A

SERMON

PREACHED AT DURHAM

JULY 21, 1801,

AT

THE VISITATION

OF THE

HONOURABLE AND RIGHT REVEREND FATHER IN GOD

SHUTE,

LORD BISHOP OF DURHAM.

BY ROBERT GRAY, B. D.

PREBENDARY OF CHICHESTER, AND RECTOR OF
CRAIKE IN THE COUNTY OF DURHAM.

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TO THE

HONOURABLE AND RIGHT REVEREND FATHER IN GOD

SHUTE,

LORD BISHOP OF DURHAM,

WHOSE MUNIFICENT ENCOURAGEMENT OF LEARNING, AND

DISTINGUISHED EXAMPLE IN THE PRACTICE OF THE

DUTIES OF RELIGION,

HAVE UNIFORMLY PROMOTED THEIR UNITED INTERESTS:

THE FOLLOWING DISCOURSE,

DESIGNED TO ILLUSTRATE THE CONNECTION BETWEEN

LITERATURE AND CHRISTIANITY,

PREACHED AT HIS LORDSHIP'S APPOINTMENT AND

PUBLISHED IN OBEDIENCE TO HIS COMMAND,

IS

WITH EVERY SENTIMENT OF RESPECT AND GRATITUDE

INSCRIBED,

BY HIS LORDSHIP'S MUCH OBLIGED

AND MOST OBEDIENT HUMBLE SERVANT,

ROBERT GRAY.

MATT. xxviii. 20.

And, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.

IT was a peculiar and impreſſive mark of that divine confidence which characterized the authority of Chriſt Jeſus, that, in announcing to his Diſciples the object of their miniſtry, and the nature of the kingdom which they were to eſtabliſh, he unfolded to their view, not only the difficulties which they were perſonally to encounter; but the extent of thoſe evils, which in every period ſhould intermingle with the increaſe of the Goſpel, and the variety of thoſe impediments, which ſhould obſtruct its advancement and influence in the world.

Conſiderable muſt have been the diſcouragement to hear, that, after every trial to be endured in the cauſe of religion, and after every advantage to be derived from its eſtabliſhment, the powers of

darkneſs ſhould ſtill be able to maintain an unſubdued oppoſition to its deſign; and even to produce in the circles of the profeſſed Diſciples of the faith, errors which ſhould corrupt, and diſſenſions which ſhould weaken its dominion: the aſſurance therefore of a protection to be extended to the end of the world, was eſſential to impart conſolation to thoſe, who were to experience embarraſſments, through every age.

If we advert to the nature and extent of that protection which has been beſtowed in conformity to Chriſt's promiſes, we ſhall find, that whatever effects have reſulted either from his ſpiritual preſence and direction, or from the operation of the Holy Ghoſt, have always been conferred with regard to the general benefit of mankind; that no ſuperfluous meaſures of direct interpoſition have been manifeſted; but that, while ſufficient aid has been imparted, it has generally been in conformity to exiſting ordinances, and means already conſecrated, and often by the concurrence of ſecondary cauſes, rendered ſubſervient to the intereſts and exigencies of the Church--A diſcuſſion, it is preſumed, not uſeleſs, as it leads us to aſſert the inſpiration and ſovereign authority of the Scriptures; to review ſome providential appointments, in which the extenſive deſigns of religion have been conſulted; and to encourage a full confidence in the continuance of ſuch

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ſupport, as may give efficacy to the human exertions, which God vouchſafes to render inſtrumental to the maintenance and further advancement of religion.

If we look back to that plenary effuſion of the Holy Ghoſt, which had long before been predicted as characteriſtic of the kingdom of the Meſſiah[a], and which, under diverſities of operations, ſpecifically verified the aſſurances of our Lord, we immediately perceive, that notwithſtanding the Spirit was "poured out upon all fleſh," upon the "old, and "the young, upon ſervants, and upon handmaids," yet, its gifts were not more tranſcendent than the occaſion required; that their chief effects were not for temporary, but permanent uſe; and that, when miraculous powers were withdrawn from the church, ſuch advantages had reſulted from their communication, and ſuch proviſions been eſtabliſhed, as allowed to ſucceeding ages no cauſe to complain in being left deſtitute of them.

Without intending to conſider thoſe effects of the Spirit, which the Apoſtles experienced in the peculiar zeal and fortitude, with which they were inſpired, for the endurance of the unexampled difficulties, with which they were to contend; or thoſe

[a] Joel ii. 28, 29.

