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With the Translator's Respects

SPECIMEN OF A TRANSLATION
OF THE
DIVINITY PRELECTIONS
OF
ARCHBISHOP POTTER.

LONDON :
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14

SPECIMEN OF A TRANSLATION

OF THE

DIVINITY PRELECTIONS

OF

ARCHBISHOP POTTER :



ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN LATIN,

IN THE THIRD VOLUME OF HIS WORKS,

AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS, OXFORD, 1753,

AND NEVER REPRINTED.

LONDON :

W. STRAKER, ADELAIDE STREET, WEST STRAND.

1843.

TO

THE REVEREND THE PRESIDENT,
MAGDALEN COLLEGE, OXFORD.

MR. PRESIDENT,

THE kindness I experienced from you while a Demy in your distinguished College, encourages me to hope, that in respectfully seeking the expression of your judgment in regard to this Specimen, I may learn also your opinion of the utility of re-publishing, in a correct translation of them, Archbishop Potter's Divinity Prelections.

They were eminently serviceable, in my own case, when I was preparing for Orders; and I was particularly struck, during the reading of them, with the appropriateness of the antidote, which, while inculcating deep and sound theological prin-

ciples, this straightforward course of lectures supplies to certain wanderings of the intellect and of the fancy in the present day, on some of the topics there treated of.

It may be asked, no doubt, in the case of a work suited principally to the Student in Divinity, what occasion there can be for a translation of it out of a language which has long been employed as the medium of theological discussion, and for the service of an university to which such language must presumably be familiar.

In reply, I would, in the first place, submit the fact, that these Lectures are, from some cause or other, less known than they deserve to be, having been printed only once, namely, in the Oxford Edition of the Archbishop's Works, in 1753.

Next, the Latinity has little in itself to attract the attention, or gratify the taste of a scholar well versed in the niceties and elegancies of that tongue; nor is it altogether exempt from the obscurities arising out of every attempt to express, in a dead language, the idiomatic and the technical peculiarities of a science comparatively modern.

Again, the numerous compendia and ready prepared analyses which now abound, indispose the

mind for more serious application, and prevent or retard the formation of such habits of industry and perseverance as are likely to lead the student to possess himself thoroughly of the valuable matter contained in such a work as this, amid the dry and occasionally perplexed phraseology in which it is here presented to him.

The apparent objection to any supposed utility of translating from the Latin for the benefit of students in an University, is farther, and, I trust, effectually removed by the considerations, that Archbishop Wake translated into English the Apostolic Epistles certainly not altogether for unlearned readers—that assistance in the *notes* of my translation is offered me by my Father—and that even the mere English reader may derive some profit from a *systematic* view of theology such as these Lectures exhibit, and such as is not common in our language.

And if, upon examination of this Specimen, it should appear to yourself and to those other competent and influential judges to whom copies will be sent, that a translation of this character might usefully be printed, I should feel gratification in the circumstance that a work of this kind would once

more issue from the University and from the Press
whence the Lectures originally proceeded.

With the utmost deference and respect, I request
permission to subscribe myself,

Mr. President,

Your very obliged and

Grateful Servant,

GEORGE F. GODDARD.

Huclescote (Ashby-de-la-Zouch),

November, 1843.

PRELECTION I.

2 TIM. iii. 16, 17.

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.”

It is the custom of those who undertake to teach any art or science to lay down, at the outset, certain principles, acquired by careful forethought and diligent examination, as a ground-work upon which all that follows may be firmly and securely rested. And this practice can in no case be more suitably adopted, than where the task of treating of *Theology* has officially been imposed. For this is a science superior to all others, as well for the unrivalled dignity of its matter, as for its pre-eminent utility in ministering to the aspirations of mankind after present and future happiness, and after a deliverance from sorrows of the bitterest description. It ought to be established, therefore, if possible, upon proportionably stronger and better considered foundations.

