*, but an *Example*, of universal Goodness. In order to this it seems *probable*, that he should be led through a Series of Calamity and Distress; since otherwise he would not have been a *Pattern* of the Virtues, which adorn Adversity, and are peculiar to it. And it might also have been *expected*, that in the Extremity of his Distress, the blessed God, whose Messenger he was, should, in some extraordinary Manner, have interposed, either to preserve, or to recover him from Death.

IT is moreover exceeding *probable*, that such a Person, and perhaps also They who were at first employed as his Messengers to the World, should be endowed with a Power of *working Miracles*; both to awaken Mens Attention, and to prove a Divine Mission, and the consequent Truth of their Doctrines; some of which might perhaps not be capable of any other Kind of Proof; or if they were, it is certain that no Method of arguing is so short, so plain, and so forcible, and on the whole, so well suited to the Conviction, and probably the Reformation of Mankind, as a Course of evident, repeated, and uncontrouled *Miracles*. And such a Method of Proof is especially adapted to the *Populace*, who are incomparably the greater Part of Mankind, and for whose Benefit, we may assure ourselves, a Revelation would chiefly be designed.—I might add, it was *no way improbable*, though not in itself *certain*, that a Dispensation should open *gradually* on the World; and that the most illustrious Messenger of God to Men should be ushered in by some *Predictions*, which should raise a great Expectation



pectation of his Appearance, and have an evident Accomplishment in him.

As for the *Propagation* of a Religion *so introduced*, it seems *no way improbable*, that having been thus established in its first Age, it should be *transmitted* to future Generations by *credible Testimony*, as other important Facts are. It is certain, that Affairs of the utmost Moment, which are transacted amongst Men, depend on *Testimony*: On this Voyages are undertaken, Settlements made, and Controversies decided; Controversies, on which not only the Estates, but the Lives of Men depend. And though it must be owned, that such an *Historical Evidence* is not equally convincing with *Miracles* which are wrought before our own Eyes; yet it is certain, it may rise to such a Degree as to exclude all reasonable Doubt. And I know not why we should expect, that the *Evidence of a Revelation* should be such, as universally to compel the immediate Assistance of all to whom it is offered. To me it seems much more likely, that it should be so adjusted, as to be a Kind of *Touch-stone* to the Tempers and Characters of Men; capable indeed of giving ample Satisfaction to the diligent and candid Enquirer, yet attended with some Circumstances, from whence the Captious and Perverse might take Occasion to cavil and object. *Such* might we suppose *the Evidence of a Revelation* would be, and *such* it is maintained, *that of Christianity* is. The Teachers of it say, and undertake to prove, that it was thus *introduced*, thus *established*, and thus *transmitted*; and we trust, that this is a strong *Presumption* in its Favour: Especially as we can add,

4. " THAT the main *Doctrines* contained in the  
 " *Gospel* are of such a *Nature*, as we might in ge-  
 " neral suppose, those of a *Divine Revelation* would  
 " be, rational, practical, and sublime."

ONE would imagine, that in a *Revelation* of a Religion from GOD, the great Principles of *Natural Religion* should be clearly asserted, and strongly maintained: Such I mean, as the Existence (r), the Unity (s),  
 the

(r) Heb. xi. 6.

(s) Mark xii. 29. 1 Tim. ii. 5.

the Perfection (*t*), and the Providence of God (*u*); the essential and immutable Difference between Moral Good and Evil (*w*); the Obligation we are under to the various Branches of Virtue, whether Human, Social, or Divine (*x*); the Value and Immortality of the Soul (*y*); and the Rewards and Punishments of a Future State (*z*). One would easily conclude, that all these Particulars must be contained in it; and that upon the whole, it should appear calculated, to form Mens Minds to a proper Temper, rather than to amuse them with curious Speculations.

It might indeed be farther supposed, and *probably* concluded, that such a *Revelation* would contain some Things, which could not have been learnt from the highest Improvements of Natural Light: And considering the infinite and unfathomable Nature of the Blessed God, it would be *more than probable*, that many Things might be hinted at, and referred to, which our feeble Faculties should not be able fully to comprehend. Yet we should expect, to find these introduced in a practical View, as directing us to Duties before unknown, or suggesting powerful Motives to make us resolute and constant in the Discharge of the rest\*. As for Ceremonial and Positive Institutions, we should imagine, at least in the most perfect State of the *Revelation*, that they should be but few, and those few plainly subservient to the great Purposes of practical Religion.

I SHALL only add, that forasmuch as *Pride* appears to be the most reigning Corruption of the Human Mind, and the Source of numberless Irregularities; it is exceeding *probable*, that a *Divine Revelation* should be calculated, to *humble* the fallen Creature, and bring it to a Sense of its Guilt and Weakness; and the more evidently that Tendency appears, other Things being equal, the greater Reason there is to believe, that the Original of such a Scheme is from above.

YOUR

(*t*) Matt. v. 48.      (*u*) Matt. v. 29, 30.      (*w*) Isai.  
v. 20. 2 Cor. vi. 14.      (*x*) Matt. xxii. 37, 39. Phil. iv. 8.  
Tit. ii. 12.      (*y*) Matt. x. 28. xvi. 26.      (*z*) Rom. ii. 6,—10.  
Matt. xxv. 46.

\* Particularly on what Terms, and to what Degree, Pardon and Happiness might be expected by sinful Creatures.

YOUR own Thoughts have undoubtedly prevented me in the Application of these Characters to the *Christian Revelation*. The Justice of that Application I must not now illustrate at large. But I must beg leave to advance one Remark, which will conclude what I have to say on this General: Which is, that as the *Christian System* is undoubtedly *worthy of GOD*, so considering the Manner in which it is said to have been *introduced*, (separate from the *Evidence* of these *Facts*, which is afterwards to be considered,) it is extremely difficult to imagine, from whom else it could have proceeded.

I WILL readily allow, that neither the Reasonableness of its Doctrines, nor the Purity of its Morals, will alone prove its *Divine Original*; since it is possible, the Reason of one Man may discover that, which the Reason of another approves, as being, in itself considered, either true in Theory, or useful in Practice. But this is not all; for in the present Case it is evident, that the first Teachers of *Christianity* professed, that they were taught it by *Divine Revelation*, and that they were empowered by GOD with *miraculous Endowments* for the Confirmation of it. Now if it were not indeed so as they professed, how can we account for so strange a Phænomenon, as such a Doctrinè introduced with such Pretences? If it were not *from GOD*, whence was it? from *good*, or from *evil* Angels or Men? Wicked Creatures, as our Lord strongly intimates (a), would never contrive and propagate so excellent a Scheme; nor can we imagine, that holy Angels, or righteous Men would thus be *found false Witnesses of GOD* (b), or have attempted to support the Cause of Religion and Truth, by such impious and notorious Falshoods, as their Pretensions must have been, if they were Falshoods at all.

AND thus much for the *first Branch* of the Argument: If you consider the *Christian Scheme* only in Theory, it appears *highly probable*; since a *Revelation* was so much *needed*, might so reasonably be *expected*, and if it were ever given, would, so far as we can judge, be thus *introduced*, and be in the main attended with

(a) Matt. xii. 25,—29.

(b) 1 Cor. xv. 15,

with such *Internal Characters*. And though we have not as yet expressly proved, that the *Gospel* was *introduced* in such a Manner, as the Defenders of it assert; yet it would be strangely unaccountable, that so admirable a System of Truth and Duty should be advanced by the Prince of Darkness, and the Children of Wickedness; as it must have been, if the Persons first employed in the Propagation of it were not *endowed with Power from on High* (c).

To embrace the *Gospel* is so safe, and on the whole, so comfortable a Thing, that I think a wise Man would deliberately and resolutely venture his All upon it, though nothing more could be offered for its Confirmation. But, blessed be GOD, we have a great deal more to offer in this important Cause; and can add, with still greater Confidence, that it is not only *in Theory* thus *probable*, but,

SECONDLY, “That it is *in Fact* certain, that *Christianity* is indeed a *Divine Revelation*.”

HERE I confess the chief Stress is to be laid; and therefore I shall insist more largely on this Branch of the Argument, and endeavour, by the Divine Assistance, to prove the *Certainty* of this great *Fact*. You will naturally apprehend, that I speak only of what is commonly called a *Moral Certainty* \* : But I need speak of no more; for in many Cases, such Kind of *Evidence* gives the Mind as ample, and as rational a Satisfaction, as it may find even in some supposed *Mathematical Demonstration*; since there it is possible, at least in a long Deduction of Particulars, for the most sagacious of Mankind to fall into a Mistake.

Now in order to settle this grand Point as clearly as I can, I think it may be proper to prove,

### I. THAT

(c) Luke xxiv. 49.

\* Which, though it amount not to strict *Demonstration*, is such Kind of *Evidence* as suits past Matters of *Fact*, and is sufficient to make a candid and rational Enquirer easy in his Assent.

I. THAT the Books of the *New Testament*, as they are now in your Hands, may be depended upon as *written* by the *first Preachers* and Publishers of *Christianity*. And,

II. THAT from hence it will certainly follow, that what they assert is *true*, and that the Religion they teach, brings along with it such Evidences of a *Divine Authority*, as may most justly recommend it to our Acceptance.

EACH of these Heads might furnish out Matter for many Volumes; but it is my Business to hint at the most obvious and important Thoughts, by which they may briefly be illustrated and confirmed.

I. I AM to prove to you, “ That the Books of the  
 “ *New Testament*, now in your Hands, were *writ-*  
 “ *ten* by the *first Preachers* and Publishers of  
 “ *Christianity*.”

You see I confine the present Proof, to the Books of the NEW TESTAMENT. Not that I think the Authority of the *Old* to be suspected, or the Use of it by any Means to be despised. GOD forbid! It is an invaluable Treasure, which demands our daily delightful and thankful Perusal, and is capable of being defended in a Manner which I am persuaded its subtlest Enemies will never be able to answer. But the Nature of my present Argument, and the Limits of my Time, oblige me at present to wave the Proof of it; any farther than as it is implied in, and dependent upon, what I have more immediately in View.

IN the Process of the Discourse, though I shall studiously avoid any Ostentation of Learning, yet it will be absolutely necessary to assert some Things, which cannot certainly be known, without some little Acquaintance with *ancient Writers*. You cannot, most of you, be supposed to have formed such an Acquaintance; but I take it for granted you will readily believe, that I will not *lie for GOD*, nor talk *deceitfully for him*

*him (d)*. I shall say nothing of this Kind, but what I know to be contained in those Writings; and you may assure yourselves, that no Man of common Sense, whatever his moral or religious Character were, would venture in such an Age as this, publicly to cite Passages, as from Authors in every ones Hands, which he cannot prove to be contained in them.

HAVING premised these Things, I go on to the Argument; and shall advance in it by the following Degrees. I shall prove,——that *Christianity* is an ancient Religion;——that there was such a Person as *Jesus of Nazareth*, crucified at *Jerusalem* about *Seventeen Hundred Years* ago;——that the *first Preachers* of his Religion *wrote Books*, which went by the Name of those, that now make up the Volume of our *New Testament*;——that they are preserved in the *Original* to the present Times;——and that the *Translation* of them, which you have, is in the main such, as may be depended upon as *faithful*. And then I shall have clearly made out what I proposed in this *first Part*.

1. IT is certain, “ that *Christianity* is not a New Religion, but that it was maintained by great Multitudes, quickly after the Time in which *Jesus* is said to have appeared.”

THAT there was, considerably more than *Sixteen Hundred Years* ago, a Body of Men, who went by the Name of *Christians*, is almost as evident, as that a Race of Men was then existing in the World; nor do I know, that any have ever been wild and confident enough to dispute it. If any should for Argument sake question it, they might quickly be convinced by a considerable Number of *Christian Writers*, who lived in the same, or the next Age \*, and mention it as a Thing notoriously certain, that *Christianity* was then of some Standing in the World;

(d) Job xiii. 7.

\* Such as *Clemens Romanus*, *Ignatius*, *Polycarp*, *Justin Martyr*, *Irenæus*, *Tatian*, *Athenagoras*, and *Theophilus Antiochenus*, who all wrote before the Year 200, and some in the *First Century*: Not to urge *Barnabas*, and *Hermas*; nor to mention any of those cited by *Eusebius*, whose Books are all lost, except some Fragments, preserved chiefly by that excellent Writer.

World; some of them giving *Directions* and *Exhortations* to their Brethren, and others forming *Apologies* to their Enemies, for which there could not otherwise have been the least Foundation. We might have acquiesced in *their Testimony*, had it been alone; but it is confirmed by that of *Jews* and *Heathens*, who, by their early *Invectives* against the *Christians*, do most evidently prove, that there was such a Body of Men in the World. — The most considerable *Roman Historians*, who lived in this Age, and wrote of it, are *Tacitus*, and *Suetonius*, who both published their Writings above *Sixteen Hundred Years* ago? and they are always, and very justly appealed to, as pregnant *Witnesses* upon this Occasion.—For *Tacitus* assures us, “that in *Nero’s Days*,” who begun his Reign about *Twenty Years* after the Death of *Christ*, “there was a vast Multitude of *Christians*, not only in *Judea*, but at *Rome* too; against whom *Nero* raised a Persecution, attended with such Circumstances of *Ignominy* and *Cruelty*, as moved the *Compassion* even of their *Enemies*,” of which Number this *Historian* evidently was\*. Nay he plainly intimates, that this was not the *first Attempt* which had been made to crush them; though this Attempt was so early as we have heard.—His Contemporary *Suetonius*, in his more concise Manner, attests the same †.—And *Pliny*, the intimate Friend and Correspondent of both, being employed in *Trajan’s* Time to persecute the *Christians*, writes an Account of them to that Emperor, which, though commonly known, must be mentioned, as it is so highly important. After having spoken very favourably of their *Moral Character*, he adds, “That many of both Sexes, and of every Age and Rank, were infected with *this Superstition* ;” as he thinks fit to

\* Nero quæsitissimis pœnis affecit, quos, per Flagitia invisos, vulgus *Christianos* appellabat.—Repressa in præsens exitiabilis Superstitio, rursus erumpebat, non modo per Judæam, originem ejus mali, sed per urbem etiam, &c —Multitudo ingens—Odio humani generis convicti sunt; & pereuntibus addita Ludibria,—unde Misericordia oriebatur, &c. *Tacit. Annal. Lib. xv. c. 44.*

† Afflicti supplicii *Christiani*, Genus hominum Superstitionis novæ ac maleficæ. *Sueton. Ner. cap. xvi.*

to express it; “ that it was got into the Villages, as  
 “ well as the Cities; and that, till he begun to put the  
 “ Laws in Execution against them, the Temples of the  
 “ Heathen Deities were almost deserted, and hardly  
 “ any could be found who would buy Victims for  
 “ them †.” — It might be added, that *Marcus Antoninus* §, who wrote a few Years after *Pliny*, mentions the *Christians*, “ as Examples of a resolute and  
 “ obstinate Contempt of Death:” And it is generally supposed, *they are the Galileans*, whom *Epictetus* speaks of \*, “ as those whom Practice had taught to despise the  
 “ Rage of their armed Enemies.” †

I SHALL dismiss this Head with observing, that it tends greatly to the Confirmation of *Christianity*, that each of these celebrated and ancient *Pagan Writers*, at the

‡ Multi omnis *Ætatis*, omnis *Ordinis*, utriusque *Sexus* etiam vocantur in periculum. Neque *Civitates* tantum, sed *Vicos* etiam, atque *Agros*, *Superstitionis* istius *Contagio* pervagata est;—prope jam desolata *Tempa*,—& *sacra Solennia* diu intermissa:—*Victimas*, quarum adhuc rarissimus *Emptor* inveniebatur. *Plin. Epist. Lib. x. Epist. 97.*

§ Ἐτοιμὸν ἀπολυθῆναι τὸ σῶμα, μὴ κατὰ ψιλὴν παραταξίην, ὡς οἱ Χριστιανοί. *Marc. Antonin. L. b. xi. § 3.* — [See also this Emperor's *Constitution* to the Community of *Asia*, (as inserted by *Eusebius* in his *Ecclesiastical History*, *Lib. iv. cap. 13.*) in which he mentions *their persecuting the Christians to Death*; τὰς Χριστιανὰς διώκετε εἰς θάνατον and speaks of these *Persecutions* as having continued a considerable Time. *N. B.* This was inserted in *Melito's Apology for the Christians*, which he wrote in that Emperor's Reign, so that there cannot be the least Doubt of its being genuine.