ſtupendous works, which, as ſigns of their divine miſſion, they were enabled to perform, all of which appear to have been abſolutely neceſſary to their ſucceſs; I ſhall firſt advert to that momentous gift, by which they were qualified for the diſcovery and communication of truth, and for perpetuating the dictates of infallible wiſdom, for the benefit of future ages.

Upon this ſubject there appears indeed ſufficient ground to affirm, that when our Saviour declared to his Diſciples, that "the Comforter, the Holy "Ghoſt, whom he ſhould ſend in his name, ſhould "teach them all things, and bring all things to "their remembrance, whatſoever Chriſt had ſaid "unto them;" and farther, that he ſhould "guide "them into all truth[a]; leſs cannot be underſtood, than that they ſhould be furniſhed with an unerring recollection as to all matters of fact, and enlightened to the diſcovery of all eſſential doctrine; and theſe promiſes may therefore be allowed to have aſſured to them an intelligence, which precluded all miſconception and defect.

This illumination, however it might leave them, as teachers and evangeliſts, to the exerciſe of their own faculties and language; and even conſiſt with

[a] John xiv. 26. xvi. 13.

trivial

trivial omiſſions and differences of opinion in particulars of no moment, ſecured them from all error in important points: a gift, it muſt be admitted, indiſpenſably neceſſary to thoſe who were to preach the doctrines of ſalvation to mankind; and to commit to writing, inſtructions which were to ſuperſede the neceſſity of all farther revelation: a gift, however, which, eminent as it may be conſidered, was manifeſtly not deſigned for the excluſive advantage of the age in which the Apoſtles lived, but for the production of thoſe Scriptures, which were to remain the unperiſhable oracles of wiſdom. When the ſacred Canon was completed, it was indeed ſo calculated for the general and laſting benefit of mankind, as to exclude all reaſonable pretence of inſpiration, for local or tranſient purpoſes; and where the folly or the artifice of men has ſince led them to lay claim to the unwarranted boaſt of infallibility; either in individual or collective ſupremacy—as to internal perception, or as to interpretation of the written word, it has been productive of effects, which have but too fully expoſed the vanity of the preſumption.

The next gift, which may be conſidered as, in ſome degree, a diſtinct manifeſtation of the Spirit [a], was the gift of Prophecy; of which the viſions were

[a] 1 Cor. xii. 6—11.

not

not ſealed till they embraced all ages to the final conſummation, which is to be perfected under "a new "heaven and a new earth." This preſcient power, characteriſtic as it was of that knowledge, which God alone could impart; while it fulfilled the divine promiſe to the Diſciples, that the Holy Ghoſt ſhould "teach them things to come," was clearly intended, not as a ſign to demonſtrate the authority of the Prophet to his contemporaries, but as a continued manifeſtation of truth to all who witneſs the completion, or look back on the accompliſhment of its predictions. This therefore, like other ſacred communications, was beſtowed chiefly for the benefit of thoſe, who were to deduce from tranſmitted records the ſucceſſive and increaſing proofs of the reality of that inſpiration, to which the Scriptures laid claim.

Such manifeſtation, when its minute details were to be examined through the miſts which diſtance interpoſed, required that learning and reſearch, which the providence of God ſupplied in the fathers and ſucceeding paſtors of the Church. The importance of ſuch application, to illuſtrate the documents of religion, while it exhibits the neceſſity of a perpetuated order of men, whoſe duty it is to bring forward a remote and receding evidence; and to renew from time to time, with vivid repreſentation, the fading teſtimonies of truth, impoſes on them the ſtrong obligation with induſtry and diſcretion

cretion to explore the arrangements of a ſyſtem, of which even the leſſer and more diſtant lights, though they ſhould diffuſe no moral inſtruction to direct our ways, exhibit on every ſide the multiplied proofs of the wiſdom and contrivance of God.

The laſt peculiar gifts of the Spirit, which remain here to be conſidered, are thoſe of ſpeaking, and of interpreting tongues. Theſe extraordinary powers, if we abide by the early and general opinion of their nature, without regard to the notion of their being merely tranſient ſigns of divine authority [a]; and eſteem them to have been ſubſervient to the publication of truth; rendering that diverſity of tongues, of which the firſt confuſion ſeems to have been deſigned to diſcountenance human preſumption, conducive to the progreſs of religion; will appear to have been highly uſeful at leaſt, if not neceſſary, when we reflect, that the Goſpel was to be the manifeſtation of the power of God; and to be proclaimed with rapid and miraculous effect by men who were "unlearned and ignorant," excepting indeed St. Paul, an Apoſtle diſtinguiſhed by human attainments, and ſome acquaintance with Heathen literature [b]. The continuance of theſe powers was

[a] See Middleton's Eſſay on the Gift of Tongues; Salmaſius, &c.