That there *is* such a science as Theology, whose province it is to treat of the nature and attributes of the Deity, and of the particulars of faith and practice by which his favour may be conciliated, will be called in question only by those who would fain remove God and his Providence out of our system. For the direct refutation of such persons, a better opportunity will perhaps hereafter be afforded.

Meantime (according to the practice which obtains in every course of instruction of altogether *assuming* the subject-matter that is to be dealt with) we take for granted, that there is a God, that the universe is governed by a Divine Providence, and that some path or other lies open to all who do not neglect their own welfare, by the pursuit of which they may propitiate the favour of the Deity, while by departing from it in whatever direction they will incur his displeasure and his enmity; and upon these assumptions we proceed at once to consider under what guidance, and with what assistance, we may be enabled to tread in that path, and acquire the perception of all that is essential to be known on these topics.

For, while with some, reason, and the light of nature are held in such estimation as to be thought sufficient for our apprehending whatever we have need to know concerning God and religion, others, on the contrary, are so far from admitting the utility of reason to those who are employed in the study

of a Divine Religion, that they consider it rather as an obstacle, and to be kept out of the way by all who are desirous of pleasing God. Some, in their zeal for the authority of those books in which Christians believe the oracles of God to be contained, regard with a superstitious veneration not only sentences, but words, letters, and even accents of letters, as though they were placed there and indited by the Spirit of God; while others withhold all assent from the same books, and represent them as fabricated for the purpose of deceiving mankind, and turning them aside from the road of right reason into that of error and superstition. There are those again who so tenaciously adhere to, and so studiously enlarge upon such customs and opinions as, in their view, were universally received in the primitive Church, and have thence been delivered down to us from hand to hand, that they scruple not to claim for them a veneration and pious attachment¹, equal to what we feel for the Holy Scriptures; while not a few regard them as scarcely entitled to any degree of attention, but class them rather with old wives' fables, deserving only of contempt.

But in order that it may clearly appear what judgment should be formed, and what course pursued, amid so great a variety of opinions, it is worth while to enter in succession upon the following serious inquiries.

¹ Council of Trent, Sess. i. (Potter.)

First, whether mankind are capable, by the unassisted light of nature, of forming correct notions of God, of worshipping Him as they ought, and of acquiring the knowledge of other particulars, by means of which they may ingratiate themselves into the Divine favour; or whether for these purposes it is farther necessary that God should Himself discover what He would have us believe and practise.

Secondly, in what rank those books are to be placed, and of what value they are to be held, which by Christians are denominated the Holy Scriptures.

Thirdly, what authority is to be allowed in matters of faith and practice to the consentient opinions of Christians, especially of those who lived in the ages next after the time of Christ.

Lastly, what advantages are actually derivable from the light of human reason and learning in their application to religious truth; a point which will require grave consideration.

From a complete and perspicuous investigation of these topics will result the discovery of the principles and foundations of that sound theology which we all profess to follow.

I. First, then, we are to inquire, whether mankind are capable, by the unassisted light of nature, of forming correct notions of God, of worshipping Him as they ought, and of acquiring the knowledge of other particulars, by means of which they may ingratiate themselves into the Divine favour; or whether

for these purposes it is farther necessary that God should Himself discover what He would have us believe, and practise.

And here we have to remark, that the question is not whether what we, or others, believe of revealed truth may, *after it has been made known by God*, be shown by us to be agreeable to right reason ; for it is by no means an unusual occurrence in other instances, that discoveries originally made with great difficulty, approve themselves to all when known ; but the present inquiry is, whether those to whom nothing has ever been revealed by God can, by the unaided powers of nature, arrive at a point whence, unobstructed by the darkness of error and ignorance, they may obtain a clear prospect of all those objects, by the perception or the practice of which they can become pleasing and acceptable to God. Neither, again, do we inquire whether at any period, *under different circumstances*, we might have been capable of such discoveries ; but whether we are equal to them *in this present condition of things*, in which it is evident that our senses are dull, and the powers of our minds impaired, from whatever quarter this calamity has come upon us ; a question which will, perhaps, be entered upon in another place.