\* Ὑπο μανίας μὲν δύναται τις ἕτο διατεθῆναι περὶ ταῦτα, (δορυφορέας scil. ἢ μαχαιρας) καὶ ὑπο ἐθὺς οἱ Γαλιλαοί. *Arrian. Epictet. Lib. iv. cap. 7. pag. 400.*

† [This would be the proper Place to mention the Passage said to be in *Philo Judæus*, (who was contemporary with the Apostles,) relating to the *Christians* in his Days, and the Methods taken by an *Embassy from Jerusalem* to prevent the Progress of their Religion: But though I verily believe the *Fact* to have been true, I omit it, for Reasons which the Reader will find in a *Note* under *Head 3.* of the next *Sermon*—Some other Passages of *Ancient Writers*, which might be very pertinent here, I reserve to mention under some following *Heads*, and particularly where I shall speak of the *Miraculous Propagation of the Gospel*, in *Serm. x.*]



the same Time that they attest the Existence of such a Body of Men professing it, inform us of those extream *Persecutions* which they underwent, in the very Infancy of their Religion; a *Fact* also farther apparent from the *Apologies* addressed by the *Christians* to their Persecutors, which, whatever Imperfections may attend the Manner in which some of them are writ, appear to me some of the most valuable Remains of Antiquity, (the Sacred Records only excepted,) especially those of *Justin Martyr*, *Tertullian*, and *Minutius Fælix*.—This fundamental Point is then abundantly made out; that there were vast Numbers of Men, very quickly after the Time when *Jesus* is said to have appeared on Earth, who professed his Religion, and chose to endure the greatest Extremities, rather than they would abandon it. From hence it will be easy to shew,

2. “ THAT there was certainly such a Person as *Jesus*  
 “ of *Nazareth*, who was crucified at *Jerusalem*,  
 “ when *Pontius Pilate* was the *Roman Governour*  
 “ there.”

It can never be imagined, that Multitudes of People should take their Name from *Christ*, and sacrifice their Lives for their Adherence to him, even in the same Age in which he is said to have lived, if they had not been well assured, there was such a Person. Now several of the Authors I have mentioned plainly assert, that the *Christians* were denominated from *Christ*; nay, *Tacitus* expressly adds, “ that he was put to Death under *Pontius Pilate*, who was Procurator of *Judæa*, in the “ Reign of *Tiberius* \*.” And it is well known, that the primitive *Christian Apologists* often appeal to the *Acts of Pilate* †, or the *Memoirs of his Government*, (which he, according to the Custom of other Procurators, transmitted to *Rome*,) as containing an Account of these Transactions: And as the Appeal was made  
 to

\* Auctor nominis ejus *Christus*, qui *Tiberio* imperitante per Procuratorem *Pontium Pilatum* supplicio affectus erat. *Tacit. ubi supra.*

† Vid. *Justin. Mart. Apolog. Oper. pag. 76. & Tertull. Apolog. cap. xxi.*

to those, who had the Command of the publick Records, we may assure ourselves such Testimonies were then extant. But it is a *Fact*, which our *Enemies* never denied? they owned it, they even gloried in it, and upbraided the *Christians* with it. The *Jews* therefore in some of their earliest Writings since those Times, call *Jesus* by the ignominious Name of “the Man who was hanged, or crucified,” and his Followers, “the Servants of the crucified Person \*.” And *Lucian* rallies them for deserting the pompous Train of the *Heathen Deities*, to worship one whom he impiously calls “a crucified Impostor †.”—[*Spartian* also assures us, that the Emperor *Alexander Severus* entertained such high Thoughts of *Christ*, “that he would have admitted him into the Number of his *Deities*, and have built a Temple to him, had not his *Pagan* Subjects vigorously opposed it ‡.” And *Porphyrus*, though an inveterate Enemy to *Christianity*, not only allowed there was such a Person, but honoured him “as a most wise and pious Man, approved by the Gods, and taken up into Heaven for his distinguished Virtues §.”]—I might add a great deal more on this Head ||; but it already appears as certain as *ancient History* can make it, and incomparably more certain than most of the Facts which it has transmitted to us, that there was at the Time commonly supposed such a Person as *Christ*, who professed

\* *Buxtorf. Lexic. Talmud. in Voce תלו*

† *Τον δε αγροκολοπισμενον εκεινον σοφιστην αυτον προσκυνωσις*  
*Lucian de Morte Peregrini, Oper. Tom. II pag. 568.* [I might here introduce a great many other remarkable Particulars from this Writer, which relate to “the Fortitude of the *Christians* in bearing Sufferings, their entire Submission to the Authority of *Jesus*, their unparalleled Charity to each other, the Prophets and Messengers of their Churches, and the great Progress of their Religion.” All these Things are mentioned in the *Pseudomantis*, and the *Death of Peregrinus*, which are undoubtedly *Lucian's*: Not to mention those very memorable Passages in the *Philopars*, which is of a much later Date. But a particular Detail of these Things would swell this Note to a very improper Bulk.]

‡ *Spartian. de Vita Severi, cap. xxix, & xliii.*

§ *Euseb. Demonstr. Evang. Lib. iii. pag. 134.*

|| I say nothing of the celebrated Passage in *Josephus*, (*Antiq. Lib. xviii. cap. 4.*) because it has been disputed; though I know no considerable Objection against it, but its being so honourable to *Christianity*, that one would hardly imagine a *Jew* could write it.

professed himself a Divine Teacher, and who gathered many Disciples, by whom his Religion was afterwards published in the World.

3. It is also certain, “ that the *first Publishers* of  
 “ this Religion *wrote Books*, which contained an  
 “ Account of the Life and Doctrine of *Jesus* their  
 “ Master, and which went by the Name of those  
 “ that now make up our *New Testament*.”

It was in the Nature of Things exceeding *probable*, that what they had *seen and heard*, they would *declare* and publish to the World in *Writing* (e); considering, how common *Books* were in the Age and Countries in which they taught; and of how great Importance an Acquaintance with the History and Doctrine of *Christ* was, to the Purposes which they so strenuously pursued: But we have much more than such a *presumptive Evidence*.

THE greatest Adversaries of *Christianity* must grant, that we have *Books* of great Antiquity, written some *Fourteen*, others *Fifteen*, and some *Sixteen Hundred Years* ago \*; in which mention is made of the *Life of Christ*, as *written* by many, and especially by *Four* of his Disciples, who by way of Eminence are called *the Evangelists*. Great Pains have indeed been taken to prove, that some spurious Pieces were published under the Names of the *Apostles*, containing the History of these Things: But surely this must imply, that it was a Thing known and allowed, that the *Apostles* did *write* some Narrations of this Kind; as counterfeit Coin implies some true Money, which it is designed to represent. And I am sure, he must be very little acquainted with the ancient *Ecclesiastical Writers*, who does not know, that the *primitive Christians* made a very great Difference between those Writings, which we call the *Canonical Books* of

(e) 1 John i. 3.

\* Such as *Tatian, Irenæus, Tertullian, Clemens Alexandrinus, Origen, Eusebius*, and many others: See *Jones of the Canon, Part. iv. Introd.*, *Justin Martyr's Controversy with Tripbo*, and *Origen's with Celsus*, prove that *Jews and Heathens* allow'd, not only that there were such *Books*, but that they contained the *Religion of Christians*.

of the *New Testament*, and others: Which plainly shews, that they did not judge of Writings, meerly by the Names of their pretended Authors, but enquired with an Accuracy becoming the Importance of those Pretences. The Result of this Enquiry was, that the *Four Gospels*, the *Acts*, *Thirteen Epistles of Paul*, *One of Peter*, and *One of John*, were received upon such Evidence, that *Eusebius*, a most accurate and early Critick in these Things, could not learn that they had ever been disputed †: And afterwards the remaining *Books of the New Testament*, *Hebrews*, *James*, the *Second of Peter*, the *Second and Third of John*, *Jude*, and the *Revelation* were admitted as genuine, and added to the rest; though some Circumstances attending them rendered their Authority for a while a little dubious. On the whole it is plain, the *primitive Christians* were so satisfied in the Authority of these Sacred Books, that they speak of them, not only as credible and authentick, but as *equal to the Oracles of the Old Testament*, as *divinely inspired*, as *the Words of the Spirit*, as *the Law and Organ of GOD*, and as *the Rule of Faith*, which cannot be contradicted without great Guilt; with many other Expressions of the like Kind, which often occur in their Discourses. To which I may add, that in some of their *Councils*, the *New Testament* was placed on a Throne, to signify their Concern, that all their Controversies and Actions might be determined and regulated by it.

ON the whole then, you see, that the *primitive Church* did receive certain Pieces, which bore the same Titles with the Books of our *New Testament*. Now I think it is evident, they were as capable of judging whether a Book was written by *Matthew*, *John*, or *Paul*, as an ancient *Roman* could be of determining whether *Horace*, *Tully*, or *Livy*, wrote those which go under their Names. And I am sure, the *Interest* of the former was so much more concerned in the Writings of the *Apostles*, than that of the latter in the Compositions of the *Poets*, *Orators*, or even their *Historians*; that there is Reason to believe, they would take much greater Care to inform themselves fully in the Merits of the Cause,  
and

† *Euseb, Eccles. Hist. Lib. vi. cap. 25.*

and to avoid being imposed upon by Artifice and Fiction.  
Let me now shew,

4. " THAT the Books of the *New Testament* have  
" been preserved in the main *uncorrupted*, to the  
" present Time, in the *original* Language in which  
" they were written."

THIS is a Matter of vast Importance, and blessed be GOD, it is attended with proportionable Evidence; *an Evidence*, in which the Hand of Providence has indeed been remarkably seen; for I am confident, that there is no other ancient Book in the World, which may so certainly, and so easily, be proved to be authentick.

AND here, I will not argue merely from the Piety of the *primitive Christians*, and the Heroick Resolution with which they chose to endure the greatest Extremities, rather than they would deliver up their *Bibles*, (though that be a Consideration of some evident Weight;) but shall intreat you to consider the utter *Impossibility* of corrupting them. From the first Ages, they were received, and read in the Churches, as a Part of their publick Worship, just as *Moses* and the *Prophets* were in the *Jewish* Synagogues; they were presently spread far and wide, as the Boundaries of the Church were increased; they were early *translated* into other Languages, of which *Translations* some remain to this Day. Now when this was the Case, how could they possibly be adulterated? Is it a Thing to be supposed, or imagined, that Thousands and Millions of People should have come together from distant Countries; and that with all their Diversities of Language, add Customs, and I may add, of Sentiments too, they should have agreed on *corrupting a Book*, which they all acknowledged to be the Rule of their Faith, and their Manners, and the great Charter by which they held their Eternal Hopes. It were Madness to believe it: Especially when we consider what Numbers of *Hereticks* appeared in the very Infancy of the Church, who all pretended to build their Notions on *Scripture*, and most of them appealed to it as the final Judge of Controversies; Now it is certain, that these different Parties of professing *Christians* were a perpetual  
Guard

Guard upon each other, and rendered it impossible for one Party, to practise grossly on the Sacred Books, without the Discovery, and the Clamour of the rest.

NOR must I omit to remind you, that in every Age, from the Apostles Time to our own, there have been numberless *Quotations* made from the Books of the *New Testament*; and a Multitude of *Commentaries* in various Languages, and some of very ancient Date, have been written upon them: So that if the *Books* themselves were lost, I believe they might in a great Measure, if not entirely, be recovered from the Writings of others. And one might venture to say, that if all the *Quotations*, which have ever been made from all the ancient Writings now remaining in *Europe*, were to be amassed together, the Bulk of them would be by no Means comparable, to that of the *Quotations* taken from the *New Testament* alone. So that a Man might with a much better Face dispute, whether the Writings ascribed to *Homer, Demosthenes, Virgil, or Cæsar*, be in the main such as they left them; than he could question it concerning those of *Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Peter, James, and Paul*, whether they are in the main so.

I SAY, in the main, because we readily allow, that the Hand of a *Printer*, or of a *Transcriber*, might chance in some Places to insert one Letter or Word for another, and the *Various Readings* of this, as well as of all other ancient Books, prove, that this has sometimes been the Case. Nevertheless those *Various Readings* are generally of so little Importance, that he who can urge them as an Objection against the Assertion we are now maintaining, must have little Judgment, or little Integrity; and indeed, after those excellent Things which have been said on the Subject by many Defenders of *Christianity*, if he have read their Writings, he must have little Modesty too.

SINCE then it appears, that the Books of the *New Testament*, as they now stand in the *Original*, are, without any material Alteration, such as they were, when they came from the Hands of the Persons whose Names they bear; nothing remains to compleat this Part of the Argument, but to shew,

5. "THAT the *Translation* of them, now in your Hands, may be depended upon, as in all Things most material, *agreeable to the Original.*"

THIS is a *Fact*, of which the Generality of you are not capable of judging immediately, yet it is a Matter of great Importance: It is therefore a very great Pleasure to me to think, what ample Evidence you may find another Way, to make your Minds as easy on this Head, as you could reasonably wish them. I mean, by the concurrent *Testimony* of others, in Circumstances in which you cannot imagine they would unite to deceive you.

THERE are, to be sure, very few of *us*, whose Office it is publickly to *preach the Gospel*, who have not examined this Matter with Care, and who are not capable of judging in so easy a Case. I believe you have seen few in the Place where I now stand, that could not have told you, as I now solemnly do, that, on a diligent Comparison of *our Translation* with the *Original*, we find *that* of the *New Testament*, (and I might also add, that of the *Old*;) in the main faithful and judicious. You know indeed, that we do not scruple on some Occasions to animadvert upon it; but you also know, that these Remarks affect not the Fundamentals of Religion, and seldom reach any farther than the Beauty of a Figure, or at most the Connection of an Argument. Nay, I can confidently say, that, to the best of my Knowledge and Remembrance, as there is no *Copy* of the *Greek*, so neither is there any *Translation* of the *New Testament* which I have seen, whether ancient or modern, how defective or faulty soever, from which all the principal Facts and Doctrines of *Christianity* might not be learnt, so far as the Knowledge of them is necessary to Salvation, or even to some considerable Degrees of Edification in Piety. Nor do I except from this Remark, even that most erroneous and corrupt *Version*, published by the *English Jesuits* at *Rheims*, which is undoubtly one of the worst that ever appeared in our Language.