[b] St. Paul appears to have been endued with Grecian literature, and to have read Aratus, Menander, and Epimenides. See Origen in Matt. xxvii. Lami de Eruditione Apoſtol. cap. x. Clem. Alex. Strom.

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rendered unneceſſary, when miniſters were eſtabliſhed in every department of the Church, with ſuch application to their profeſſion, as might enable them to devote their time and talents to the attainment of every requiſite qualification.

It is, however, to be remarked further, that though the multiplicity of tongues was ſtill to form in many inſtances a cauſe of difficulty and obſtruction to the propagation of truth, yet that, by the preconcerted purpoſe of God, ſome arrangements had been made, which at every period ſhould facilitate the promotion of religious knowledge in every country where civilization and human learning ſhould prevail; and connect the preſervation of the original ſources of religion, and the means of transfuſing their ſacred ſtreams into every channel, with the maintenance of literature.

To have an adequate idea of the importance of the arrangements here alluded to, favourable as they have at all times been to the promulgation of religion, but eſpecially advantageous when its doctrines and evidence were to be ſupported by its own records, and the expoſitions of human learning, it is neceſſary to take a ſhort retroſpect of ſome of thoſe circumſtances, which have remarkably conſpired to the extenſion and permanency of the languages, in which the communications of revealed wiſdom have been

been recorded. Theſe circumſtances, though they involve ſome particulars connected with the hiſtory of the Old and New Teſtament, and were manifeſtly calculated to conſpire with their deſign, exhibit a ſeparate and diſtinct evidence of an external arrangement, which could not have been in the contemplation of any human views: they muſt be allowed indeed to indicate the contrivance of that wiſdom, which concerted the ſyſtem of the two connected covenants; and which, controlling events in conformity to an heavenly plan, has conferred on Chriſtianity the peculiar glory, that reſults from its being the centre, in ſubordination to which all earthly objects have appeared to move, and the diſtinction which it alone can claim, of having extended its teſtimonies through every age and country.

If we direct our firſt attention to that language which was firſt conſecrated to the purpoſes of Revelation, it appears, that its preſervation was effected during the many ages in which divine communications were made, as well by the reverence with which the Moſaic writings were regarded ſo as to become an eſtabliſhed ſtandard of purity, as by the ſecluſion of the Iſraelites from intercourſe with other nations: and we even find, that, by a remarkable exemption from the ordinary fate of languages, no innovations were allowed ſo far to debaſe its integrity, as to intermingle with the ſacred compoſi-

 tions,

tions, till the inſpired Canon was cloſed[a]: however, the common dialect of the people was vitiated in captivity, and further corrupted after their return. From which period the knowledge of the unadulterated productions in Hebrew, excluſively confined as they are to the ſacred volume, has been maintained by the veneration which they inſpire in a people, who, amidſt all the odium that they have excited, have been acknowledged as unimpeachable witneſſes to the truth of the Goſpel which they reject; affording to every department of the Chriſtian Church the foundation of its ſtructure, and the prophetic evidence of its authority. An acquaintance with

[a] The Hebrew prophets and hiſtorians, as Daniel and Ezra, employed occaſionally the language of the country in which they abode during the captivity, reciting with accurate fidelity the national decrees and other public records of Chaldæa: but they did not ſuffer the purity of their writings to be affected. The people in general, by a broken and detached intercourſe with the various provinces of an extended empire, had gradually changed or forgotten their language, ſo that after the return to Judæa it was neceſſary to interpret the Hebrew Scriptures to the common audience by Chaldee paraphraſes, and to introduce the Chaldee characters for writing: yet ſtill as long as the inſpired communications were furniſhed, the Scriptures were written in Hebrew; and the prophecies of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, were compoſed in the original language; in the inſtance of Zechariah with no inconſiderable beauty; a circumſtance the more remarkable, as ſoon after the cloſing of the ſacred Canon the language was rapidly debaſed by a depravation of the Chaldee into Syriac; and the uſe of that, in proceſs of time, conſiderably affected and leſſened by the introduction of the Greek.

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their Scriptures, facilitated by the preſervation of one genuine and unallayed ſtyle, and by the general diſperſion of living interpreters, muſt ſtill be kept up, wherever enquiry ſhall inveſtigate the proofs of Revelation, or learning reſpect the moſt venerable and intereſting monuments of antiquity.