Now it is not to be doubted that many things may be known, as well in regard to God and divine truth, as concerning the relative duties of mankind, by such as have the use only of the light of nature ; for no one has yet been able to point out a nation so

rude and barbarous as to be destitute of what are termed “common notions or conceptions” in these respects; and whether we admit them to have been communicated to the first parents of the human race from God Himself, and to have been brought down to our own times by uninterrupted tradition; whether they were at first obtained by the powers of the human intellect, which easily ascends from the contemplation of the visible world to higher objects; or were, as some have thought, originally grafted and imprinted on our minds instinctively, and by Divine influence; or rather, having been at the first made known by the Author of all things, were afterwards preserved and improved by the care and diligence of men, the Holy Spirit constantly providing against their extinction; whatever may be our conclusions in these respects, experience has shown that such notions and conceptions could never be altogether eradicated. And thence arose the persuasion, that whosoever was not sufficiently observant of them, deservedly drew down upon himself the Divine vengeance. In reference to which St. Paul thus writes in his Epistle to the Romans:—“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and

Godhead ; so that they are without excuse : Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful ; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts².” Hence also it happens, that the joy and consolation ordinarily proceeding from the recollection of a life spent well and according to reason, and the fear and anguish usually attendant upon the consciousness of crime, are experienced not only by those who have been instructed by God Himself, but by those also who possess the mere light of nature :—“ When the Gentiles (says the same Apostle), which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves : Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another³.”

But though there are many things which men know, or have the means of knowing, by the light of nature, yet there are a much larger number, and these of the greatest consequence, of which they are ignorant ; for what is the proportion of persons who

² Rom. i. 18—24.

³ Rom. ii. 14, 15.

apply themselves to these studies? The greater number, devoted to sensual objects, pass through life like travellers who have no proper interest in it, without instruction, and without improvement; the rest, involved in domestic anxieties, or the occupations of public affairs, or intent upon the acquisition of polite learning and accomplishments, never think of inquiring who, or of what character, the Divine Creator and Governor of this world may be; in what manner, or with what rites, He is to be worshipped and propitiated; by what boundaries He has separated virtue from vice, or what rewards and punishments He has assigned to each of them. Even though nature proclaims these things by many evident tokens, yet men are dull of hearing, and refuse to listen. Others there are who, though they employ some pains in the investigation of truth, yet, being blinded by habitual self-indulgence, and disturbed by unruly affections, are unable to pronounce an honest and true judgment; for where evil affections predominate, there can be no room for the exercise of right reason. Vices, upon the plea of interest, urge their claims; avarice promises wealth; luxury abundance and variety of pleasures; ambition official dignities and public applause; and, as the result of these, power, and all that power can bestow. Yielding to these attractions, men estimate the nature of good and evil by their own irregular desires; whatever contributes to the satisfying of these, they follow; whatever is repugnant to these,

that alone is in their opinion to be avoided ; till at length they utterly extinguish, by a corrupt practice, those sparks of virtue and piety which they had from nature. Then comes the force of evil customs and of prejudice, which so stedfastly inhere in the minds of most men, that scarce any labour and diligence suffice for their eradication. The greater part of mankind, almost as soon as they see the light, are initiated into the most perverse opinions, and would seem to have sucked in vanity together with their nurse's milk : presently they are handed over to preceptors, and by them are imbued with fresh errors ; and when to this have been added the lessons of that chief of all teachers, the world, with a multitude on every side giving way to vice, then do they become thoroughly infected with every sort of depravity, and are in a state of revolt against nature itself. Lastly, we must take into account the great weakness of the human intellect, which often errs even in things of daily use, and such as are almost self-evident : and if we are unequal to the investigating and comprehending of this visible course of nature, its operations, and its effects, what wonder if we fall short of the attainment of what is far above our reach ? If we are thus grievously mistaken in things that are before our eyes, what marvel if we are not able to obtain a perfect knowledge of such as elude our senses ? As matters now stand, therefore, that man must have claims to our esteem far above those of the ordinary mass of mankind, whom neither indo-