BUT

BUT I desire not, that with Respect to *our own Translation* of the *New Testament*, a Matter of so great Moment as the Fidelity of it should rest on *my Testimony* alone, or entirely on *that* of any of my Brethren, for whose Integrity and Learning you may have the greatest and justest Esteem. I rejoice to say, that this is a Head, on which we *cannot* possibly deceive you, if we were ever so desirous to do it. And indeed in this Respect, *that* is our Advantage, which in others is our great Calamity, I mean *the Diversity of our Religious Opinions*. It is certain, that wheresoever there is a Body of *Dissenters* from the publick Establishment, who do yet agree with their Brethren of that Establishment in the Use of the *same Translation*, though they are capable of examining it, and judging of it; there is as great Evidence as could reasonably be desired, that *such a Translation* is in the main *Right*: for if it were in any considerable Article corrupted, most of the other Debates would quickly lose themselves in this: And though such *Dissenters* had all that Candor, Tenderness, and Respect for their Fellow-Christians, which I hope we shall always endeavour to maintain, yet they would, no doubt, think themselves obliged in Conscience to bear a warm and loud Testimony against so crying an Abomination, as they would another Day appear free from the Guilt of a Confederacy, to poison the publick Fountains, and destroy the Souls of Men. But we make no Complaint on this Subject; we all unite in bearing our Testimony to *the Oracles of GOD*, as delivered in *our own Language*. Oh that we were equally united in regulating our Doctrine, and our Discipline, our Worship, and our Practice by them!

You see then, on the whole, how much Reason there is to believe, “ that the Books of the *New Testament*, as “ they are now in your Hands, were *written* by those “ whose Names they bear, even *the first Preachers* and “ Publishers of *Christianity*.” This is the grand Point; and from hence it will follow by a Train of easy and natural Consequences, that *the Gospel is most certainly true*: But that is a Topick of Argument, abundantly sufficient to furnish out Matter for another Discourse. May God command his Blessing on what has been



28 *Our English Translation, &c.* SERM. I.

already laid before us, that through the Operation of his Spirit, it may be useful for establishing our Regard to the Scripture, and for confirming our Faith in that Almighty Redeemer, who is *the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last (f); whom to know is Life everlasting (g),* and in whom to believe is the great Security of our eternal Salvation! Amen.

(f) Rev. i. 8, 17.

(g) John xvii. 3.



S E R-



## S E R M O N II.

The Evidences of CHRISTIANITY,  
deduced from the New Testament al-  
lowed to be genuine.

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2 PET. i. 16.

— *We have not followed cunningly devised  
Fables.* —



WHEN we are addressing ourselves to an Au-  
dience of professing *Christians*, I think,  
we may reasonably take it for granted, in  
the main Course of our Ministry, that  
they *believe the Truth of the Gospel*, and  
may argue with them on that Supposition. To be ever  
laying the Foundation would be the Part of an unwise  
Builder, and be greatly detrimental to your Edification  
and Comfort, and I may add, to our own. Nevertheless,  
*Christians*, we do not desire, that you should take it  
merely upon our Word, that your Religion is *Divine*,  
and your Scriptures *inspired*. We desire, that your  
Faith, as well as your Worship, should be a *reasonable  
Service* (a); and wish, that, in this Respect, *all the  
Lord's People were as Prophets* (b); that as every  
*Christian* is in his Sphere *set for the Defence of the Gos-  
pel* (c), each might in some Measure be able to assert

C 3

its

(a) Rom. xii. 1.  
i. 17.

(b) Numb. xi. 29.

(c) Phil.

its Truth, and if possible, to convince Gainsayers (d). Therefore, as we are often hinting at the chief Arguments, on which this sacred Cause is established, (established, I trust, so firmly, that *the Gates of Hell shall never prevail against it* (e);) so I thought it might be agreeable and useful, on this Occasion, to state them a little more largely, in their proper Connection, and mutual Dependence. And I chose the rather to do it, as these Sermons are especially intended for *young People*, who in an Age in which Infidelity so much abounds, can hardly expect to pass through the World, if they are called to converse much in it, without some Attacks on their Faith; which may be very dangerous, if they are not provided with some Armour of Proof against them. It is indeed, (as I before observed,) above all Things to be desired, that *the Heart may be established with Grace* (f); for we are then most secure from the Danger of forgetting *GOD's Precepts* (g), when they have been the blessed Means of quickening us to a Divine Life. Yet as other Arguments have their Use, and in some Degree their Necessity too, I shall go on briefly to propose them.

I BEG therefore, that you would renew your Attention, while I resume the Thread of my Discourse, in an entire Dependence on the blessed *Spirit*, by whom the *Gospel* was at first revealed and confirmed, to add Success to this humble Attempt for its Service, and for your Edification.

I AM now shewing you, that *Christianity*, which before appeared in *Theory* probable and rational, has in *Fact* a convincing Evidence: Not only that *it may be*, but that *it certainly is true*; —as it is certain, that the *New Testament*, as now in your Hands, is *genuine*; — and as it may with great Evidence be argued from thence, that the *Gospel* is a *Revelation* from *GOD*. The *first* of these Points I have endeavoured to prove at large; and without repeating what I said in Confirmation of it, I now proceed to shew,

## II. THAT

(d) Tit. i. 9.

(e) Matth. xvi. 18.

(f) Heb. xiii. 9.

(g) Psal. cxix. 93.

II. "THAT from allowing the *New Testament* to  
 " be *genuine*, it will certainly follow, that *Chris-*  
 " *tianity* is a *Divine Revelation*."

AND here a Man is, at first, ready to be lost in the Multiplicity of Arguments which surround him. It is very easy to find *Proofs*; but difficult to range and dispose them in such an *Order*, as best to illustrate and confirm each other. Now I chuse to offer them in the following *Series*, which seems to me the most natural, and perhaps may be most intelligible to you.

THE *Authors* of the Books contained in the *New Testament* were certainly *capable of judging* concerning the Truth of the *Facts* they attested;—their *Character*, so far as we can judge of it by their Writings, renders them *worthy of Regard*;—and they were *under no Temptation* to attempt to impose on the World by such a Story as they have given us, if it had been false: So that considering all Things, there is no Reason to believe they *would attempt* it;—But if they *had*, they must probably *have perished* in the Attempt, and could *never have gained Credit* in the World, had their Testimony been false.—Nevertheless it is certain in Fact, that they *did gain Credit*, and succeed in a most amazing Manner against all Opposition.—It is certain therefore, that the *Facts* they assert *were true*; and if they were *true*, then it was reasonable for their Contemporaries, and is reasonable for us, to receive the *Gospel* as a *Divine Revelation*;—especially, if we consider what has happened in the World for the *Confirmation of it*, since it was first propagated by them. This is the Conclusion, to which I was to lead you; and I beg, you would seriously consider each of the Steps, by which we arrive at it.

I. IT is exceeding evident, "that the *Writers* of the  
 " *New Testament* certainly *knew*, whether the *Facts*  
 " they asserted were true, or false."

AND this they *must have known* for this plain Reason; because they tell us, they did not trust merely to the

*Report*, even of Persons whom they thought most credible; but were present *themselves*, when several of the most important Facts happened, and so received them on the *Testimony of their own Senses*. On this *St. John* in his *Epistle* lays a very great and reasonable Stress: *That which we have seen with our Eyes*, and that not only by a sudden Glance, but *which we have attentively looked upon, and which even our Hands have handled of the Word of Life*, i. e. of *Christ* and his *Gospel*,—*declare we unto you* (b).

LET the common Sense of Mankind judge here. Did not *Matthew* and *John* certainly *know*, whether they had personally and familiarly *conversed* with *Jesus* of *Nazareth*, or not? whether he had *chosen* them for his constant Attendants and *Apostles*? whether they had seen him *heal the Sick, dispossess Devils, and raise the Dead*? and whether they themselves had received from him such *miraculous Endowments*, as they say he bestowed upon them? Did not *they know*, whether he fell into the Hands of his Enemies, and was publickly *put to Death*, or not? Did not *John know*, whether he saw him *expiring on the Cross*, or not? and whether he received from him the *dying Charge* which he records (i)? Did he not *know*, whether he saw him *wounded* in the Side *with a Spear*, or not? and whether he did, or did not see, that *Effusion of Blood and Water*, which was an infallible Argument of his being really dead? Concerning which, it being so material a Circumstance, he adds, *He that saw it bare Record, and he knoweth that he saith true* (k); i. e. that it was a Case, in which he could not possibly be deceived. And with Regard to *Christ's Resurrection*, did he not *certainly know*, whether he *saw our Lord* again and again; and whether he *handled his Body*, that he might be sure it was not a mere Phantom? What one Circumstance of his Life could he *certainly know*, if he were mistaken in this?

DID not *Luke know*, whether he was in the Ship with *Paul*, when that extraordinary Wreck happened, by which they were thrown ashore on the Island of *Malta*? Did he not *know*, whether while they were *lodged together*

(b) 1 John i. 1, 3.  
xix. 35.

(i) John xix. 27.

(k) John

gether in the Governour's House, *Paul* miraculously healed one of the Family, and many other diseased Persons in the Island, as he positively asserts that he did (l) ?

DID not *Paul* certainly know, whether *Christ* appeared to him on the Way to *Damascus*, or not? whether he was blind, and afterwards on the Prayer of a Fellow-Disciple received his Sight? or was that a Circumstance, in which there could be Room for Mistake? Did he not know, whether he received such extraordinary Revelations, and extraordinary Powers, as to be able, by the Imposition of his Hands, or by the Words of his Mouth, to work Miracles, and even to convey supernatural Endowments to others?

To add no more, Did not *Peter* know, whether he saw the Glory of *Christ's* Transfiguration, and heard that Voice to which he so expressly refers, when he says in the Text, *We have not followed cunningly devised Fables, — but were Eye witnesses of his Majesty, — when there came such a Voice to him; — and this Voice we heard* (m).

Now *Matthæw*, *John*, *Luke*, *Paul*, and *Peter*, are by far the most considerable Writers of the *New Testament*; and I am sure, when you reflect on these Particulars, you must own, that there are few *Historians*, ancient or modern, that could so certainly judge of the Truth of the *Facts* they have related. You may perhaps think, I have enlarged too much in stating so clear a Case: But you will please to remember, it is the Foundation of the whole Argument; and that this Branch of it alone cuts off Infidels from that Refuge, which I believe they would generally chuse, that of pleading *the Apostles were Enthusiasts*; and leaves them silent, unless they will say they were *Impostors*: For you evidently see, that could we suppose *these Facts* to be false, they could by no Means pretend an involuntary Mistake, but must, in the most criminal and aggravated Sense, as *Paul* himself expresses it, be found false Witnesses of *G O D* (n). But how unreasonable it would be to charge them with so notorious a Crime, will in part appear, if we consider,

C 5

2. " THAT

(l) Acts xxviii. 7, — 9, xv. 15.

(m) 1 Pet. i. 16, 18.

(n) 1 Cor.

2. " THAT the *Character* of these Writers, so far  
 " as we can judge by their Works, seems to render  
 " them *worthy of Regard*, and leaves no Room to  
 " imagine they intended to deceive us."

I SHALL not stay to shew at large, that they appear to have been Persons of *natural Sense*, and at the Time of their writing, of a *composed Mind*; for I verily believe, no Man that ever read the *New Testament* with Attention, could believe they were *Idiots* or *Madmen*. Let the Discourses of *Christ* in the *Evangelists*, of *Peter* and *Paul* in the *Acts*, as well as many Passages in the *Epistles* be perused; and I will venture to say, he who is not even charmed with them, must be a Stranger to all the justest Rules of polite Criticism: But he who suspects, that the *Writers* wanted *common Sense*, must himself be most evidently destitute of it; and he who can suspect, they might possibly be *distracted*, must himself, in this Instance at least, be just as *mad* as he imagines them to have been.

It was necessary however just to touch upon this; because, unless we are satisfied, that a Person *be himself* in what he writes, we cannot pretend to determine his *Character* from his Writings. Having premised this, I must intreat you, as you peruse the *New Testament*, to observe what evident Marks it bears, of Simplicity and Integrity, of Piety and Benevolence; which when you have observed, you will find them pleading the Cause of its *Authors*, with a resifless, though a gentle Eloquence; and powerfully persuading the Mind, that Men who were capable of writing so excellently well, are not, without the strongest Evidence, to be suspected of acting so detestably ill, as we must suppose they did, if in this solemn Manner they were carrying on an *Imposture*, in such Circumstances as attended the Case before us. For,

(1.) THE *Manner* in which they tell their amazing Story, is most happily adapted to gain our Belief. For as they tell it with a great *Detail of Circumstances*, which would by no Means be prudent in *legendary Writers*, because

because it leaves so much the more Room for Confutation; so they also do it in the most *easy* and *natural Manner*. There is no Air of Declamation and Harangue; nothing that looks like Artifice and Design: No Apologies, no Encomiums, no Characters, no Reflections, no Digressions: But the *Facts* are recounted with great Simplicity, just as they seem to have happened; and those *Facts* are left to speak for themselves, and their great Author. It is plain, that the rest of these *Writers*, as well as the Apostle *Paul*, did not affect *Excellency of Speech, or Flights of Eloquence*, (as the Phrase signifies), but *determined to know nothing*, though amongst the most learned and polite, *save Jesus Christ, even him that was crucified* (o): A Conduct, that is the more to be admired, when we consider how extraordinary a Theme theirs was, and with what abundant of Variety of most pathetick Declamation it would easily have furnished any common Writer; so that one would really wonder, how they could forbear it. But they rightly judged, that a vain Affectation of Ornament, when recording such a Story as of their own Knowledge, might perhaps have brought their Sincerity into Question, and so have rendered *the Cross of Christ of none Effect* (p).

(2.) THEIR Integrity does likewise evidently appear in the *Freedom* with which they mention those Circumstances, which might have exposed *their Master* and *themselves* to the greatest Contempt, amongst prejudiced and inconsiderate Men; such as they knew they must generally expect to meet with. — As to *their Master*, they scruple not to own, that his Country was infamous (q), his Birth and Education mean (r), and his Life indigent (s); that he was most disdainfully rejected by the Rulers (t), and accused of Sabbath-breaking (u), Blasphemy (w), and Sedition (x); that he was reviled

(o) 1 Cor. ii. 1, 2. *υπεροχην λογισ.* (p) 1 Cor. i. 17  
 (q) John i. 45, 46. vii. 52. (r) Luke ii. 4,—7. Matt. x. 55. Mark vi. 3. (s) Matt. viii. 20. Luke viii. 3. (t) John vii. 48. 1 Cor. ii. 8. (u) John v. 16. ix. 16. (w) John ix. 3. xxvi. 65. John x. 31,—36. (x) Luke xxiii. 2. xix. 12



by the Populace, as a Debauchee (*y*) a Lunatick (*z*), and a Dæmoniac (*a*); and at last, by the united Rage of both Rulers and People, was publickly executed as the vilest of Malefactors, with all imaginable Circumstances of Ignominy, Scorn, and Abhorrence (*b*): Nor do they scruple to own that Terror and Distress of Spirit into which he was thrown by his Sufferings (*c*), though this was a Circumstance, at which some of the *Heatbens* took the greatest Offence, as utterly unworthy so excellent and Divine a Person. — As to *themselves*, the *Apostles* readily confess, not only the Meanness of their original Employments (*d*), and the Scandals of their former Life (*e*); but their Prejudices, their Follies, and their Faults, after *Christ* had honoured them with so holy a Calling: They acknowledge their Slowness of Apprehension under so excellent a Teacher (*f*), their Unbelief (*g*), their Cowardice (*h*), their Ambition (*i*), their rash Zeal (*k*), and their foolish Contentions (*l*). So that on the whole, they seem every where to forget, that they are writing of themselves, and appear not at all solicitous about their own Reputation, but only that they might represent the Matter just as it was, whether they went through Honour or Dishonour, through evil Report or good Report (*m*). Nor is this all; for,

(3). IT is certain, that there are in their Writings the most genuine *Traces*, not only of a plain and honest, but a most *pious* and *dévout*, a most *benevolent* and *generous Disposition*. These appear especially in the *Epistolary* Parts of the *New Testament*, where indeed we should most reasonably expect to find them: And of these I may confidently affirm, that the greater Progress any

(*y*) Matt. xi. 19. Luke vii. 34. (*z*) John x. 20.  
 (*a*) John vii. 20. viii. 48. (*b*) Matt. xxvii. 32, — 44.  
 (*c*) Matt. xxvi. 38. Luke xxii. 44. Matt. xxvii. 46. (*d*) Matt.  
 iv. 18, — 21. Luke v. 10. (*e*) Matt. ix. 9. x. 3. Luke  
 v. 8. Acts xxii. 4, 5, xxvi. 11. 1 Tim. i. 13, 15. (*f*) Mark  
 ix. 32. Luke ix. 45. xviii. 34. Matt. xvi. 22, 23. (*g*) Matt.  
 viii. 26. xvii. 20. Mark xvi. 14. Luke xxiv. 25. John xx.  
 24, — 27. (*h*) Matt. xxvi. 56, 69, — 74. Gal. ii. 11, — 14.  
 (*i*) Matt. xx. 20, — 24. Mark x. 35, — 44. Luke ix. 46. xxii.  
 24, 26. (*k*) Luke ix. 54. Mark ix. 38. (*l*) Mark ix.  
 34. Acts xv. 37, — 40. (*m*) 2 Cor. vi. 8.