The appointments, by which the extenſion and permanency of the Greek language have been rendered ſubſervient to the purpoſes of Chriſtianity, were of a different, but not leſs remarkable deſcription. By the early emigrations, enlarged commerce, and military exploits of the Grecian nations, were the knowledge and diffuſion of that language promoted, in which the Scriptures of the Old Teſtament were to be tranſlated near three centuries before the advent of the Meſſiah, and in which the glad tidings of the Goſpel were to be everlaſtingly recorded.

By the excellency of the various works of eloquence, of hiſtory, and of ſcience, which were produced by a people raiſed to the higheſt eminence, did this language continue to preſerve its influence, when the Grecian ſtates were ſubverted; and conſiderable advantages reſulted from its cultivation, often favoured by political events [a], as well as by its

[a] The Greek was kept up as a living language for many centuries

diſtinguiſhed claims to regard; ſince the early teachers of the Church, its biſhops and fathers, its commentators and hiſtorians, though flouriſhing in countries diſtant from each other, and preſiding over communities, connected only by the bands of Chriſtian charity, wrote their animated Apologies, Expoſitions, and Homilies, in a language generally underſtood; and were enabled to conſecrate their labours to the inſtruction of future times; when the nations, who ſpoke the language employed, ſhould be exterminated by invaders, whoſe ſuperſtition and barbarous dialects would prove equally hoſtile to the religion and literature of the conquered countries. Since the language has appeared to expire in its original abodes, under accumulated corruptions, its preſervation has been enſured in every civilized nation, by the ſplendid monuments of its purity, which are

after the promulgation of the Goſpel. On the removal of the empire to Conſtantinople, it was cultivated with renewed vigour. Grecians were employed in the government of the provinces, and the language was encouraged with great effect till the reign of Heraclius, about 640 years after Chriſt, when the Saracens introduced their language, giving it an aſcendancy even to the ſkirts of Greece. Yet at no time was the Grecian language ſo entirely overpowered, as not to be cheriſhed with affection by the Byzantine court, and by the Eccleſiaſtics, who uſed the liturgies of St. Baſil and St. Chryſoſtom, and reverenced the books of the Greek fathers. It received countenance alſo from the Arabians, whoſe conqueſts were moſt extended at the time that they were moſt devoted to Grecian literature. After the deſtruction of Conſtantinople, a taſte for claſſical knowledge was excited wherever the learned exiles found an aſylum.

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contemplated from the earlieſt youth with the fondeſt admiration, and which muſt continue to render a critical knowledge of the original language of the Goſpel, familiar to the learned of every country, where the productions of genius ſhall be preſerved.

The advantage which has reſulted to the cauſe of truth from the eſtabliſhment of the Latin, as an univerſal language, is deſerving alſo of ſome notice.

The progreſs of the Roman empire, the ſubject of contemplation to Prophecy [a], while as yet the Romans were ſcarcely known beyond the neighbouring ſtates, with whom they were engaged in inconſiderable conteſts, was made conducive, in this as in other reſpects, to the propagation of Chriſtianity; by giving notoriety to events, on which the truth of religion was founded, and by introducing a language, which, though it did not ſuperſede the municipal dialects of the countries in which it prevailed, produced a general medium of communication.

It deſerves particularly to be conſidered, that the Romans were at firſt indifferent to, if not jealous of, the extenſion of their language, and only con-

[a] Dan. ii. 31—45. vii. 7, 8.

ceded

ceded it, as an indulgence to ſome of the Italian ſtates, within little more than two centuries of the birth of Chriſt: but when the enlargement of its ſcanty limits[a] was to become ſubſervient to that general intercourſe, which was in ſo many reſpects favourable to the views of Chriſtianity, we find, that, as if in concert with the deſign of religion, they adopted every meaſure to promote its uſe, adminiſtering laws, and publiſhing decrees, only in their own tongue; obliging ambaſſadors to addreſs the ſenate in its terms, and eſtabliſhing ſchools for its cultivation through the provinces of the ſubjugated world: with what advantage to the cauſe of truth, then, and in later times, may eaſily be collected, as well from the rapidity of the progreſs of the Goſpel; as from attention to the works of the Latin fathers; and to the Vulgate and other verſions, that were the channels, through which revealed wiſdom was communicated for many ages to the weſtern church. And it ſhould farther be remarked, that, while the Latin verſions were principally regarded through the different countries in which that language was no

[a] Livy informs us, that the uſe of the Latin tongue in public concerns was granted as a privilege to the Cumæans, (who ſpoke the Oſcan, or, according to Lipſius, the Greek language) ſo late as 180 years before the birth of Chriſt, though Cuma was within 150 miles of Rome, and the Romans were then in poſſeſſion of Sicily, Sardinia, and part of Spain; and even Cicero in his time ſpeaks of the ſmall limits of the Latin tongue. See Liv. Hiſt. lib. xl. c. 42. Cic. Orat. pro Archia. §. 5.

longer

longer vernacular, its knowledge was kept up by the uſe of the civil law, the public liturgies, and other favourable circumſtances; ſo that whatever abuſe of the Scriptures was made by a corrupt church, at leaſt the means of information were afforded; and that juſt apprehenſion of religion exiſted, which finally led the way to the Reformation.