lence nor corrupt affections, nor preconceived opinions, nor the weakness of human nature itself, have hindered from arriving at truth in all its purity and entireness. But how little such happiness is to be expected in this life, we learn from the examples of that portion of mankind whom God has not seen fit Himself to enlighten. For, without insisting on the case of those nations which, having extinguished nearly all sense of piety, and even of humanity, are said to pass their lives like mere animals, though even these people are a proof that we have need of some other guide besides nature, if we would run our course of life in a manner creditable to rational beings, and according to what God requires of us; to dismiss, moreover, that crowd of impious philosophers who would take away the Deity Himself, and also, as a consequence, all piety and virtue; although these, likewise, furnish a plain intimation of the fallaciousness of human reason, and how dangerous is any absolute reliance on it; to say no more of these stains upon the human character, I will ask, not what people or state, but what sect, or even what noted and eminent individual of any of the sects who made learning and wisdom their study, have at any time either delivered to others a perfect rule of thought and action, or have themselves adopted it? One and all went astray, wandering as it were upon an open sea, and knew not whither they were driven, because they were ignorant of the true course, and followed an uncertain guide.

More especially is this apparent in what regards God, and divine worship. In matters of such vast importance as these, upon the knowledge of which our happiness wholly depends, what doubt and diversity of opinion prevailed on every side! Some were not ashamed openly to affirm that there is no God; others admitting his existence in words, took it away in fact, by denying Him all concern in human affairs, or by entertaining and expressing sentiments respecting Him manifestly repugnant to the Divine nature. The rest, for the most part, in their disputations on religion, frankly confess it to be a difficult topic, surpassing the powers of the human intellect, and conceive themselves to have succeeded (if indeed their success has extended thus far) in detecting error rather than in apprehending truth. Those who worshipped one supreme God thought it a primary duty of religion to consecrate images to Him; a practice by which God was highly dishonoured; and also to ascribe divine honours to innumerable deities of a lesser order. But they were entirely ignorant with what devotion and preparation of mind, and with what actual rites and ceremonies God should be worshipped. They thought it, therefore, the safest way to observe and maintain the mode of worship received from their ancestors, however vain and unworthy of God, and indeed of men also. In proof of this I need mention only the example of Socrates, whom we are taught to regard as incomparably the first of all the philosophers; for he, although con-

demned to death for contempt of his country's gods, yet, as Plato relates, entreated his friends, a short time before his departure, that they would sacrifice on his behalf a cock which he had vowed to Esculapius.

Nor have they wandered less from the true *rule of virtue*, than from that of religion. It was indeed easy for those who treated of Moral Science to make it appear in general terms, that virtue was to be embraced, and everything contrary to it to be avoided; but when they came to define severally and distinctly what virtue is, to what end it is to be referred, and what acts and offices are comprehended in it, how great the discrepancy of opinions, what bitter and interminable contentions presently arose! And in regard to that ultimate moral end to which all actions are to be referred, so various and so repugnant to each other, not less than to truth itself, were the sentiments adduced, that Varro has enumerated nearly three hundred opinions of philosophers upon a matter which, if any be so, is of the very highest importance, since on this the whole course of human action essentially depends. Nor was there less contention about the *way*, than concerning the *end*. For it often happened that what some enjoined as honest, honourable, praiseworthy, and to be followed by all who would consult their own well-being, was, according to other teachers of equal authority and repute, to be avoided, and even restrained by penalties. How