SERM. II. *Writers of the New Testament.* 37

any one has made, in Love to God (*n*), in Zeal for his Glory (*o*), in a compassionate and generous Concern for the present and future Happiness of Mankind (*p*); the more humble (*q*), and candid (*r*), and temperate (*f*), and pure (*t*) he is; the more ardently he loves Truth, and the more steadily he is determined to suffer the greatest Extremity in its Defence (*u*); in a Word, the more his Heart is weaned from the present World (*w*), and the more it is fired with the Prospects of a glorious Immortality (*x*); the more Pleasure will he take in reading those Writings, the more will he relish the Spirit which discovers itself in them, and find, that *as Face answers to Face in Water*, so do the Traces of Piety and Goodness, which appear there, answer to those which a Good Man feels in his own Soul. Nay, I will add, that the warm and genuine Workings of that excellent and holy Temper, which every where discovers itself in the *New Testament*, have for many Ages been the most effectual Means of spreading a Spirit of Virtue and Piety in the World; and what of it is to be found in these degenerate Days, seems principally owing to these incomparable and truly Divine Writings.

[WHERE

(*n*) 1 Cor. vii. 3. Tit. iii. 4,—7. 1 John iv. 16,—21. v. 1,—3.  
 (*o*) Rom. vi. 10, 13. xii. 1. xiv. 7, 8. 1 Cor. vi. 20. x. 31.  
 2 Cor. iv. 15. 1 Pet. iv. 11. (*p*) Acts xx. 20, 21, 31,—35.  
 xxvi. 29. Rom. ix. 1,—3. xiii. 8,—10. xv. 1, 2. 1 Cor. x.  
 24. 2 Cor. xii. 15. Gal. vi. 10. Phil. ii. 4. 1 Thes. ii. 7, 8,  
 11, 12. 1 Tim. ii. 1. (*q*) Rom. xii. 3, 16. 1 Cor. xv. 9, 10.  
 Eph. iii. 8. Col. iii. 12. 1 Tim. i. 13, 15. 1 Pet. v. 5. (*r*) Rom.  
 xiv. 3, 10, 13, 19. xv. 1, 2. 1 Cor. viii. 9,—13. xiii. 4,—7.  
 Gal. v. 22. (*f*) Rom. xiii. 13, 14. 1 Cor. ix. 27. Gal. v. 24.  
 Col. iii. 5. 2 Pet. i. 6. (*t*) 2 Cor. vii. 1. Phil. iv. 8. 1 Thess.  
 iv. 3, 4. 2 Tim. ii. 21. Heb. x. 22. xii. 14. Jam. i. 27.  
 1 John iii. 3. (*u*) Acts xx. 24. 2 Cor. i. 12. iv. 2. xiii. 8.  
 Phil. ii. 17, 18. 2 Tim. iv. 7. (*w*) 2 Cor. iv. 18. Gal. vi. 14.  
 Phil. iv. 11, 12. Col. iii. 2. 1 Tim. vi. 6,—10. 2 Tim. ii. 3, 4.  
 1 John ii. 15, 16. (*x*) 2 Cor. v. 1,—8. Phil. i. 21,—23.  
 2 Tim. i. 12. iv. 8. Tit. ii. 13.

*N. B.* Those who are acquainted with the *New Testament* will know, that this is but a small Specimen of the *Texts* which might easily be collected on each of these Heads: Yet were the Energy of these few attentively considered, I cannot but think, that every well disposed Mind would be deeply struck, and powerfully convinced by them.

[WHERE then there are such *genuine Marks* of an *excellent Character*, not only in laboured Discourses, but in *Epistolary Writings*, and those sometimes addressed to particular and intimate Friends, to whom the Mind naturally opens itself with the greatest Freedom, surely no candid and equitable Judge would lightly believe them to be all *counterfeit*; or would imagine, without strong Proof, that Persons who breathe such exalted Sentiments of Virtue and Piety, should be guilty of any *notorious Wickedness*: And in Proportion to the Degree of Enormity and Aggravation attending such a *supposed Crime*, it may justly be expected, that the Evidence of their having really committed it, should be unanswerably strong and convincing.

Now it is most certain, on the Principles laid down above, that if the *Testimony* of the *Apostles* was *false*, they must have acted as detestable and villainous a Part, as one can easily conceive. To be *found* (as the Apostle with his usual Energy expresses it), *false Witnesses of GOD* (y) in any single Instance, and solemnly to declare him miraculously to have done, what we know in our own Consciences was never done at all, would be an audacious Degree of *Impiety*, to which none but the most abandoned of Mankind could arrive. Yet, if the *Testimony* of the *Apostles* was *false*, as we have proved they could not be *themselves mistaken* in it, this must have been their Conduct, and that, not in One single Instance only, but in a Thousand. Their Life must, in effect, be one continued and perpetual Scene of Perjury; and all the most solemn Actions of it (in which they were speaking to *GOD*, or speaking of him as the *GOD and Father of Christ*, from whom they received their Mission and Powers), must be a most profane and daring Insult on all the acknowledged Perfections of his Nature.

AND the *Inhumanity* of such a Conduct would, on the whole, have been equal to its *Impiety*. For it was deceiving Men in their most important Interests, and persuading them to venture their whole future Happiness on the Power and Fidelity of *One*, whom on this  
Sup-

(y) 1 Cor. xv. 15.

Supposition, they knew to have been an *Impostor*, and justly to have suffered a Capital Punishment for his Crimes.

IT would have been *great Guilt*, to have given the Hearts and Devotions of Men so wrong a Turn, even though they had found Magistrates ready to espouse and establish, yea, and to enforce the Religion they taught: But to labour to propagate it in the Midst of the most vigorous and severe Opposition from them, must equally enhance the *Guilt*, and *Folly* of the Undertaking: For by this Means they made themselves accessory to the Ruin of Thousands; and all the Calamities, which fell on such Profelytes, or even on their remotest Descendants, for the Sake of *Christianity*, would be in a great Measure chargeable on these *First Preachers* of it. The Blood of honest, yea, and (supposing them, as you must, to have been involuntarily deceived), of pious, worthy, and heroick Persons, who might otherwise have been the greatest Blessings to the Publick, would, in effect, be crying for Vengeance against them; and the Distresses of the Widows and Orphans, which those *Martyrs* might leave behind them, would join to swell the Account.

So that on the whole, the *Guilt* of those *Malefactors*, who are from Time to Time the Victims of publick Justice, even for Robbery, Murder, or Treason, is *small*, when compared with *that* which we have now been supposing: And corrupt as Human Nature is, it appears to me utterly improbable, that *Twelve Men* should be found, I will not say, in one little Nation, but even on the whole Face of the Earth, who could be capable of entering into so black a Confederacy, on any Terms whatsoever.

AND now, in this View of the Case, make a serious Pause, and compare with it, what we have just been saying of the *Character* of the *Apostles* of *Jesus*, so far as an Indifferent Person could conjecture it from their *Writings*; and then say, whether you can in your Hearts believe them to have been these *abandoned Wretches*, at once the Reproach and Astonishment of Mankind? You cannot surely believe such Things of *any*; and much less of *them*, unless it shall appear, they were in some peculiar

peculiar Circumstances of *strong Temptation*; and what those Circumstances could be, it is difficult even for Imagination to conceive.

BUT History is so far from suggesting any unthought-of Fact to help our Imagination on this Head, that it bears strongly the contrary Way; and hardly any Part of my Work is easier, than to shew,]

3. " THAT they were *under no Temptation* to forge  
 " a Story of this Kind, or to publish it to the  
 " World, knowing it to be *false*."

THEY could reasonably expect no Gain, no Reputation by it: But on the contrary, supposing it an *Imposture*, they must, with the most ordinary Share of Prudence, have foreseen Infamy and Ruin, as the certain Consequences of attempting it. For the grand Foundation of their Scheme was, that *Jesus of Nazareth*, who was *crucified at Jerusalem* by the *Jewish Rulers*, was *the Son of GOD*, and *the Lord of all Things*. I appeal to your Consciences, whether this looks at all like the Contrivance of artful and designing Men. It was evidently charging upon the *Princes* of their Country the most criminal and aggravated *Murder*; indeed, all Things considered, the most enormous *Act of Wickedness*, which the Sun had ever seen. They might therefore depend upon it, that *these Rulers* would immediately employ all their Art and Power, to confute their *Testimony*, and to destroy their *Persons*. Accordingly one of them was presently *stoned* (z) and another quickly after *beheaded* (a); and most of the rest were *scattered abroad* into strange Cities (b), where they would be sure to be received with great *Prejudices*, raised against them amongst the *Jews* by Reports from *Jerusalem* \*, and vastly

(z) Acts vii. 59.      (a) Acts xii. 2.      (b) Acts viii. 1, 4.  
 xi. 19.

\* [I do not here mention *Philo Judæus*, as speaking of " an Embassy sent from the *Jews* in his early Days, to their Brethren in all Parts of the World, exhorting them to resist the Progress of *Christianity*." For though *Bishop Atterbury* asserts, that there is such a Pas-

vastly strengthened by their Expectations of a *Temporal Messiah*; *Expectations*, which, as the Apostles knew by their own Experience, it was exceeding difficult to root out of Mens Minds; *Expectations*, which would render the Doctrine of *Christ crucified*, an inseparable *Stumbling-Block to the Jews* (c).

NOR could they expect a much better Reception amongst the *Gentiles*; with whom their Business was, to persuade them to renounce the Gods of their Ancestors, and to depend on a Person who had died the Death of a Malefactor and a Slave; to persuade them to forego the pompous Idolatries in which they had been educated, and all the sensual Indulgences with which their Religion (if it might be called a *Religion*,) was attended, to worship *one invisible GOD* through *one Mediator*, in the most plain and simple Manner; and to receive a Set of Precepts, most directly calculated to controul and restrain, not only the Enormities of Mens Actions, but the Irregularities of their Hearts. A most difficult Undertaking! And to engage them to this, they had

a Passage, (*Serm. Vol. i. pag 117.*) I have never been able to find, or to hear of it; and therefore am ready to believe, it was a very pardonable Slip of his Lordship's Memory, and that the Passage he intended to refer to, was a very celebrated and important one in *Justin Martyr's Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, in which he expressly asserts such a Fact, in a Manner which his Integrity, and good Sense would never have permitted, had he not certainly known it to be true. For he addresses the learned *Jew*, with whom he was disputing, in these memorable Words, Ου μόνον & μέλεινοσατε εφ' οίς επραξατε κακοίς, αλλά ανδράς εκλεκτίους απο Ιερουσαλημ εκλεξαμηνοι τοτε εξεπεμφατε εις πασαν την γην, λεγοντες, αιρεσιν αθεον Χριστιανων πεφνηνεναι, καταλεσοντες ταυτα απερ καθ' ημων & αγνοοντες ημας παντες λεγουσιν: "You were so far from repenting of the Crime you had committed, (in crucifying *Christ*), that you sent chosen Men of the most distinguished Character all over the World, representing the *Christians* as an *Atheistical Sect*, and charging us with those Things which the ignorant *Heathens* object against us." *Justin. Mart. Dialog. cum Tryph. pag. 171. Tbi lb.*—*Eusebius*, and *Origen*, have both mentioned the same Fact, which is in itself very probable; and there may possibly be some Reference to it, *Acts xxviii 22.* where the *Jews* at *Rome* say, *As concerning this Sect* (of *Christianity*), *we know that it is every where spoken against.*]

(c) 1 Cor. i. 23.

had no other Arguments to bring, but such as were taken from the Views of an invisible State of Happiness or Misery, of which they asserted their *crucified Jesus* to be the supreme Disposer; who should another Day dispense his Blessings, or his Vengeance, as the *Gospel* had been embraced, or rejected. Now could it be imagined, that Men would easily be persuaded, merely on the Credit of their Affirmation, or in Compliance with their Importunity, to believe Things which to their prejudiced Minds would appear so improbable, and to submit to Impositions, to their corrupt Inclinations so insupportable? And if they could not persuade them to it, what could the *Apostles* then expect? What, but to be *insulted* as *Fools* or *Madmen*, by one Sort of People; and by another, to be *persecuted* with the most savage and outrageous Cruelty, as *Blasphemers* of the Gods, as *Seducers* of the People, and as *Disturbers* of the publick Peace? All which we know accordingly happened (*d*): Nay, they assure us, that their *Lord* had often *warned them of it* (*e*); and that *they* themselves *expected it* (*f*), and thought it necessary to admonish their *Followers* to *expect it* too (*g*): And it appears, that far from *drawing back* upon that Account, as they would surely have done if they had been governed by secular Motives, they became so much the more zealous and courageous, and encouraged each other to *resist even to Blood* (*b*).—Now as this is a great Evidence of the Integrity and Piety of their *Character*, and thus illustrates the *former Head*; so it serves to the Purpose now immediately in View, *i. e.* it proves how *improbable* it is, that any Person of common Sense should engage in an *Imposture*, from which (as many have justly observed,)

(*d*) [Compare Acts v. 40. vii. 57, 58. viii. 1. ix. 1, 2. xxvi. 10, 11. ix. 23, 24. xii. 1,—4. xiii. 50. xiv. 5, 19. xvi. 19,—24, xvii. 5,—8. xviii. 12, 13. xx. 3. xxi. 27, 28. xxii. 22. xxiii. 14. all which Texts relate to the *Persecution* of the *Christians*, either by *Jews* or *Gentiles*: And compare also the Scriptures cited in the *last Note* on this *Sermon*.]

(*e*) Matt. x. 16,—25. xxiii. 34. Mark x. 29, 30, 39. Luke xiv. 27. xxi. 12, 17. John xv. 20, 21. xvi. 2,—33. xxi. 18, 19. Acts ix. 16. (*f*) Acts xx. 23, 24. xxi. 13. 1 Cor. iv. 9. 2 Cor. xii. 10. 1 Thess. iii. 3, 4. 2 Tim. iv. 6. (*g*) Acts xiv. 22. 2 Tim. iii. 12. iv. 5. 1 Jm v. 10, 11. 1 Pet. ii. 20, 21. iv. 1, 12,—16. v. 9. (*b*) Heb. xii. 4.

observed), they could, on their own Principles, have nothing to expect, but Ruin in this World, and Damnation in the next. When therefore we consider, and compare their *Character*, and their *Circumstances*, it appears *utterly improbable* on various Accounts, that they would have *attempted* in this Article to impose upon the World. But suppose, that in Consequence of some unaccountable, as well as undiscoverable Frenzy, they had ventured on the *Attempt*, it is easy to shew,

4. " THAT humanly speaking, they must quickly  
 " *have perished* in it, and their foolish Cause must  
 " have died with them, without ever *gaining any*  
 " *Credit* in the World."