Now it muſt be evident, that the introduction of theſe languages, which were thus made inſtrumental to the predetermined counſels of God, and their preſervation as permanent channels of intelligence, though the nations which uſed them are either ſpread abroad in ſeparate diſperſions, or have utterly periſhed, could have been the reſult only of ſuch extraordinary circumſtances as mark the interpoſition of Providence. We ſee a preliminary arrangement of events; a preparation and adjuſtment of circumſtances, by which the way is paved and made ready, and ſecured to all ages, for the publication and maintenance of religious knowledge in its original characters. We do not ſay that kingdoms were raiſed up and literature eſtabliſhed, merely for the introduction and continuance of languages ſubſervient to Revelation; but that theſe at leaſt were great objects in the revolutions and appointments which the Almighty ordained, and which ought not to eſcape our obſervation.

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The difficulties which impede the introduction of foreign languages are always conſiderable; and even conqueſt itſelf, without extermination, has been found, in many inſtances, unable to effect it, whatever exertions it may have made [a]: the preſervation of them, after the nations, among whom they were in uſe, have been either diſperſed through all countries, or ſwept away from the face of the earth, is a circumſtance ſo peculiar and unprecedented, that it cannot but be conſidered as concerted with a view to the intereſts of religion. The languages employed by impoſture have been local and tranſient, prevailing merely where conqueſt has impoſed them. The only inſtances, in which any have been eſtabliſhed to a general extenſion, independent of the nations by which they were reſpectively introduced, are thoſe in which the Scriptures were originally compoſed, or early tranſlated; and

[a] The Franks could not impoſe their language on the Gauls: the Goths could not enforce their barbarous dialect on the acceptance of the Italian ſtates, or Spaniſh nation. When the Saxons introduced their language here, the ancient inhabitants of Britain were either deſtroyed, or driven to take refuge in the mountains of Wales. The Norman invaders could not give the aſcendancy to their tongue, though they were more advanced in civilization and improvement than were the natives; though they ſuffered no other to be taught in the ſchools; and though they wrote the laws, and directed all judicial proceedings to be carried on in that tongue, as they were till the reign of Edward V. All that they could effect was to introduce ſome words of popular uſage, which ſtill bear the marks of a foreign character.

theſe, we obſerve, have been reſtricted or enlarged, as the objects of Revelation have required; and have in all reſpects ſo remarkably concurred with its deſigns, as to enable us to trace in every revolution the intention and wiſdom of Providence.

The full importance of the arrangements, by which the circumſtances of different nations have been made ſubſervient to the progreſs and cultivation of languages, connected with the intereſts of religion, can be eſtimated only by attentive conſideration: but it is obvious to remark, that, unleſs the Moſaic and Chriſtian covenants had been recorded in different languages, and the Old and New Teſtament had been in the poſſeſſion of diſtinct and unconnected people, the Revelation, which we revere, had wanted ſome of its moſt ſatisfactory and convincing proofs; and that, unleſs in the inſtance of the Hebrew nation, the prevalency of the language had been conjoined with, and in that of the Greek and Latin ſeparated from, the fate of the people who uſed them, their preſervation could not have been ſecured; and the connection ſubſiſting between the two covenants, together with the collateral evidence reflected on them by the Heathen teſtimonies, could not have been diſplayed with ſuch univerſal effect.

As combined with this retroſpect, we cannot to-

tally omit to advert to that providential care, by which the Scriptures themſelves, and the works, which ſecure the immortality of the claſſical languages, have been preſerved; ſince, during the darkeſt and moſt deſtructive ſtorms which prevailed, the productions of learning were never ſo wrecked, but that its precious remains were allowed to float down to more auſpicious times. Patrons of literature, and prodigies of learning, were raiſed up at the moſt unfavourable periods; even the inſtitutions of ſuperſtition were made ſubſervient to the conſervation of manuſcripts, tranſcribed with that elaborate nicety and ſuperfluous decoration, which ſecured their reverent obſervance; till the revival of literature reſtored them to general regard, and the diſcovery of a nobler art multiplied their copies beyond the reach of future deſtruction. It muſt be added further, as well deſerving of conſideration, that if we examine into the general nature of the works themſelves, thus wonderfully reſcued, we can hardly omit to aſcribe ſomewhat to the eſpecial control of Providence, ſince of whatever productions of ſcience and of taſte we may have to regret the loſs, there appears to be enough tranſmitted in every department of literature, fully to demonſtrate the neceſſity of Revelation, and to corroborate the teſtimonies to which it appeals.