large a part of the philosophers approved, or did not prohibit, the promiscuous intercourse of the sexes, if not also other kinds of communication of which nature has the greatest abhorrence! Was any one inclined to lay violent hands upon himself? How many venerable authorities might he allege for so impious a crime! If any one desired to revenge a wrong, though the public might suffer by the act, what great names, not only of those who permitted and tolerated, but who praised and even enjoined the deed, might he adduce in self-justification! One must, in short, be altogether a stranger to the writings of the ancients, or very inexperienced in the use of them, who cannot point out among those that have made profession of wisdom, or attempted to reform mankind by laws, some one or other who has taken the lead both by precept and example in any vice that may be named. And although some of them said many things in an admirable manner, and appeared to speak as it were by inspiration, though there is scarcely any virtue, or office of virtue, separately taken, for which some precept, and perhaps some example may not be shown; yet no one was ever adorned in his own person with every kind of virtue, or embraced its precepts without some mixture of vice. Different persons made out indeed very successfully portions of the truth; but there was a want of some one who should collect into one its widely dispersed members, and reduce them to a system.

Add to this, that scarce any one of them upheld that general principle, on which the whole of piety and virtue is wont to be rested; that all men, after they have departed this life, are to be judged by God. They, in fact, thought that the interests of virtue were sufficiently consulted if, in the pursuit of it, they led a life conformable to their nature; and almost the only argument they employed to show that vice should be avoided was, that it degraded men, and so deprived them of that happiness which is attainable in this life by such as are obedient to right reason. But it is very evident that arguments of this kind possess little weight where men are carried away by the violence of headstrong passions. Others, moreover, urged that the conscience of every one commended his virtuous actions, and in some measure punished what he did amiss; but then those who do not dread the vengeance of Heaven find it a very easy matter to make light of conscience. Not a few put forward praise and glory on the one hand, and infamy and disgrace on the other, as if in these resided the extremes of good and evil: but though it be true that many have been thus incited to honourable achievements, and deterred from actions of a contrary character, yet such motives are altogether without application to men who trust that they shall sin without discovery, or who have learned to hold in contempt the opinions and the language of those around them. Lastly, what obscurity and doubt was there even among those who

held out a happy immortality to the good, and to the bad, eternal sorrow and remorse. They had no absolute assurance—nothing that proceeded from actual knowledge; and it was hope, rather than persuasion, which they entertained, that they should survive the term of this life; their reliance being on arguments that could easily be refuted, and which were, in fact, powerfully refuted by many. Cicero makes this admission: “I know not how it is; while I read I assent: when I have laid aside my book, and begin to reflect with myself upon the immortality of the soul, all my assent glides away.” And Socrates, than whom no one ever better or more fully treated of this subject, in that speech which, according to Plato, he delivered before his judges, spoke very doubtfully: “*If* that be true which is reported concerning death, that it is a migrating into those regions where they who have departed this life inhabit:” and he concludes at length in these words:—“It is time for me to depart hence, that I may die; you, that you may return to the business of life: which of these may be the better, is known to the immortal gods; of men, I think no one can tell¹.” Hence it is evident that neither he nor any others of those who made profession of wisdom were able to affirm any thing certain and unquestionable in regard to the immortality of the soul; and so neither in respect of a

¹ Plato fin. Apolog. Cic. Tusc. Disp. lib. i. cap. 41.

Divine judgment after this life. Hence, also, it seems to have happened, that scarce here and there an individual complied with the instructions of the ancient philosophers, because no one is willing to bestow his labour upon an uncertainty.

Nor would they have been at all benefited by knowing that the soul survived the body, so long as they were utterly ignorant what was requisite to be done in order to appease and propitiate the Deity, or even whether He could be appeased at all. And since no mortal was ever altogether free from sin, which, as such, must incur the displeasure of God, they were subjected, therefore, under a consciousness of evil, to suspense, anxiety, and vexation of mind, and knew not what to do, or whither to turn themselves. For it might be discovered, perhaps, though somewhat obscurely, by the light of nature, that God had assigned rewards to piety and virtue, and to vice such punishments as it deserves. It seems, likewise, that they might, without presumption, entertain a hope that God, the best and most equitable Judge, would pardon the unintentional transgressions of a good and pious man ; but whether any hope of forgiveness remained to those who knowingly and deliberately had offended God ; this, as depending solely on his will, no one could possibly determine : and if it were allowable to estimate the Divine judgments from what passes amongst men, it must have been thought that graver crimes, at all events, could never by any

means be washed out, or expiated; since usually it is to no purpose that persons convicted and condemned by human tribunals declare that they have *repented* of their offences.