ONE may venture to say this in general, on the Principles which I before laid down. But it appears still more evident, when we consider the *Nature* of the *Fact* they asserted, in Conjunction with the *Methods* they took to engage Men to believe it: *Methods*, which had the *Apostles* been *Impostors*, must have had the most direct Tendency to ruin both their Scheme and themselves.

(I.) LET us a little more particularly reflect on the *Nature* of that grand *Fact*, the Death, Resurrection, and Exaltation of *Christ*; which, as I observed, was the great *Foundation* of the *Christian Scheme*, as first exhibited by the *Apostles*. — The *Resurrection* of a dead Man, and his *Ascension* into, and *Abode* in the upper World, was so strange a Thing, that a thousand Objections would immediately be raised against it; and some extraordinary Proof would justly be required as a Balance to them. Now I wish the Rejecters of the *Gospel* would set themselves to invent some *Hypothesis*, which should have any Appearance of Probability, to shew how such an amazing Story should ever *gain Credit* in the World, if it had not some very convincing Proof. Where, and when, could it first begin to be received? Was it in the same, or a succeeding Age? Was it at *Jerusalem*, the Spot of Ground on which it is said to have happened, or in *Greece*, or *Italy*, or *Asia*, or *Africa*? You may  
 change



change the Scence, and the Time, as you please; but you cannot change the Difficulty.

TAKE it in a parallel Instance. Suppose *Twelve Men* in *London* were now to affirm, that a Person executed there as a Malefactor in a publick Manner, a Month, or Six Weeks ago, or if you please, a Year, or Five or Ten Years since, (for it is much the same), was a Prophet sent from GOD with extraordinary Powers, that he was raised from the Dead, that they conversed with him after his Revival, and at last saw him taken up into Heaven: Would their united *Testimony* make them be *believed there*? — Or suppose them, if you please, to disperse, and That One or Two of them should come *hither*, and go on to more distant Places, suppose *Leicester, Nottingham, or York*, and tell their Story there; and that others were to carry it over to *Paris, or Amsterdam, or to Vienna, or Madrid*: Could they expect any more *Credit* with *us*, or with *them*; or hope for any thing better, than to be looked upon as *Lunaticks*, and treated as such? — And if they should go into other Places, and attempt to mend their Scheme, by saying their Master was put to Death 100, or 200 Years ago, when there could be no Historical Evidence of it discovered, and no Proof given but their own confident Assertion: Would they remove, or would they not rather increase, the Difficulty? — Or would they, in any of these Cases, *gain Credit* by the most dexterous Tricks of *Legerdemain*, of which you can suppose them Masters? Especially if they should undertake, in Consequence of such *supposed Facts*, to engage Men to renounce the Religion in which they had been educated; to deny themselves in their dearest Passions, and most important worldly Interests; and even, probably, to hazard their Liberties and their Lives, in Dependance on a future Reward, to be received in a Place and State, which no Man living on Earth had ever seen or known? You would readily allow *this* to be an insupposable Case: And why should you suppose it to have happened *Sixteen or Seventeen Hundred Years* ago? You may assure yourselves, that the Reason, and the Passions of Mankind, were *then* as strong, as they are *now*. — But let us a little more particularly consider,

(2). THE Manner, in which the *Apostles* undertook to prove the Truth of their *Testimony* to this *Fact*; and it will evidently appear, that instead of confirming *their Scheme*, it must have been sufficient utterly to have overthrown it, had it been itself the most *probable Imposture* that the Wit of Man could ever have contrived — You know, they did not merely assert, that they had seen *Miracles* wrought by this *Jesus*, but that he had endowed *themselves* with a Variety of *miraculous Powers*. And these they undertook to display, not in such idle and useless Tricks as Sleight of Hand might perform, but in such solid and important Works, as appeared worthy a Divine Interposition, and entirely superior to Human Power: Restoring, as they pretend, Sight to the *Blind*, Soundness to *Lepers*, Activity to the *Lame*, and in some Instances, Life to the *Dead*. Nor were these Things undertaken *in a Corner*, in a Circle of Friends, or Dependants; nor were they said to be wrought on such, as might be suspected of being *Confederates* in the Fraud: But they were done often in the *publick Streets*, in the Sight of *Enemies*, on the Persons of such, as were utter *Strangers* to the *Apostles*, but sometimes *well known* to Neighbours and Spectators, as having long laboured under these Calamities, to Human Skill utterly incurable (i). Would *Impostors* have made such Pretensions as these? Or if they had, must they not immediately have been exposed and ruined?

NOR is there any Room at all to object, that perhaps the *Apostles* might not undertake to do these Things *on the Spot*, but only assert they had done them *elsewhere*: For even then, it would have been impossible they should have *gained Credit*; and they would have seemed *the less credible*, on account of such a Pretence. Whatever Appearances there might have been of Gravity, Integrity and Piety, in the Conversation of *Peter*, (for Instance,) very few, especially few that had known but little of him, would have taken it upon his Word, that he saw *Jesus* raise *Lazarus* from the Dead at *Bethany*: But fewer yet would have believed it upon his Affirmation, had

(i) Acts iii. 1,—10. v. 15. ix. 33,—42. xiv. 8,—10. xix. 11, 12, xx. 9,—12. xxviii. 7,—9.

had it been ever so solemn, that he had himself raised *Dorcas at Joppa*; unless he had done some extraordinary Work before them, correspondent at least, if not equal to that. You will easily think of invincible Objections, which otherwise might have been made; and undoubtedly, the more such Assertions had been multiplied, every new Person, and Scene, and Fact, had been an additional Advantage given to the Enemy, to have detected and confuted the whole Scheme, which *Peter* and his Associates had thus endeavoured to establish.

BUT to come still closer to the Point: If the *New Testament* be genuine, (as I have already proved it,) then it is certain, that the *Apostles* pretend to have wrought Miracles in the very Presence of those, to whom their Writings were addressed; nay more, they profess likewise to have conferred those miraculous Gifts, in some considerable Degrees, on others (k), even on the very Persons to whom they write; and they appeal to their Consciences as to the Truth of it. And could there possibly be Room for *Delusion* here? It is exceedingly remarkable to this Purpose, that *Paul* makes this Appeal to the *Corinthians* (l), and *Galatians* (m), when there were amongst them some Persons disaffected to him, who were taking all Opportunities to sink his Character, and destroy his Influence: And could they have wished for a better Opportunity, than such an Appeal? An Appeal, which, had not the Fact it supposed been certain, far from recovering those that were wavering in their Esteem, must have been sufficient utterly to disgust his most cordial and steady Friends.—And the same Remark may be applied to the *AdVICES* and *Reproofs*, which the *Apostle* there gives, relating to the Use and Abuse of their *Spiritual Gifts* (n); which had been most notoriously absurd, and even ridiculous, had not the *Christians* to whom he wrote, been really possessed of them. And these Gifts were so plainly *Supernatural*,  
that

(k) Acts viii. 17. xix. 6. (l) 1 Cor. i. 5, 7. ii. 4, 5. ix. 2. xii. 8,—11, 28,—30. xiv. 1,—18, 26, & seq. 2 Cor. xi. 5, 6. xii. 12, 13. xiii. 3, 10. (m) Gal. iii. 2, 5. (n) 1 Cor. i. 1,—7. xiv. per tot.

that (as it has often been observed,) if it be allowed, that *Miracles* can prove a *Divine Revelation*, and that the *First Epistle* to the *Corinthians* be *genuine*, (of which, by the way, there is at least as pregnant Evidence, as that any Part of the *New Testament* is so †), then it follows by a sure and easy Consequence, that *Christianity is true*. Nevertheless other Arguments are not to be forgot in this Survey.—And therefore, as I have proved under this Head, that had the *Testimony* of the *Apostles* been *false*, it is not to be imagined, that they could have *gained Credit* at all; and especially, when they had put the Proof of their Cause on such a Footing, as we are sure they did; I am now to shew you,

5. “ THAT it is *certain in Fact*, that the *Apostles* “ *did gain early Credit*, and succeeded in a most “ *wonderful Manner* ;” from whence it will follow, that their *Testimony* was *true*.

THAT the *Apostles* did indeed *gain Credit* in the World, is evident, from what I before offered to prove the early Prevalence of *Christianity* in it; and may farther be confirmed, from many Passages in the *New Testament*. And here, I insist not so much on express *historical Testimonies*, though some of them are very remarkable; especially that of the *Brethren* at *Jerusalem*, who speak of *many Myriads of believing Jews* assembled at the Feast of *Pentecost* (o). But I argue from the *Epistles* written to several *Churches*, which plainly prove, that there were *Congregations of Christians* in *Rome*, *Corinth*, *Ephesus*, *Colosse*, *Thessalonica*, *Philippi*, *Laodicea* (p), *Smyrna*, *Pergamos*, *Thyatira*, *Sardis*, *Philadelphia* (q), *Crete* (r), *Pontus*, *Galatia*, *Cappadocia*,

† I cannot but look upon it as a kind and remarkable Providence to this Purpose, that there is still extant an *Epistle* of *Clemens Romanus* to the Church at *Corinth*, probably written before the *Year of Christ* 70, in which he plainly refers to 1 Cor. i. 12. in what he cites from “ an *Epistle* of *Paul* written to them by the Spirit at his first preaching “ the *Gospel* among them.” *Clem. Epist. i. ad Cor. §. 47.*

(o) Acts xxi. 20. (p) Col. iv. 16. (q) Rev. ii. and iii. (r) Tit. i. 5.

*cia, Asia, and Bithynia (f) and many other Places; insomuch that one of the Apostles could say, that Christ had so wrought by him, to make the Gentiles obedient, not only in Word or Profession, but in Deed too, that from Jerusalem, even round about unto Illyricum, he had fully preached the Gospel of Christ (t), or as the Word imports †, had accomplished the Purposes of it. And there is a great deal of Reason, both from the Nature of the Thing, and from the Testimony of ancient History ‡, to believe, that others of the Apostles had considerable Success elsewhere: So that Paul might with Reason apply to them and their Doctrine, what is originally spoken of the Luminaries of Heaven and the Instruction they communicate, Their Line is gone out through all the Earth, and their Words to the Ends of the World (u).*

So great was the Number of those, who were profelyted to *Christianity* by the Preaching of the *Apostles*: And we have all imaginable Reason to believe, that there were none of all these *Profelytes*, but what were fully persuaded of the *Truth* of the Testimony they bore; for otherwise, no imaginable Reason can be given for their entring themselves into such a Profession. The *Apostles* had no secular *Terrors* to affright them, no secular *Rewards* to bribe them §, no dazzling *Eloquence* to enchant them (w): On the contrary, all these were in a powerful Manner pleading against the *Apostles*: Yet their Testimony was received, and their *new Converts* were so thoroughly satisfied with the Evidence which they gave them of their Mission, that they encountered great *Persecutions*, and chearfully ventured Estate, Liberty and Life itself,

(f) 1 Pet. i. 1. (t) Rom. xv. 18, 19. † *ωπερ λερω κεναι.*  
 ‡ *Euseb. Hystor. Eccles. Lib. iii. cap. 1.* (u) Compare Rom. x. 18. and Psal. xix. 4.

§ As for the *Distribution of Goods* in *Judæa*, it is plain it was peculiar to that Time and Country; and the extraordinary *Persecution*, which from the very Infancy of *Christianity* prevailed there, was more than an Equivalent for any Advantage, which the poorest of the People could gain by it. I did not therefore think it necessary to mention it.

(w) 1 Cor. i. 17. ii. 1, 4, 13. 2 Cor. x. 10. xi. 6.

itself, on the Truth of the *Facts* they asserted; as plainly appears from many Passages in the *Epistles*, which none can think the *Apostles* would ever have writ, if these *first Christians* had not been in a *persecuted Condition* (x).

NOR will it signify any thing to object, that most of these *Converts* were Persons of a low Rank, and ordinary Education, who therefore might be more easily imposed upon than others: For (not to mention *Sergius Paulus*, *Dionysius the Areopagite*, or the *Domesticks* of *Cæsar's* Household, with others of superior Stations in Life,) it is sufficient to remind you, that, as I have largely shewn, the *Apostles* did not put their Cause on the Issue of *laboured Arguments*, in which the *Populace* might quickly have been entangled and lost, but on such *plain Facts*, as they might judge of as easily and surely, as any others; indeed, on what they themselves saw, and in part too, on what they felt.

Now I apprehend, this might be sufficient to bring the Matter to a satisfactory Conclusion. You have seen, that as there is no Reason to believe, that the *Apostles*, who certainly *knew* the Truth, would have *attempted* a Fraud of this Kind; — so if they *had* attempted it, they could not possibly have *succeeded*; — nevertheless they *did succeed* in a very remarkable Manner; — whence it plainly follows, that *what they testified was true*.

AND now then, after this, the Reasonableness of receiving the *Gospel*, on admitting the *Truth* of what they testified concerning *Christ*, is an easy Consequence. — Yet some Things are to be offered under *this Head*, which are of great Weight, and would not so conveniently have fallen under any of the *former*: And some considerable *additional Evidence* to the *Truth of Christianity* arises, from what has happened in the World,

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since

(x) Rom. viii. 36. 1 Cor. iv. 11, — 13. xv. 29, — 32. 2 Cor. i. 8, 9. iv. 8, — 11. vi. 4, 5, 9. xi. 23, — 27. Gal. vi. 17. Phil. i. 28, — 30. 1 Theff. i. 6. ii. 14, — 15. 2 Theff. i. 4, — 7. 2 Tim. i. 8. ii. 3, 9, 12, 13. iii. 11, 12. Heb. x. 32, — 34. Jam. ii. 6. v. 10, 11. 1 Pet. ii. 19, 20. iii. 14, — 17. iv. 1, 12, — 16. Rev. ii. 10, 13.

50      *The Gospel ought to be received.*      SERM. II.  
since its first Propagation. And therefore I chuse rather  
to make *a distinct Discourse* on these, with the *Im-*  
*provement* of the whole, than to throw together the  
Hints of them, in so hasty a Manner as I must do,  
should I attempt to dispatch the Subject in *this Discourse*,  
the just Limits of which I have already transgressed,  
lest the great Chain of the Argument should be broken.



S E R.



## S E R M O N III.

Additional Evidences of CHRISTIANITY, and Reflections on the whole.

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2 PET. i. 16.

— *We have not followed cunningly devised Fables,* —



AS I had before proved the *Books* of the *New Testament* to be genuine, I proceeded in my *last Discourse*, to argue from thence the *certain Truth* of the *Christian Revelation*; and we have made some considerable Progress in the Argument.

THE Matter in short stands thus. — The *Authors* of the *New Testament* certainly *knew*, whether the *Facts* they asserted were true, or false; so that they could not *themselves be deceived*: — Neither can we think they *would attempt to deceive others*, since they appear by their Manner of writing, to have been Persons of great Integrity and Goodness; — and it is likewise evident, they could have *no Temptation* to attempt a Fraud of this Nature: — However, if they *had attempted it*, we cannot imagine they *could have gained Credit* in the World, if the *Facts* they asserted had not been *true*: — Nevertheless they *did gain Credit* in a very remarkable



able Manner; from whence it plainly follows, that *those Facts were true*.—Now I am to shew farther, to compleat the *Proof* of our grand Proposition,

6. “ That admitting the *Facts* which they testified  
 “ concerning *Christ* to be true, then it was rea-  
 “ sonable for their *Contemporaries*, and is reason-  
 “ able for *us*, to receive the *Gospel* which they  
 “ have transmitted to us, as a *Divine Reve-*  
 “ *lation.*”

THE great Thing they asserted was, that *Jesus was the Christ*, and that he was proved to be so,—by *Prophecies* accomplished in him,—and by *Miracles* wrought by him, and by others in his Name. Let us attend to each of these, and I am persuaded we shall find them no contemptible Arguments; but must be forced to acknowledge, that the *Premises* being established, the *Conclusion* most easily and necessarily follows: And this Conclusion, that *Jesus is the Christ*, taken in all its Extent, is an *Abstract* of the *Gospel Revelation*, and therefore is sometimes put for the *Whole* of it (a).