From theſe conſiderations it appears, that our bleſſed

bleſſed Lord has furniſhed at every period ſuch means of intelligence, and ſuch aid to the cauſe of truth, as have fully verified his promiſes; and the retroſpect which has been taken cannot but tend to confirm our confidence in God's protection, whatever clouds may appear to intercept the rays of his favour, and lead us to rely on that power, which, though its open interference has ceaſed, and its influence ſubſided into a ſpiritual guidance, operates as in the natural world by general and unobſerved principles of governance, and will doubtleſs continue its direction with increaſing diſplay of effect to whatever period the preſent ſcene of exiſtence may be continued.

Painful, doubtleſs, and diſcouraging it is ſtill to reflect, that notwithſtanding the accumulated proofs of the divine origin of Chriſtianity have eſtabliſhed its authority on an immoveable foundation, yet that ſo many ſhould ſtill diſregard its incontrovertible evidence; and, reſting on ſome ſpeculative objections or ſubordinate difficulties, forego the only principle which can give any ſtability to human virtue; or impart any confidence to the mind of man, haraſſed in theſe ſcenes of heavineſs and of trial, by the violence and conflict of earthly paſſions, the deprivation of beloved objects, and the failure of hopes often cheriſhed but to diſappointment.

Painful alſo, and diſcouraging, is it to obſerve, that, after the influence of Chriſtianity has been found for many centuries to have produced effects beneficial in proportion to the ſincerity with which its principles have been adopted, any ſpirit ſhould exiſt, ſo hoſtile to the happineſs of mankind, as to endeavour to undermine its aſcendancy, for the ſubſtitution of vain and pernicious theories of human invention; which, though framed under the light of Revelation by thoſe, who "make their ſhadow as "the night in the midſt of the noon-day," exhibit a morality more deluſive, and motives more vague and ineffectual, than the ſyſtems of Heathen philoſophy; though they would lead us to bring up the children of our affection, and the generations which are yet unborn, amidſt darkneſs, in which no gleam of divine light ſhould be allowed to reprove the ſcenes of riot and of horror, and where no "holy hope" of a reſurrection after a life of wretchedneſs would adminiſter conſolation to compunction and to ſorrow.

Amidſt, however, ſuch ſubjects of diſcouragement, there are circumſtances, which ſerve to enliven our confidence, and to open proſpects of the final triumph of religion. If its authority hath in ſome countries been ſubverted, it has been by meaſures of violence; or by arts of miſrepreſentation, which, while they fearfully illuſtrate the views of thoſe who

who gather together against the Lord and his Church, cannot prevent the return of reflection, or totally obliterate the impression of his written word. The testimonies of truth multiply with the researches of learning, and are strengthened by every impartial examination into the monuments of ancient times, or enquiry into the origin, tradition, and chronology of other countries. Even the enemies of Christianity have in some instances eventually served its cause—" howbeit, they meaned not " so," by removing in their controlled course some institutions of spiritual tyranny, which had long repressed the genuine spirit and energies of religion.

The consideration, that extensive regions are still darkened by imposture, and even gross idolatries, is less affecting, if we consider that these malignant shades must be dispersed, when knowledge shall be allowed to spread its beams around the rude and uninstructed people, and to open their views to those Scriptures, which often predict their condition, and faithfully describe their ancient and existing manners.

From the rising of the sun to the going down thereof, Christianity has been found to accompany the progress of knowledge. In the East and in the South, it dawned and disappeared, with the light of science; and it prevails (with less united and effective power,

power, indeed, than might be wiſhed, but ſtill it prevails,) and ſpreads itſelf with the population of the weſtern continent [a]. It may be allowed alſo to us to expreſs the humble hope, that the extended commerce and dominion of this favoured nation, which ſteadily preſerves its reverence for the inſtitutions of true religion, may contribute to diſſeminate its uncorrupted principles; a deſign which will be moſt effectually promoted by that zeal, with which its ſacred oracles are ſtudied and explained.