From these instances it is, I trust, made sufficiently clear, that no one could ever by the sole light of nature attain to a perfect system of theology. But there are also many other particulars, respecting which all who have in ancient times professed the study of philosophy have gone very far astray, as well from the rule of true virtue, as likewise from the right worship of God; but to have remarked thus far, and to have pointed out the more serious errors, or rather the sources and heads of error, may for the present suffice. And yet it would not have been foreign to our purpose to have added, that even those things which were rightly taught by philosophers possessed little stability, or weight; because they rested for the most part on that kind of reasoning and of evidence, which are allowed indeed by some, but which others reject, and to which scarcely any one pays so much regard as on that account to endure any uneasiness, to encounter any danger, or to enter upon a new course of life: for we find the best and most considerable of those who formerly flourished in the pursuit of wisdom and learning, often confessing that they were not so much ignorant of many things which were allowed by all to be of the greatest moment, as that there was scarcely any thing which they could hold for *certain*

and *unquestioned*, and that what they taught was rather like the truth than true. Thus Socrates is reported to have said that the oracle of Apollo had pronounced him wise, not because he knew more than others, but because he confessed his ignorance of what he did not know. And even those very persons who pretended to have arrived in some respects at certainty, were, through the dissent of the learned, compelled against their wills to doubt.

But however certain and definite might have been the determinations of the schools of philosophers, yet with far the largest part of mankind they would have had little authority; for philosophy is satisfied with few judges, and always shuns the crowd, who never have had, or will have leisure for disputation; who cannot estimate the force or disentangle the subtleties of argument, nor discriminate, even when they comprehend, so as to separate false from true. Whoever, therefore, is desirous of taking philosophy for his guide and teacher, either in worshipping God or in the formation of manners, must have recourse to tranquillity and solitude, must decline the crowd and concourse of men, and exclusively devote himself to learned studies. But how few can derive any benefit from what is attainable only on such conditions!

Hence it plainly appears, that unless God had been pleased to point out some rule of thought and action, no one could have so formed and regulated himself and his course of life as to become sure of

the Divine favour and indulgence, and therefore no one could arrive at the perception of true and perfect theology by the sole light of nature.

II. Having come to this conclusion, we are next to inquire in what rank, and of what value, those books are to be held, which by Christians are entitled the Holy Scriptures. For if from these we can discover what God requires us to believe and to do, there is not much cause of complaint on account of the defect of natural light. Now there are principally two sorts of persons who maintain that these books contain nothing in them which is of Divine authority; the one sort affirming that nothing has ever been revealed by God on these subjects, beyond what is perceived by the light of nature; the other, though not openly denying all revelation from God, yet asserting that to these books at least no credit is to be given.

And first, they who contend that no revelation has ever been made by God on these subjects to the human race, think, apparently, either that it could not be done at all, or that it is unworthy of God to do it. Now there is no occasion for *us* to enter upon the strict proof, that God had the power, if He saw fit, to make known his will to men, since we are, for the present, concerned only with those who acknowledge that we and the rest of the universe were in the beginning made by God, and are still governed and sustained by his providence. For can we think that He who formed the nature of man