THE *Apostles*, especially when disputing with the *Jews*, did frequently argue from “ the *Prophecies* of the *Old Testament* ;” in which, they say, many Things were expressly foretold, which were most literally and exactly fulfilled in *Jesus of Nazareth* (b). Now, greatly to the Evidence, Confirmation, and Advantage of *Christianity*, so it is, that *these Prophecies* are to this Day extant in their *original* Language; and this, in the Hands of a People, most implacably averse to the *Gospel*: So that, an attentive Reader may still, in a great Measure, satisfy himself, as to the Validity of the Argument drawn from them.

ON searching these ancient and important *Records*, we find, not only in the general, that God intended to raise

(a) Acts viii. 37. ix. 22. xvii. 3. xviii. 5. 1 John ii. 22. v. 1.  
 (b) Acts ii. 25,—31. iii. 18,—25. vii. 37. viii. 35. x. 43.  
 xiii. 23, 27, 32,—37, 40, 41. xvii. 2, 3. xxvi. 22, 23, 27.  
 xxviii. 23.

raise up for his People an illustrious *Deliverer*, who, amongst other glorious Titles, is sometimes called *the Messiah*, or *the anointed One* (c): But we are more particularly told, that this great Event should happen, before the *Government* ceased in the Tribe of *Judab* (d); while the *Second Temple* was standing (e); and a little before its *Destruction*, about 490 Years after a *Command* given to *rebuild Jerusalem* (f); which was probably issued out in the Seventh Year of *Artaxerxes Longimanus*, or at least within a few Years before, or after it. It is predicted, that he should be *the Seed of Abraham* (g), *born of a Virgin*, of the House of *David* (h), in the Town of *Bethlehem* (i); that he should be *anointed* with an extraordinary Effusion of the *Divine Spirit* (k), in virtue of which, he should not only be a perfect and illustrious *Example* of universal *Holiness* and *Goodness* (l), but should also *perform* many extraordinary and beneficial *Miracles* (m); nevertheless, that, for Want of *external Pomp* and *Splendour*, he should be *rejected* and *insulted* by the *Jews* (n), and at length be *cut off* and *slain* by them (o). It is added, that he should *arise from the Dead* before his *Body* should be *corrupted* in the *Grave* (p); and should be *received up to Heaven*; and there *seated at the right Hand of GOD* (q); from whence he should in a wonderful Manner *pour out his Spirit* on his Followers (r); in consequence of which, though the *Body* of the *Jewish* People perished in their obstinate Opposition to him (s), yet, the *Gentiles* should be brought to the Knowledge of the true *GOD* (t), and a *Kingdom* established amongst them, which from small *Beginnings* should spread itself to the *Ends of the Earth*, and continue to the *remotest Ages* (u).

D 3

BESIDES

- (c) Dan. ix. 25, 26. Psal. li. 2. (d) Gen. xlix. 10.  
 (e) Hag. ii. 7, 9. (f) Dan. ix. 25,—27. (g) Gen.  
 xii. 3. xviii. 18. xxii. 18. (h) Isai. vii. 14. xi. 1. Jer. xxiii.  
 5, 6. (i) Mic. v. 2. (k) Isai. xlii. 1. lxi. 1. (l) Isai.  
 xlii. 1, 4. liii. 9. Psal. xlv. 7. (m) Isai. xxxv. 5, 6. (n) Isai.  
 liii. 2,—4. (o) Isai. liii. 7,—9. Dan. ix. 26. (p) Psal.  
 xvi. 9, 10. Isai. xxvi. 19. liii. 10,—12. (q) Psal. xvi. 11.  
 cx. 1. (r) Joel. ii. 28, 29. (s) Isai. vi. 9, 10. xxix. 10.  
 xlix. 4, 5. liii. 1. lxxv. 2. (t) Psal. ii. 8. xxii. 27. lxxxvi. 9.  
 Isa. ii. 2, 3. xi. 10. xlii. 1, 4, 6, 7. xlv. 22. xlix. 6,—12.  
 Mal. i. 11. (u) Dan. ii. 44. vii. 13, 14, 27.

BESIDES *these* most material *Circumstances*, there were several *others* relating to him, which were either expressly *foretold*, or at least *hinted at*; all which, with those already mentioned, had so evident an *Accomplishment* in *Jesus*, (allowing the *Truth* of the *Facts* which the *Apostles* testified concerning him), that we have no Reason to wonder, that *they* should *receive the Word* with all *Readiness*, who *searched the Scriptures daily*, whether *these Things* were so predicted there, as the *Apostles* affirmed (w). For I am persuaded, that no wise and religious Person could imagine, that GOD would permit an *Impostor* to arise, in whom so great a Variety of *Predictions*, delivered by so many different Persons, and in so many distant Ages, should have an exact *Accomplishment*.

WHEN the *Apostles* were preaching to *Heathens*, it is indeed true, that they generally waved the Argument from *Prophecy*, because *they* were not so capable Judges of it: But then they insist on another, which might as soon captivate their Belief, and as justly vindicate it, I mean “the *Miracles* performed by *Christ*, and those “ commissioned and influenced by him.” Many of these were of such a Nature, as not to admit of any Artifice or Deceit: Especially, that most signal one of *his Resurrection from the Dead*, which I may call a *Miracle* performed *by*, as well as *upon Christ*; because he so expressly declares, that he had himself a *Power to resume his Life* at Pleasure (x). The *Apostles* well knew, *this* was a *Fact* of such a Nature, that they who believed this, would never doubt of the rest: They therefore often single *this* out, and lay the whole Stress of their Cause upon it (y). *This* they proved to be *true*, by their own *Testimony miraculously confirmed*; and in proving *this*, they established *Christianity* on an impregnable Rock. For I may safely refer it to any of you to judge, whether it is an imaginable Thing, that GOD should *raise* the dead Body of an *Impostor*; especially when he had solemnly

(w) Acts xvii. 11. (x) John x. 18. (y) Acts ii. 24,—32. iii. 15. iv. 10. v. 30, 32. x. 40, 41. xiii. 30,—39. xvii. 31. xxvi. 23. Rom. x. 9. 1 Cor xv. 3,—8, 12,—22.

solemnly appealed to such a *Resurrection*, as the grand Proof of his Mission, and had expressly fixed *the very Day* on which it was to happen (x).

I PERSUADE myself you are convinced by all this, that *they*, who on the *Apostles Testimony* believed, that the *Prophecies* of the *Old Testament* were accomplished in *Jesus*, and that *GOD* bore Witness to him by *Miracles*, and raised him from the *Dead*, had abundant Reason to believe, that the *Doctrine* which *Christ* taught was *Divine*, and his *Gospel* a *Revelation from Heaven*. And if *they* had Reason to admit *this Conclusion*, then it is plain, that *we*, who have such satisfactory Evidence, on the one hand, that the *Testimony* of the *Apostles* was credible, and on the other, that *this* was the Substance of it, have Reason also to admit this grand *Inference* from it, and to embrace the *Gospel* as a *faithful Saying*, and as well *worthy of all Acceptation* (a). This is the Thing I was attempting to prove; and here I should end the Argument, were it not for the *Confirmation* it may receive from some additional Considerations, which could not properly be introduced under any of the proceeding *Heads*. I add therefore,

7. IN the last Place, “ that the *Truth of the Gospel* “ has received farther, and very considerable *Con-* “ *firmation*, from what has happened in the *World* “ since it was first published.”

AND here I must desire you, more particularly to consider, — on the one Hand, what *GOD* has been doing to *establish* it; — and on the other, the *Methods* which its *Enemies* have been taking to *destroy* it.

- (1). CONSIDER “ what *GOD* has been doing “ to *confirm* the *Gospel* since its first *Publication* ? ” and you will find it a farther Evidence of its *Divine Original*.

I MIGHT here argue at large, from its surprizing *Pro-* *pagation* in the *World*; — from the *miraculous Powers*, with

with which not only the *Apostles*, but succeeding *Preachers* of the *Gospel*, and other *Converts*, were endowed; — from the *Accomplishment* of *Prophecies* recorded in the *New Testament*; — and from the *Preservation* of the *Jews* as a *distinct People*, notwithstanding the various *Difficulties* and *Persecutions* through which they have passed.

I MIGHT particularly urge, in *Confirmation* of the *Truth* of *Christianity*, “ the wonderful *Success* with which it was attended, and the surprizing *Propagation* of the *Gospel* in the World.”

I HAVE before endeavoured under a *former Head* to shew you, that the *Gospel* met with so favourable a *Reception* in the World, as evidently proved, that its *First Publishers* were capable of producing such *Evidence* of its *Truth*, as an *Imposture* could not admit. But now I carry the Remark farther, and assert, that considering the *Circumstances* of the Case, it is amazing that even *Truth itself*, under so many *Disadvantages*, should have so illustrious a *Triumph*; and that its wonderful *Success* does evidently argue such an extraordinary *Interposition* of *God* in its Favour, as may justly be called a *miraculous Attestation* to it.

THERE was not only *one of a Family*, or *two of a City* taken, and brought to *Zion* (b); but so did the *Lord* hasten it in its appointed *Time*, that a *little one* became a *thousand*, and a *small one* a *strong Nation* (c). And as the *Apostles themselves* were honoured with very remarkable *Success*, so this *Divine Seed* was *propagated so fast* in the next Age, that *Pliny* testifies, “ he found the *Heathen Temples* in *Achaia* almost deserted \* :” And *Tertullian* afterwards boasts, “ that all *Places* but *those Temples* were filled with *Christians*; so that were they *only* to withdraw, *Cities* and *Provinces* would be depopulated †.” [Nor did the *Gospel* only triumph thus within

(b) Jer. iii. 14.

(c) Isai. lx. 22.

\* Prope jam desolata Tempia, — & sacra Solennia diu intermissa: *Plin. Epist. x. 97.*

† Hesterni sumus, & vestra omnia implevimus, Urbes, Insulas, Castella, Municipia, Conciliabula, Castra ipsa, Tribus, Decurias, Palatium,

within the Boundaries of the *Roman Empire*; for long before *Tertullian* was born, *Justin Martyr*, in his *Dialogue* with *Trypho the Jew*, which seems to have been written not much above 100 Years after *Christ's* Death, declares, “ that there was no Nation of Men, whether  
 “ *Greeks* or *Barbarians*, not excepting those *Savages*,  
 “ that wandered in *Clans* from one *Region* to another,  
 “ and had no fixed *Habitation*, who had not learnt to  
 “ offer *Prayers* and *Thanksgivings* to the *Father* and  
 “ *Maker* of all, in the *Name* of *Jesus* who was cru-  
 “ cified †.]”

Now how can we account for such a Scene as this, but by saying, that the *Hand of the Lord* was with the *First Preachers* of the *Gospel*, and therefore such *Multitudes* believed, and turned unto the *Lord* (d)? How had it been possible, that so small a *Fountain* should presently have swelled into a mighty *River*, and even have covered the *Face* of the *Earth*, had it not sprung from the *Sanctuary* of *God*, and been render'd thus triumphant by his almighty *Arm*?

HAD this *New Religion*, so directly contrary to all the *Prejudices* of *Education*, been contrived to sooth *Mens Vices*, to assert their *Errors*, to defend their *Superstitions*, or to promote their *secular Interests*, we might easily have accounted for its *Prevalence* in the *World*. Had its *Preachers* been very profound *Philosophers*, or polite and fashionable *Orators*, many might have been charmed, at least for a while, to follow them: Or had the *Princes* and *Potentates* of the *Earth* declared themselves its *Patrons*, and armed their *Legions* for its *Defence* and *Propagation*, *Multitudes* might have been terrified into the *Profession*, tho' not a *Soul* could by such *Means*

D 5 have

*Palatium, Senatum, Forum*; So' a vobis relinquimus *Templa*:—  
*Potuius* & *inermes*, nec *rebelles*, sed tantummodo *discordes*, solius *divortii invidia* adversus vos *dimicasse*; — *suffudisset dominationem* vestram tot *amissio civium*, & *ipsa destitutione* punisset. *Tertul. Apolog. Cap. xxxvii.*

† [Ουδε εν γαρ ολωσ εστι το γεν<sup>ο</sup> ανθρωπων, ειτε Βαρβαρων, ειτε Ελληνων, ειτε απλωσ φιλινων ονοματι προσαγορευομενων, η Αμαξοειων, η Αοικων καλυμενων, η εν σκηλαις κτηνοτροφων, εν οισ μη, δια τ<sup>ο</sup> ονομαλος τ<sup>ο</sup> ς αυρωθεν<sup>ο</sup> Ιησ<sup>ο</sup>, ευχα<sup>ι</sup> και ευχαρισται τω πατρι και ποστη<sup>ρ</sup> των ολων γινο<sup>ν</sup>ται. *Justin, Mart. pag. 388, Edit. Thirlb.*]

(d) *Acts xi. 21.*

have been rationally persuaded to the Belief of it. But without some such Advantages as these, we can hardly conceive, how any *New Religion* should so strangely prevail; even though it had crept into the World in its darkest Ages, and most barbarous Countries, and though it had been gradually proposed in the most artful Manner, with the finest Veil industriously drawn over every Part, which might at first have given Disgust to the Beholder.

BUT you well know, that the very Reverse of all this was the Case here. You know, from the apparent Constitution of *Christianity*, that the Lusts and Errors, the Superstitions and Interests of carnal Men would immediately rise up against it as a most irreconcilable Enemy. You know, that the Learning and Wit of the *Greeks*, and the *Romans*, were early employed to overbear and ridicule it. You know, that as all the Herd of *Heathen Deities* were to be discarded, the *Priests*, who subsisted on *that Craft*, must in Interest find themselves obliged to oppose it. You know, that the *Princes* of the Earth drew the Sword against it, and arm'd Torments and Death for the Destruction of its Followers. And yet you see, that it triumphed over all, though published in Ages, and Places, of the greatest Learning and Refinement; and proposed, not in an ornamental and artificial Manner, but with the utmost Plainness; the Doctrines of the *Cross* being always avowed as its grand Fundamentals, though so notorious a *Stumbling-Block* both to *Jews* and *Gentiles* (e); [and the absolute Necessity, not only of embracing *Christianity*, but also of renouncing all *Idol Worship*, being insisted on immediately and in the strongest Terms, though it must make the *Gospel* appear the most singular and unfociable Religion that had ever been taught in the World.]