By what more efficacious means God may ultimately eſtabliſh its dominion, we preſume not to enquire. Conſidering Chriſtianity as a progreſſive ſcheme, deſtined ultimately to produce an univerſal diſplay of righteouſneſs, we enquire not impatiently for the accompliſhment of the promiſes; or aſſent to thoſe premature and ſtrained conſtructions, which precariouſly apply the prophecies to every paſſing ſcene, without regard to the periods and gradual developement of the divine economy.

That the propagation of Chriſtianity is now left to the influence of ſecondary cauſes, and dependent in ſome meaſure on the co-operation of human

[a] It deſerves to be noticed, that America was not diſcovered till the reformed doctrines began to circulate; and though moſt of the firſt coloniſts were of the Romiſh perſuaſion, many parts of the continent were afterwards peopled by Proteſtants.

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agents, ſhould be no ſubject of deſpondence to thoſe, who, conſidering that "all things work together for "good to them that love God," reflect, that political councils muſt conſpire to preſerve the religious intereſts of mankind, if they would promote their welfare; and that, notwithſtanding the diſunion, indifference, and apoſtaſy which have recently been witneſſed, the increaſe of real knowledge muſt be conducive to the progreſs of Chriſtianity.

True indeed it is, that the exertions of reputed knowledge, and even learning, have in theſe latter days been ſometimes employed in direct oppoſition to that religion, which has ever been propitious to their encouragement; and that men have been found, eſpecially among thoſe, who in foreign univerſities preſide over the education of youth, attracted by their reputation (induſtriouſly exaggerated as it has been) who, though poſſeſſed of no inconſiderable attainments in claſſical and ſacred literature, and converſant with the original languages of the Scriptures, have licentiouſly preſumed to diſparage their character, and falſify their conſtruction; and have particularly endeavoured to reduce the inſpired books of the Hebrew Canon to the level of human compoſitions, notwithſtanding the acknowledged prophecies interwoven with every part.

Whether it be, that theſe men are ſeduced into al-

alliance with the views of thoſe who would injure religion, (deemed leſs aſſailable in its later diſpenſation,) through the remote and obſcurer documents of antiquity; or that being leſs happily circumſtanced than thoſe, who devote themſelves to literature under the munificent endowments of this country, they endeavour to excite popularity by novel opinions; certain it is, that they indicate the contagion of thoſe corrupt principles, which have recently infatuated the minds of men. They furniſh, however, no argument againſt the cultivation of knowledge, under juſt impreſſions, but ſhould excite the emulation of the diſtinguiſhed members of an enlightened Church, to oppoſe the progreſs of a ſpirit, which ſhakes the main pillars of our faith, and vitiates the higheſt departments of literature; and under the influence of their general fame to expoſe in works of juſt criticiſm, and in the language which is familiar to the learned of every country, the falſehood and tendency of thoſe miſrepreſentations, which violate equally the creed of every church, and which muſt contribute to retard, though not, we truſt, to prevent, the re-eſtabliſhment of religion in thoſe countries, where its ordinances have been overturned, and its claims derided.

Learning, if it be ſought merely on motives of perſonal ambition or fame, or on any principle but that of enabling us better to underſtand the nature of

of our condition, and better to perform the divine will, muſt be deluſive, and biaſſed by the influence of falſe impreſſions; but if regulated in conformity to the noble views, and in ſubjection to the unerring inſtructions of Revelation, it will lead us juſtly to value the records which are ſtamped with the ſacred ſeal of truth. It will teach us alſo, in examining the remains of claſſical antiquity, not to over-rate the powers of human reaſon; not to familiarize the mind to impurity, or to engage its admiration for the falſe virtues of a fanciful and licentious mythology; but to read in the hiſtory of ſucceſſive ages, as well the ſad proofs of the extent of human corruption, as the acknowledged inſufficiency of earthly wiſdom, ſinking diſcouraged under every ſyſtem; and it will enable us to diſcover in the unſuſpected confeſſions of Pagan writers (who, in proportion to their general character for veracity, are found to authenticate the ſacred accounts,) the reality of the facts, and the certainty of the prophecies, on which Chriſtianity erects its pretenſions [a].

[a] As may be familiarly inſtanced in the comparative characters of Herodotus and Xenophon: the former, who differs from the Scriptures, is allowed, notwithſtanding the accuracy of thoſe accounts which were derived from his own obſervation, to have ſanctioned many fabulous and erroneous reports; and the latter, who confirms the ſacred relations, has univerſally been regarded as a writer, whoſe works bear the cleareſt evidence of truth.