shall not be able to impress upon it whatever sensations He pleases? He who has supplied us with the faculty of speech, shall He Himself not have power to speak to us? These things are manifestly so absurd, that whosoever utters them appears not so much to reason, as to talk at random, and to be beside himself. It would be not less strange for one who is seriously persuaded that we and our affairs are under the care of God, and that nothing comes to pass in this world without his permission or appointment, to esteem it unworthy of Him to make known to us what He wishes us to believe and do; and indeed, except Epicurus and the rest of those who denied that the world was governed by Divine Providence, we know of none who were not persuaded that God vouchsafed to communicate Himself to mankind, and to converse with them. What then? Shall we say that the subject is in itself so trivial as to be altogether unworthy of any communication of it from God? For this is the remaining objection of such as pretend that nothing has ever been revealed by God on the subject of religion: and it was a maxim of those among the heathen who were somewhat more cautious than the rest, and is said to have been observed even by their poets, that the gods should not be brought down from heaven to mix in human affairs, except upon such occasions as would justify their interference. But that theology is not so trivial a matter that the unfolding and the manifestation of it would misbecome God, is evi-

denced by the simple mention of those subjects which it professes to teach; and they are, whatever it concerns us to know of God and of his worship, and of the manner of ordering our lives rightly, and according to reason. For if these are considered as trifles, it will scarcely be possible to say what ought to be esteemed of any moment. And if we are permitted to appeal to the common sentiments of mankind, which it is imprudent wholly to disregard, a firm and constant opinion that directions upon these subjects had been derived from Heaven will appear to have universally prevailed. For not only Minos of Crete, and the Roman Numa, but the legislators of almost all other nations were thought to have received from God the precepts which they severally delivered to their people; as well such as belonged to religion as those appertaining to the cultivation of manners. Then in no other way did the wisest among the philosophers hope to arrive in course of time at the truth, than by having God for their teacher and guide, as Socrates, according to Plato, often confessed.

But if this be so, it is asked by those who deny all revelation from God, Why were the communications oral or written which were ascribed to him, confined to certain nations, and within the compass of certain ages; why were they not extended to the whole human race? for it appears, say they, but equitable, that whatever relates to the common welfare and utility should be conferred upon all without

distinction. Now to such persons it will not be difficult to reply, when we consider that the methods of justice and of goodness are not the same. The effects of justice belong equally to all; but those of goodness, inasmuch as they can be claimed by none as a right, belong to those only to whom God has chosen to impart them. Accordingly, the Deity, although uniformly good, varies, nevertheless, his gifts to different persons, as He sees fit. Thus one is distinguished for firmness and strength of body, another for mental *endowments*, and another for the gifts of fortune; the rest mostly pass their lives in obscurity, and are in no way distinguished; yet, all these should be content with their lot; should return thanks to the best of their ability for the benefits which God has vouchsafed to them, and not envy others whom they may think more highly favoured than themselves. And in bringing accusations against God for not having equally made known his will to all, men seem to be not much unlike those persons who cast reproaches upon Him because they have not been born of noble and rich families, or endowed with extraordinary powers of mind and body: but let the Apostle supply the answer: "Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour²?" For He who bestows on some what none can claim

² Rom. ix. 20, 21.

as a right, must be deemed not merely not unjust, but kind and liberal. Accordingly in the same place the Apostle writes, "For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth; It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger: as it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid: for he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion³." Whence it appears that no presumption against those books which are said to be the gift of God can be derived from the fact, that they have not been given universally to men of all countries and of all ages.

On the whole, then, it is clear that nothing foreign to right reason, or to the common opinions of mankind, is affirmed by those who contend that theology was made known to us from Heaven.

We now proceed to inquire what is to be thought of those books in which Christians assert that it is contained, and to which on this account they give the title of Holy Scriptures. For there are some who fear not to reject them as fictions invented for the purpose of deception, while others not only value them as the repositories of truth, but reverence them

³ Rom. ix. 11—15.

as written by Divine influence and inspiration. This topic, therefore, consists of two questions; first, whether these books are true; secondly, whether they are divinely inspired. The former of these it would seem may be easily dispatched, as having been already often satisfactorily disposed of; the latter, as being recent, and almost unheard of until the present age (than which none was ever more fruitful in errors and in heresies), deserves an ampler consideration.