HAD one of the Wits, or Politicians of these Ages, seen the *Apostles*, and a few other plain Men, who had been educated amongst the lowest of the People, as most of the *First Teachers* of *Christianity* were, going out armed with nothing but Faith, Truth, and Goodness, to encounter the Power of *Princes*, the Bigotry of *Priests*, the Learning of *Philosophers*, the Rage of the *Populace*,  
and

(e) 1 Cor. i. 23.

and the Prejudices of *all*; how would he have derived the Attempt, and said with *Sanballat*, *What will these feeble Jews do (f) ?* But had he seen the Event, surely he must have owned, with the *Egyptian Magi*, in a far less illustrious Miracle, that it was *the Finger of GOD (g) ;* and might justly have *fallen on his Face*, even amongst those whom he had insulted, with an humble Acknowledgement *that GOD was in them of a Truth (h).*

I MIGHT here farther urge “ those *Miracles*, which “ were wrought in *Confirmation* of the *Christian Doc-* “ *rine*, for a considerable Time after the Death of the “ *Apostles.*”

THE most signal, and best attested of these, was the *Dispossession* of *Devils*; whom GOD seems to have permitted to rage with an unusual Violence about those Times, that *his Son's Triumph* over them might be so much the more remarkable, and that *the Old Serpent* might be *taken in his own Craftiness*. I doubt not, but many of you have heard, that more than *Two Hundred Years* after the Death of *Christ*, some of the most celebrated *Defenders* of the *Gospel*, which the Church has in any Age produced, I mean *Tertullian \**, and *Minutius Faelix †*, do not only challenge any of their *Heathen Enemies* and *Persecutors*, to bring them a *Demoniack*, engaging, at the Hazard of their Lives, to oblige the Evil Spirit, in the Name, and by the Authority of *Christ*, to quit his Possession; but do also appeal to it, as a *Fact* publickly known, that those who were agitated by such Spirits, stood terrified, and amazed in the Presence of a *Christian*, and that their pretended *Gods* were compelled then to confess themselves *Devils*.

I WAVE the *Testimonies* of some *later Writers* of the *Christian Church*, lest the Credulity of their Temper, join'd with the Circumstances attending some of the *Facts* they record, should furnish out Objections against their *Testimony*; though I think we cannot, without great Injustice to the Character of the learned and pious *Augustin*, suspect the Truth of some amazing *Facts* of this Kind,

(f) Neh. iv. 2.  
xiv. 25.  
Cap. xxvii.

(g) Exod. viii. 19.  
\* Tertu'. Apolog. Cap. xxii.

(h) 1 Cor.  
† Minut. Fael.



Kind, which he has attested, as of his own personal and certain Knowledge. \*

NOR must I on this Occasion forget to mention “ the Accomplishment of several Prophecies, recorded in the New Testament,” as a farther Confirmation given by GOD to the Gospel.

THE most eminent and signal Instance under this Head, is that of our Lord's Prediction concerning the Destruction of Jerusalem, as it is recorded by St. Matthew in his Twenty-fourth Chapter. The tragical History of it is most circumstantially described by Josephus, a Jewish Priest, who was an Eye-Witness of it; and the Description he has given of this sad Calamity, so exactly corresponds to the Prophecy, that one would have thought, had we not known the contrary, that it had been written by a Christian on purpose to illustrate it: [And one can never enough admire that Series of amazing Providences, by which the Author was preserved from most eminent Danger; that he might leave us that invaluable Treasure which his Writings contain †.]

WE have no Need of any farther Evidence, than we find in him, of the exact Accomplishment of what was prophesied concerning the Destruction of Jerusalem: But our Lord had also foretold the long continued Desolation of their Temple (i); and I cannot forbear reminding you of the awful Sanction which was given to that Part of the Prediction: For it is well known, that a Heathen Historian has assured us, that when Julian the Apostate, in deliberate Contempt of that Prediction, solemnly and resolutely undertook to rebuild it, his impious Design was miraculously frustrated again and again, and the Workmen consumed by Globes of Fire, which broke out from the Foundations †.]

THE

\* Augustin. de Civit. Dei, Lib. xxii. cap. 3.

† Joseph. Bell. Jud. Lib. iii. Cap. 8.

(i) Matt. xxiii. 38. xxiv 2.

‡ [Cum itaque fortiter rei instaret Alypius, juvaretque Provinciae Rector, metuendi Globi Flammatum, prope Fundamenta crebris assultibus erumpentes, fecere Locum, exustis aliquoties operantibus, inaccessum; hocque modo, Elemento destinatus repellente, cessavit Inceptum,

THE Prediction of St. Paul concerning the *Man of Sin*, and the *Apostacy of the latter Times*, (k), is also well worthy of our Remark. And though a great deal of the *Book of Revelation* be still concealed under a dark Veil; yet the Division of the *Roman Empire* into *Ten Kingdoms*, the Usurpation, Persecution and Idolatry of the *Romish Church*, and the long Duration of the *Papal Power*, with several other extraordinary Events, which no Human Prudence could have foreseen, and which have happened long since the Publication of that Book, are so clearly foretold there, that I cannot but look on that Part of Scripture as an invaluable Treasure \*; and think it not at all improbable, that the more visible Accomplishment of some of its other Prophecies may be a great Means of reviving the *Christian Cause*, which is at present so much on the decline †.

“THE Preservation of the *Jews* as a distinct People,” is another Particular under this Head, which well deserves our attentive Regard.

THEY plain they are vastly numerous, notwithstanding all the Slaughter and Destruction of this People, in former, and in later Ages. They are dispersed in various most distant Nations, and particularly in these Parts of the World where *Christianity* is professed: And though they are exposed to great Hatred and Contempt, on account of their different Faith, and in most Places subjected to civil Incapacities, if not to unchristian Severities; yet

Inceptum. *Ammian. Marcell. Lib. xxiii. sub init.* I think one might argue the Author to have been a Heathen, from this cold Way of telling a Story so glorious to *Christianity*: “The Element repelling them by a kind of obstinate Fatality.” The learned Reader will easily observe, with how different an Air *Socrates* (*Hist. Lib. iii. cap. 20.*) and *Sozomen* (*Hist. Lib. v. cap. 22.*) recount, and most reasonably triumph in it.]

(k) 2 Thess. ii. 3,—12. 1 Tim. iv. 1,—3.

\* [I can with great Pleasure refer my Reader to the Learned Commentary on this Book lately published by the Reverend Mr. Lowman; from which I have received more Satisfaction, with Respect to many of its Difficulties, than I ever found elsewhere, or expected to have found at all.]

† Hinc igitur apud nos futurorum quoque Fides tuta est, jam scilicet probatorum, quia cum illis quæ quotidie probantur prædicabantur, *Tertul. Apol. Cap. xx.*

yet they are still most obstinately tenacious of their Religion: Which is the more wonderful, as *their Fathers* were so prone to apostatize from it; and as most of them seem to be utter Strangers, either to Piety, or Humanity, and pour the greatest Contempt on the *Moral Precepts* of their own Law, while they are so attached to the *Ceremonial Institutions* of it, troublesome and inconvenient as they are. Now seriously reflect, what an evident *Hand of Providence* is here; that by their Dispersion, Preservation, and Adherence to their Religion, it should come to pass, that *Christians* should daily see the *Accomplishment* of many remarkable *Prophecies* concerning this People †; and that we should always have amongst us such a Croud of unexceptionable Witnesses to the Truth of those ancient *Hebrew Records*, on which so much of the Evidence of the *Gospel* depends: *Records*, which are many of them so full to the Purpose for which we alledge them, that (as a celebrated Writer very well observes, \*) “ Had  
 “ the whole Body of the *Jewish* Nation been converted  
 “ to *Christianity*, Men would certainly have thought,  
 “ they had been forged by *Christians*, and have looked  
 “ upon them, with the *Prophecies* of the *Sybil*s, as  
 “ made many Years after the Events they pretend to  
 “ foretell.” And to add no more here, The *Preservation* of the *Jews* as a *distinct* People evidently leaves Room for the *Accomplishment* of those *Old* and *New Testament Promises* (‡), which relate to their *national Conversion* and *Restoration*; whereas that would be impossible in itself, or at least impossible to be known, if they were promiscuously blended with other People. On the whole,  
 it

† [This important Thought is most excellently illustrated in that incomparable old Book of *Dr. Jackson's*, called, *The Eternal Truth of the Scriptures, &c.* especially *Book. I. Part. I. Sect. III. Chap. 10,—13.* The whole of the *Section* is very curious.]

\* *Sp. Stat. Vol. vii. N<sup>o</sup>. 495.*

(‡) Deut. xxx. 3,—5. Isai. xxvii. 12, 13. xlv. 17. xlix. 6. liv. lix. 20, 21. lx. lxi. lxii. lxv. lxvi. Jer. xxiii. 5, 6. xxx. 8,—24. xxxi. 31,—40. L. 4, 5. Ezek. xi. 17,—20. xx. 34,—44. xxxiv. 11,—31. xxxvi. 21,—38. xxxvii. 21, 28. Hof. i. 10, 11. ii. 14,—23. iii. 4, 5. Joel iii. Amos ix. 11,—15. Obad. ver. 17,—21. Mic. vii. 14,—20. Zech. viii. 7,—23. x. 6,—12. xii. 10. xiv. 9,—21. Rom. xi. 25,—27. 2 Cor. iii. 16.

it is such a Scene in the Conduct of *Providence*, as I am well assured cannot be parallel'd in the History of any other Nation on Earth, and affords a most obvious and important Argument in Favour of the *Gospel*.

THUS has *Christianity* been farther *confirmed*, since its first Publication, by what *GOD* has done to *establish* it. It only remains, that we consider,

(2.) WHAT *Confirmation* it receives, “from the  
“Methods which its *Enemies* have taken to  
“destroy it.”

AND these have generally been, either *Persecution*, or *Falsehood*, or *cauvilling* at some Particulars in the *Revelation*, without entering into the grand Argument on which it is built, and fairly debating what is offered in its Defence. Now who would not think the better of a Cause, for being thus attacked?

AT first you know, that the *Professors*, and especially the *Preachers* of the *Gospel*, were severely *persecuted*. In every City Bonds and Imprisonments awaited them (m). As soon as ever the *Apostles* began to preach *Jesus* and his *Resurrection*, the *Jewish Rulers* laid hold on them, and having confined and scourged them, strictly prohibited their *speaking any more in that Name* (n). A little while after, *Stephen* was murder'd (o); and afterwards *James* (p), and some other of the *Apostles*. Now certainly such a Conduct did evidently shew a Consciousness, that they were not able to answer the *Apostles*, and to support their own Cause by the fair Methods of Reason and Argument; to which, so far as the History informs us, they made no Pretence; but attempted to bear them down by Dint of Authority, and to silence them by brutal Force.

THE Time would fail me, should I attempt particularly to shew, how these unrighteous Methods were pursued in succeeding Ages, and distant Countries. The savage Cruelties of *Nero* to these innocent and holy Men were

(m) Acts xx. 23.  
vii. 58.

(n) Acts iv. 17. v. 40.

(p) Acts xii. 2.

(o) Acts

were such, as raised the Pity even of their Enemies \* : Yet this was one of the least extensive and destructive of the Ten general Persecutions, which arose in the Roman Empire, besides several others in the neighbouring Countries, of which Ecclesiastical History informs us.

THESE early Enemies of the Gospel added Falsehood and Slander to their Inhumanities. They endeavoured to murder the Reputations of the Christians, as well as their Persons, and were not ashamed [to represent them as Haters of the whole Human Species †, for no imaginable Reason, but because they would not associate themselves in their Idolatrous Worship, but with Regard to Charity and Truth, were strongly bearing their Testimony against it ‡ : ] Nay, they charged them with Human Sacrifices, Incest, Idolatry, and all the Crimes, for which themselves and their foolish Gods were indeed justly detestable; but from which the Christians knew how to vindicate themselves, highly to their own Honour, and to the everlasting Reproach of these malignant and pestilent Accusers: And they have not failed to do it in many noble Apologies, which through the Divine Providence are transmitted to us, and are incomparably the most valuable of any ancient uninspired Writings.

SUCH were the infamous and scandalous Methods, by which the Gospel was opposed in the earliest Ages of the Church; and I cannot forbear adding, “ that the Measures more lately taken to subvert it, especially amongst ourselves, seem to me rather to reflect a Glory upon it.” Its unhappy Enemies have been told again and again,

\* [This a haughty and cruel Enemy confesses, even while he blasphemes the Religion of these glorious Confessors:—*Quanquam adversus fontes, & novissima exempla meritos, Misericatio oriebatur.* Tacit. *Annal.* Lib. xv. § 44.]

† Odio humani generis convicti sunt. Tacit. *ubi supra.*

‡ [This Matter is set in the clearest and most beautiful Light by the sagacious Mr. Warburton, in his *Divine Legation of Moses*, (Vol. i. pag. 292,—295.) to whose Labours the Learned and the Christian World are indebted beyond Expression, for as great a Number of Original Thoughts, as are perhaps any where to be found in an equal Compass.]

again, that we put the Proof of it on plain *Fact*. They themselves do not, and cannot deny, that it prevailed early in the World, as we have shewn at large. There must have been some Man, or Body of Men, who first introduced it: They generally confess, that *Christ* and his *Apostles* were the Persons: And these *Apostles* (on whose *Testimony* what we know of *Christ* chiefly depends) must have been *Enthusiasts*, or *Impostors*, if their *Testimony* was false. Now which of these Schemes will the Unbeliever take? It seems, that the *Deists* of the present Age fix on neither, as being secretly conscious they can support neither; but they content themselves with *cavilling* at some Circumstances attending the *Revelation*, without daring to encounter its grand Evidence; *i. e.* they have been laboriously attempting to prove it “to be improbable, or absurd, to suppose that to have been, which nevertheless plainly appears to have been *FACT*.” One most weakly and sophistically pretends to prove, in Defiance of the common Sense of Mankind, that the *Light of Nature* is a *perfect Rule*, and therefore that all *Revelation* is needless, and indeed impossible. Another disguises the *Miracles* of *Christ* by false and foolish Representations of them, and then sets himself to ridicule them as *idle Tales*. And a third takes a great deal of fruitless Pains to shew, that some *Prophecies* refer'd to in the *New Testament* are capable of another Sense, different from that in which the *Apostles* have taken them. These Things have been set in a very artful and fallacious Light by Persons, whose Names will be perhaps transmitted to Posterity, with the infamous Glory of having been Leaders in the Cause of *Infidelity*; but not a Man of them undertakes directly to answer, what has been said to ascertain the grand *Fact*. Nay, they generally take no more Notice of the positive *Evidence*, by which it is even *demonstrated*, than if they had never heard it proposed; though they *cavil* at incidental Passages in those Books, in which it is most clearly stated. And as for what they have urged, tho' perhaps some, who were before weary of *Christianity*, may have taken Occasion from their Writings to reject it; and others for want of consulting the Answers to them, may have been unwarily insnared; yet the Examination

mination of these Points has been greatly for the Honour and Vindication of the *Truth*, which seems on this Occasion to have been set in a clearer and stronger Light than ever, at least in these later Ages.

THE Cause of *Christianity* has greatly gained by *Debate*, and the *Gospel* comes like fine Gold out of the Furnace, which the more it is tried, the more it is approved. I own, the *Defenders* of the *Gospel* have appeared with very different Degrees of Ability for the Work; nor could it be otherwise amongst such Numbers of them: But on the whole, though the *Patrons* of *Infidelity* have been Masters of some Wit, Humour, and Address, as well as of a moderate Share of Learning, and generally much more than a moderate Share of Assurance; yet so great is the Force of *Truth*, that (unless we may except those Writers, who have unhappily called for the Aid of the Civil Magistrate in the Controversy,) I cannot recollect, that I have seen any *Defence* of the *Gospel*, which has not, on the whole, been sufficient to establish it, notwithstanding all the sophistical Arguments of its most subtle *Antagonists*.