The genuine effect of learning, as displayed in its influence on those who have been most distinguished for erudition, has been to confirm their convictions, and to excite their zeal in the cause of Christianity. The attainments of the eminent men, who have flourished through successive ages the chief ornaments of the Church, have been cheerfully devoted to the illustration of the Scriptures; and the works of the ablest writers of our own country are animated with the most glowing testimonies of reverence for revealed wisdom. The departure from the sincerity of the faith has generally indicated the failure of human learning: and if we look back to the history of the last and preceding centuries, with a particular view to the circumstances of our own nation, we shall find the advocates of religion celebrated in the annals of literature; while the supporters of infidelity have been remarkable for superficial presumption, and sometimes for illiterate ignorance.

As to the influence of the diffusion of learning on the lower classes of society, it is to be observed, that if an insidious spirit of seduction, which accommodates its designs to every condition and circumstance, has endeavoured to mislead the minds of the inferior ranks of society to subjects beyond the sphere of their intelligence, the evil consequences which have resulted will not afford any argument against the

the conveyance of that information, which is adapted to their ſtation; while it tends to raiſe their minds to thoſe conſiderations, in which their eternal welfare is involved, and which ſhould be equally the concern of every rank. Superſtition and diſaffection to civil government ſtrike their deep roots, and ſpread their baneful ſhade, chiefly where ignorance prevails. In theſe united realms it is apparent that religion and moral virtues are found to flouriſh, in proportion as efficacy has been given to the original intention and diſcipline of thoſe inſtitutions, which were framed by ancient wiſdom for the promotion of real knowledge; and which embraced in the extenſion of a liberal policy, and by the erection of ſchools of gratuitous inſtruction, the intereſts of the loweſt claſſes of ſociety. If we look, for inſtance, on the prominent diſtinctions of the remoter appendencies of the empire, it is obvious to remark, that the country, which has been long eminent for induſtry, ſobriety, and peaceful manners, has been chiefly noticeable for that information, which is afforded to every rank; and that intelligence, by which its lower orders are characterized, more, perhaps, than thoſe of any other nation: while in a diviſion, where from improvident conduct, and a diſgraceful diſregard of the regulations, made by the ancient legiſlature, the proviſions for general inſtruction have failed, or been defeated, the unhappy people have been deluded by the agents of a malignant ſuperſtition, or the profli-

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gate advocates of infidelity, to diſorders and crimes, which cannot be reviewed but with horror and diſguſt.

If an enquiry were proſecuted with more minute detail, it would generally be found that the local habits are moſt commendable, and religion and the laws moſt reſpected, where early and ſedulous inſtruction is communicated through its ancient and legitimate channels.

It is only by inſtilling the true principles of religion with effectual and univerſal regard to the ſpiritual improvement of men, in the form of ſound words, and with ſome reference to their progreſs in general knowledge; it is only by giving efficacy to the ſpirit and intention of ancient inſtitutions and endowments, and by availing ourſelves of every increaſed advantage, that the people can be ſecured from the contagion of thoſe miſchievous opinions, which are circulated under every deception, and intermingled with every ſpecies of publication; or armed againſt the ſeductions of thoſe "beguilers of "unſtable ſouls," who multiply their ſeceding ſects by a deluſion, which exhibits the moſt melancholy proofs of the extenſion of enthuſiaſm and ignorance.

It is from want of thoſe juſt convictions of the true

true nature and principles of religion, which were formerly engraven on the mind with the firſt rudiments of knowledge, and blended with every communication, and which, as the means are now facilitated, might be impreſſed with more general and efficacious inſtruction, that men are " carried away " with every blaſt of vain doctrine," and deluded by every ſpecies of ſophiſtry. Chriſtianity, inſtilling its ſimple truths into the uncultivated underſtanding, and unfolding its ſublime wiſdom to thoſe, who by their intellectual attainments are enabled to eſtimate its excellency, muſt afford the beſt and only ſecurity againſt thoſe deceptions, which are daily engendered by human folly and human wickedneſs; and teach its enlightened diſciples, while they follow the diſcoveries of reaſon and true philoſophy in their wideſt range, to bring every thought and imagination in juſt ſubjection to the wiſdom of him, who was " a light to lighten the world."

May that great Teacher, on whom " reſted the " ſpirit of knowledge, and the fear of God," who " brought life and immortality to view through the " Goſpel," continue by his ſpiritual preſence to protect and enlighten that Church, which he hath founded on a rock, till " all nations ſhall walk in " the glory of it;" and may he, " who by his Son " Jeſus Chriſt did give to his Apoſtles many excel- " lent gifts, and commanded them earneſtly to feed

" his flock, make us and all miniſters diligently to
" preach his holy word, and the people obediently
" to follow the ſame, that they may receive the
" crown of everlaſting glory, through Jeſus Chriſt
" our Lord."

THE END.