[THIS is an Observation, which is continually gaining new Strength, as *new Assaults* are made upon the *Gospel*. And I cannot forbear saying, that as if it were by a Kind of *Judicial Infatuation*, some who have distinguished themselves in the wretched Cause of *Infidelity*, have been permitted to fall into such gross *Misrepresentations*, such senseless *Inconsistencies*, and such palpable *Falsehoods* \*, and in a Word, into such a various and malignant *Superfluity of Naughtiness*; that to a wise and pious Mind they must appear like those *venomous Creatures*, which are said to carry an Antidote in their Bowels against their own Poison. A virtuous and well-bred *Deist* must turn away from some *modern Pieces* of this Kind with Scorn and Abhorrence; and a *Christian* might almost be tempted to wish, that the *Books*, with all their Scandals

\* [I mention not here that mean *Buffoonery* and *Scurrility*, that industrious, though awkward, *Disguise*, and monstrous Mixture of the *Sceptick* and *Dogmatist*, which the learned and ingenious Mr. *Warburton* has animadverted upon with such Justice and Spirit, in his *late Dedication to the Divine Legation of Moses demonstrated*.]

SERM. III. *have added Strength to the Gospel.* 67

Scandals about them, might be transmitted to Posterity, lest when they come to live, like the Writings of some of the *ancient Heathens*, only in those of their learned and pious *Answerers*, it should hardly be credited, that ever the *Enemies* of the *Gospel* in such an enlightned Age should be capable of so much Impiety and Folly.]

THUS I have given you a brief View of the *chief Arguments* in proof of *Christianity*; and the Sum of the whole is this.

THE *Gospel* is *probable in Theory*; as considering the *Nature of GOD*, and the *Circumstances of Mankind*, there was Reason to hope a *Revelation* might be given; and if any were given, we should naturally apprehend its *Internal Evidence* would be such, as that of the *Gospel* is, and its *External* such, as it is said to be. But it is also *true in Fact*; for *Christianity* was *early professed*, as it was first *introduced* by *Jesus of Nazareth*, whose *Life and Doctrines* were *published* by his immediate *Attendants*; whose *Books* are preserved still in their *original Language*, and in the main are *faithfully translated* into our own: So that the *Books* of the *New Testament* now in your Hands may be depended upon, as *written by the Persons* whose Names they bear. And admitting this, the *Truth* of the *Gospel* follows by a *Train* of very easy *Consequences*; for the *Authors* certainly *knew the Truth* of the *Facts* they relate; and considering what appears of their *Character* and *Circumstances*, we can never believe they *would have attempted* to deceive us; or if they *had*, they could not have *gained Credit* in the *World*; yet they *did gain it* in a remarkable *Manner*; therefore the *Facts* they attested *are true*: And the *Truth* of the *Gospel* evidently follows from the *Certainty* of those *Facts*, and is much *confirmed* by what *has happened* in the *World* since the first *Publication* of it.

I SHALL conclude what I have to say on this Subject, with a few Words by way of *Reflection*.

1. LET us gratefully acknowledge the *Divine Goodness*, in favouring us with so excellent a *Revelation*, and confirming it to us by such an *ample Evidence*.



WE should be daily adoring the GOD of Nature, for lighting up the *Sun*, that glorious, though imperfect Image of his own unapproachable Lustre; and appointing it to gild the Earth with its various Rays, to cheer us with its benign Influences, and to guide and direct us, in our Journeys, and our Labours. But how incomparably more valuable is that *Day-Spring from on high* which *has visited us*, that *Sun of Righteousness*, which is *risen upon us, to give Light to them that sit in Darkness, and in the Shadow of Death, and to guide our Feet into the Way of Peace* (q)? Oh *Christians*, (for I now address myself to you, whose *Eyes* are so happy as indeed to see, and your *Ears* as to hear (r),) what Reason have you for daily and hourly Praise! When your Minds are delighted with contemplating the Riches of *Gospel Grace*, when you view with Wonder and Joy the harmonious Contrivance of our Redemption, when you feel the Burden of your Guilt removed, the Freedom of your Address to the Throne of Grace encouraged, and see the Prospect of a fair Inheritance of Eternal Glory opening upon you; then in the pleasing Transport of your Souls, borrow the joyful Anthem of the *Psalmist*, and say, with the humblest Gratitude and Self-Resignation; *God is the Lord, who hath given us Light; bind the Sacrifice with Cords, even to the Horns of the Altar* (s), Adore *G O D*, who first commanded the *Light to shine out of Darkness*, that by the Discoveries of his Word, and the Operations of his Spirit, he *has shined in your Hearts, to give you the Knowledge of his Glory, as reflected from the Face of his Son* (t). Let us all adore him, that *this Revelation* hath reached us, who live in an Age and Country so distant from that in which it first appeared; while there are to this Day, not only *dark Corners*, but *Regions of the Earth, which are full of the Habitations of Idolatry and Cruelty* (u).

LET me here peculiarly address myself to those, whose Education and Circumstances of Life have given them Opportunities of a fuller Enquiry, into the State of those ancient

(q) Mal. iv. 2. Luke i. 78, 79. (r) Matt. xiii. 16. (s) Psal. cxviii. 27. (t) 2 Cor. iv. 6. (u) Psal. lxxiv. 20.

ancient or modern Nations, that have been left merely to the *Light of unassisted Reason*; even to you, Sirs, who are acquainted with the History of their *Gods*, the Rites of their *Priests*, the Tales, and even the Hymns of their *Poets*, (those beautiful Trifles;) nay, I will add, the Reasonings of their sagest *Philosophers*, all the precarious, and all the erroneous Things they have said, where *Religion* and *Immortality* are concerned\*. I have sometimes thought, that GOD gave to some of the most celebrated *Pagan Writers* that uncommon Share of Genius and Eloquence, that they might, as it were, by their Art embalm the Monsters of Antiquity; that so succeeding Ages might see, in a more affecting View than we could otherwise have done, how weak the Human Mind is in its best Estate, and the Need, which the greatest, as well as the meanest of Mankind have, of being taught by a *Revelation* from above. Permit me to remind you, that while you are daily conversing with such Monuments as these, (as I know some of you are), and are also surveying the *Evidences of Christianity*, in a larger, and more distinct View, than it was proper for me here to propose them, you are under peculiar Obligations, to be very *thankful* for the *Gospel* yourselves, as well as to *compassionate* the Case of those, to whom it has never been offered, or by whom it is slighted. And this leads me to another Reflection;

2. WHAT Reason have we to *pity* those, who *reject* this glorious *Gospel*, even when they have Opportunities of enquiring into its clearest *Evidences*?

SUCH

\* [The great *Author* I mentioned above (pag. 301. Note †), has shewn in a most convincing Manner, that the whole Body of the *Greek Philosophers* disbelieved the Doctrine of *Future Rewards and Punishments*, though they popularly taught it as necessary to Society; and held no other *Immortality of the Soul*, than what was the Result of a most *Atheistical* Notion, (modernly known by the Name of *Spirozism*), that *the Universe was GOD*: (See Mr. Warburton's *Divine Legation of Moses*, Book iii. Sect. 2, 3, 4.) Which surely is one of the strongest Proofs of the *Need of a Revelation*, that the World ever saw, and the most affecting Comment on the Words of the learned *Apostle*, 1 Cor. i. 21. *The World by Wisdom knew not GOD*; but *professing themselves to be wise, they became Fools*. Rom. i. 22.]

SUCH undoubtedly there are in our own Age and Nation; and surely we should sometimes bestow a compassionate Thought upon them, and lift up an humble Prayer for them; if GOD peradventure will give them Repentance to the acknowledging of the Truth; that they may recover themselves out of the Snare of the Devil, who are now led Captive by him at his Pleasure (w). We should pity Heathens, and Mahometans, under their Darkness and Errors: But how much more deplorable is the Case of these, who, though they dwell in Emmanuel's Land, and in the Valley of Vision, turn it into the Valley of the Shadow of Death, by closing their Eyes against so bright a Lustre, and stopping their Ears against the Voice of the Charmer (x)? They are indeed in their own Conceit the only People, and Wisdom will die with them (y); so that to be sure, they will scorn our Pity: But who can forbear it? Is there a more melancholy Thought than this, that the Son of GOD should have done so much to introduce and establish the Gospel, and his Spirit so much to perpetuate and increase its Evidence, and that after all, it should be contemptuously despised, even by Creatures who are perishing without it? That the blessed Jesus, instead of being received with open Arms as the great Deliverer, should either be treated as an empty Name; or if acknowledged to be a real Person, should then be represented as a visionary Enthusiast, or a wicked Impostor; for there is no other Alternative? And this, not only, (though I believe, most frequently), by Men of profligate and abandon'd Lives, but sometimes by Persons of external Morality and Decency, of great Humanity and Sweetness of Temper, (for such I know are to be found amongst them), as well as Men of Wit and Genius, of Politeness and Learning, of Human Prudence and Experience in Affairs. I may also add, that it is the Case of some, who were the Children of pious Parents, who were trained up in religious Exercises, who once discovered serious Impressions, and gave very encouraging Hopes. Alas, whither are they fallen! and whither have we reason to fear, they

(w) 2 Tim. ii 25, 26.  
xii. 2.

(x) Psal. lviii, 4, 5.

(y) Job

they will at length *fall!* How shall we shelter those, that were *once our Brethren*, that are perhaps *still our Friends*, from the awful Sentence, which the *Gospel* denounces against all that reject it, without any Exception? As to the Wretches, that add *Insult* and *Derision* to their *Infidelity*, I tremble to think of that Load of Guilt, which they are bringing on themselves, and how near they approach to the *Unpardonable Sin*, if they have not already committed it. For the rest, who behave in a more modest and sober Manner, it will, no doubt, be a very difficult Task to convince them; and so much the rather, as some of them, by too easy a Transition, have renounced many of the most important Principles of *Natural Religion*, nay, I might add, even the Whole of it, together with the *Christian Revelation*. But the Influences of Divine Grace are Almighty; let us recommend them to these, and omit no other proper Method, either of recovering those who are already seduced, or at least of securing those who are not yet infected, but may be (as most of the Youth are, especially in the most populous Places), in eminent Danger of the Contagion. To this End let me add,

3. How reasonable is it, that *Christians* should form a familiar Acquaintance with the great *Evidences* of our common Faith!

It is what we so apparently owe to the Honour of *GOD*, to the Interest of *Christ*, to the Peace of our own Souls, and the Edification of others, that I hope, I need not urge it at large: especially considering what was said in the *Introduction* to these Discourses. In Consequence of all, let it be your Care to make the *Evidences* of *Christianity* the Subject of your serious Reflections, and of your frequent Converse: Especially, study your *Bibles*, where there are such Marks of *Truth* and *Divinity* to be found, that I believe, few that have familiarly know them, and have had a Relish for them, were ever brought to *make Shipwreck* of the *Faith* as it is in *Jesus*. Above all, let it be your Care to act on the Rules which are here laid down; and then, you will  
find

find your *Faith* growing in a happy Proportion, and will experience the Truth of our Saviour's Declaration, that *if any Man will resolutely and faithfully do his Will, he shall know of the Christian Doctrine, whether it be of GOD* (x). I verily believe, it is the Purity of its Precepts, which lies at the Bottom of most Mens Opposition to it; or a natural Pride of Heart, which gives them an Aversion to so humbling a Scheme; or a fond Affectation of seeming wiser than others, in rejecting what most of their Neighbours do at least profess to believe. When these unhappy Prejudices and Conceptions are by Divine Grace conquered and rooted out, the *Evidence of Truth* will daily appear with an increasing Lustre; as the Light of the *Sun* does, to an Eye recovering from a Film, with which it had been overgrown, and which before had veiled it with Midnight in the Midst of Noon. Once more,

4. How solicitous should we be to *embrace* and *obey* that *Gospel*, which comes attended with such *abundant Evidences*!

I MAY undoubtedly address myself to most of you, my Friends, and say, as *Paul* did to *King Agrippa*, *Believest thou the Prophets* (a), and I may add, *the Evangelists, and the Apostles*? Yes, *I know that you believe them*; yet let me intreat and charge you, not to rest here, but attentively to examine, how far your Hearts are affected, and your Lives regulated by such a Belief. The *Christian Revelation* is a practical Thing; and it is *heard*, it is *believed*, it is *professed*, and even *defended in vain*, if it be not *obeyed*. Therefore do we so frequently read of *obeying the Truth*, and *obeying the Gospel*, as a Matter of so great Importance (b).

IN

(x) John vii. 17. (a) Acts xxvi. 27. (b) [Rom. ii. 8. vi. 17. Gal. iii. 1. 2 Theff. i. 8. 1 Pet. i. 22. iv. 17. To which we may add John iii. 36. where ο απειθων τω υιω, *be that is disobedient to the Son*, is with great Propriety opposed to ο πιστευων εις τον υιον, *be that believeth on the Son*. See *Family Expositor*, Vol. I. pag. 163. Note (i). ]

IN this Gospel, the *Wrath of GOD is revealed from Heaven against all Ungodliness and Unrighteousness of Men*; but it is revealed with redoubted Terror against that audacious Sinner, *who holds the Truth in Unrighteousness (c)*. In this Gospel, the Lord Jesus Christ is exalted, both as a Prince, and a Saviour (d); and it is not with Impunity, that the impenitent Rebel can reject his Yoke, and trample on his Blood: For if he that despised Moses's Law died without Mercy, of how much sorer Punishment, than even a Capital Execution, must they be thought worthy, who have poured Contempt on such a Sovereign, and on such a Redeemer (e)?

OH let it be most seriously and frequently recollected, that *this Gospel is the Touch-Stone*, by which you are another Day to be tried; the *Balance*, in which an impartial Judge will weigh you; and must on the whole prove your everlasting *Triumph*, or your everlasting *Torment*. The blessed GOD did not introduce it with such solemn Notice, such high Expectation, such pompous Miracles, such awful Sanctions, that Men might reject, or dishonour it, at Pleasure: But it will certainly be found, to the greatest, and the meanest, of those that hear it, a *Savour of Life unto Life*, or a *Savour of Death unto Death (f)*.

LET it therefore be your immediate Care, to enquire, which of these it is like to prove to your Souls; since it is so far from being a *vain Thing*, that it is really *your very Life (g)*. If it has hitherto been *despised*, and that blessed Redeemer, in whom it so apparently centers, has been *neglected*; remember, that all which has been said in Confirmation of its *Truth*, does but in effect prove, that the *Hand Writing of GOD himself* is set to the Sentence of your eternal Condemnation. Oh therefore allow not yourselves a Moment's Rest, till you have with humble Submission applied to his Throne, while yet there is *Hope* that it may be reversed.

AND as for you, my Brethren, who have *received Christ Jesus the Lord*, be exhorted to *walk in him (h)*;

K

since

(c) Rom. i. 18.  
(f) 2 Cor. ii. 16.

(d) Acts v. 31.  
(g) Deut. xxxii. 47.

(e) Heb. x. 28, 29.  
(h) Col. ii. 6.

since it is the Design of his Gospel to teach us, to deny Ungodliness and Worldly Lusts, and to live Soberly, Righteously, and Godly (i); and this, not only as you have so comfortable an Assurance, that your Labour shall not be in vain in the Lord (k), but as it will be, on the whole, the most effectual Method you can take in your respective Stations to promote the Gospel. If you indeed honour it and love it, and desire it may be propagated in the World, let it be your Care, not only to defend it by your Tongues, but to adorn it by your Lives; and in the Words of that great Champion in this sacred Cause, be blameless and harmless, the Children of GOD without Rebuke, in the Midst of a crooked and perverse Generation, shining amongst them as Lights in the World, and so holding forth the Word of Life (l); and perhaps it may serve, not only to entertain their Eyes with Wonder and Glory, but to guide their Feet into the Way of Peace, and may engage them also to join with you in glorifying your Father which is in Heaven (m). Amen!

(i) Tit. ii. 12.  
(m) Matth. v. 6.

(k) 1-Cor. xv. 58.

(l) Phil. ii. 15, 16.

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